

“End-SARS” Agitation in Nigeria: A Correlative Discourse of Uzo Nwamara's *Dance of the Delta*

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Abstract

Until recent time, the Nigerian space is besieged with issues emanating from “End-SARS” agitation, masterminded by some aggrieved youths who publicly protest to seek redress in fundamental issues that are affecting the Nigerian front in the 21st century. These issues include police brutalities, corrupt governance, hardship, weak political system, incessant killings, poverty, tribalism, divide and rule system, and suffering. Their means of agitation includes public demonstrations, blockade of governmental establishments, and disruption of governmental and non-governmental economic and social activities. This further paves room for hoodlums toacerbate their heinous and malicious acts, which includes likes of youth restiveness, shop breaking, theft, looting and destruction of properties. These maliciously dichotomies unequivocally increases the pain, suffering, hunger, and death of the people and threatens the existence of the Nigerian state. The study therefore aims at identifying the cause and effect of “End-SARS” agitation in the Nigerian space, drawing reference from Uzo Nwamara's *Dance of the Delta*. To achieve this, Textual Analytical Approach and Social and Behavioural Change Communication Theory are employed as guide. Uzo Nwamara as a new generational Nigerian playwright strives in his plays to address issues of terrorism, youth restiveness, political bigotry, and tribal sentiments. Amongst the major suggestions, the study insists that job opportunities should be made available to the Nigerian youths as that would help decrease the rate of crime which paves room for establishment of SARS and other crime related agencies that are positioned to tackle crimes in the Nigerian state.

Keywords: *Protest, “End-SARS”, Agitation, Nigeria, Correlative Discourse*

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Background to the Study

From ancient till present, public demonstration both peaceful and violent, have unequivocally and distinctively positioned as a veritable tool towards drawing national and international attention, must especially on fundamental issues which are ultimately political, economical, social, religious, cultural, technological, and educational. Most often, public demonstrations may be in the form of conflict which is an inherent dimension of human relations and an undercurrent of social relations by the problem of scarcity that requires cooperation for its resolution (David, 2006).

Universally, in their study of the world protest between 2016 and 2013, for example, Ortiz, Saenz, Burke, and Berrada (2013) in Olalekan (2018) found out that a significant percentage of world protests, especially in the Third World countries in the past decade have been against neoliberal reforms, including the privatization of public enterprises, full-scale deregulation of public utilities and the implementation of various forms of austerity measures.

In most cases, there have been many social movements throughout history that have dramatically changed the societies in which they occurred. Thus, in the past ten years, a standing wave of large-scale citizen's protests according to Richard (2020) has washed over the political life of every region of the world. Further, Richard avers that "in countries as diverse as Algeria, Armenia, Korea, Iran, Venezuela, and Sudan, protests have exploded, often with little warning and sometimes with dramatic outcomes. Next, Richard noted that "protesters have taken to the street to speak out about corruption, economic Justice, environmental questions, repression, and the range of particular local issues". He further stated that "several protest have driven political leaders out of office, some have triggered draconian governments reprisals".

In a nutshell, Richard (2020) Mass mobilizations according to Richard have occurred in democracies and non-democracies and advanced and developing economies alike. To this, Richard noted that these countries are now a major feature of global politics. Emphatically, these protests according to Richard attract considerable attention while they are occurring. This kind of protest attracts media coverage as the drama of revolt plays its self out on the street of cities around the world (Richard, 2020). Larger numbers of observers according to Richard offer their views on the sparks that led to the protest, the makeup of the protest movements, and the goals they seek.

That being said, activism and agitation is by no means new to Nigerians. In the decades before 1960, social protesting was rampant. Activists challenged social issues like colonialism, slavery, rising inflation, unemployment and corruption (Stears Business, 2020). These protests according to Stears Business took various forms-print, radio, music, and of course, the street. For instance, Stears Business noted that "during the colonial, a local newspaper, *Iwe Irohin*, ran from 1859-1967. The paper according to Stears Business (2020) initially set out to create a reading culture amongst Nigerians but ended up becoming a vigorous critic of the slave trade. The reaction of the British Colonial Office was expected; they reprimanded the newspaper for supporting indigenous causes.

Decade later, Stears Business (2020) obliged that “during the 1929 Aba Women Riots (As the British named it), we witnessed 'sitting' as a major protest tactics. They female protesters according to them would dance and sing about their grievances outside the homes of warrant chiefs and native court officials. In some cases, they would go as far as pestering the properties with mud.

Extensively, these protest according to Stears Business (2020) relied heavily on the persistence of the Aba women, knowledge of their culture and a commitment to non-violence, at least on the part of women. Further, these riots according to Stears Business were not in vain, and are remembered as significant markers of women-led protests in the country.

Ironically, it is easy to forget that coup d'états are as much protest as any other campaigns. Typically, violent, they are most aggressive form of revelation to a government in power. In 1966, the military took action that resulted in Nigeria's first coup d'état. The rationale behind this protest according to Stears Business (2020) was that the military leaders would do a better job governing the newly independent country. Between 1966 to 1999, the Nigeria had a series of coups and was led by various military governments (Stears Business, 2020). The initial claims to rid the country of the “men in high and low places who seek bribes and demand 10% was seemingly forgotten. In the end, the violent protests i.e. coups were unable to deliver the better governance they promised. Very soon, these military regimes that seized power through violent protests soon became the target of protests themselves.

Finally, Stears Business (2020) noted that “#EndSARS started in 2017 when Segun Awosanya and other activists on Twitter began to demand that the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) be scrapped. And every year since then, #EndSARS has remained a key issue for young Nigerians. Amnesty International (2016) in Stear Business (2020) avers that “SARS is indicted and responsible for human abuse, cruelty, degrading treatment of Nigerians in their custody and other widespread torture”. A 2020 publication by the organization, according to Stears Business indicates that between January 2017 and May 2020, they have documents at least 82 cases of abuses and extrajudicial killings by SARS. By the 8th of October, 2020, nationwide protests led by young Nigerians according to Stears Business, led by young Nigerians had started in several cities. The protest according to Stears Business were peaceful but the Nigerians Police Force began throwing teargas and shooting at unarmed protesters. The outcome according to them was serious injuries and the death of Jimoh Isiaq in Oyo State. Against this, protesters are protesting all over the world, demanding for a thorough reform and justice for victims dead and alive.

It is therefore to interrogate the cause and effect of #EndSARS agitation, drawing reference from Uzo Nwamara's Dance of the Delta that forms the thrust of this study. To achieve this, Social and Behavioural Change Communication Theory and Content Analysis Methodology are used as guild.

Causes of “End-SARS” Demonstration in Nigeria

The causes of ENDSARS protestation in the Nigerian space in the 21st century are many, ranging from bad governance, corruption, police brutality, unemployment, poverty and the

clandestine, hike in goods and services. Further, SERAP (2020) in Vanguard News dated 10th October, 2020, noted that “These protests are taking place against a backdrop of the failure by the Nigerian government to address persistent concerns around police brutality and impunity, corruption, lack of respect for economic and social rights of the people, and disregard for the rule of law. The result has been a crisis of daily electricity outages, a struggling public education and health system, lack of access to clean water, and widespread youth unemployment.”

Against this backdrop, SERAP (2020) according to Vanguard news (2020) insisted that “Lack of transparency, accountability, and the absence of the rule of law in Nigeria have resulted in a growing level of protest activity, and an unprecedented brutal crackdown on human rights by the authorities.” “People have been targeted simply for exercising their fundamental freedoms including their rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and expression to end police brutality and impunity. SERAP is concerned about a significant deterioration in the human rights situation in the country since the assumption of office by the government of President Muhammadu Buhari in May 2015.” “Nigerian authorities have since 2015 promised to address police brutality and impunity but have repeatedly failed to do so. Authorities would seem to be suppressing protests to punish and intimidate people campaigning for an end to police corruption and brutality, grand corruption and impunity, human rights abuses, and disregard for the rule of law (SERAP, 2020).” “Allowing citizens to freely exercise their human rights including to freedom of expression and peaceful protest without threat of reprisal or attack would enable them to contribute to society on issues of transparency, accountability, good governance, integrity, and human rights.”

Concisely, Sahara reporters on the 20th October, 2020 avers that “the movement in a statement on Tuesday said its agenda was not to overthrow the government but to deepen democratic culture that ought to derive its powers from the wish of the people and to draw government's attention to the horrendous crimes committed daily against Nigerians”. They further noted that “the protesters said it was compelled to speak out in the face of a conscious plot to demonize the group through violence, jail break and killings introduced by the enemies of the protests.

They further noted, according to Sahara Reporters that “in its 13th day, the protesters are demanding better welfare and improved governance. While the protest had continued peacefully in most parts of the country, some of the agitators have come under attack in various places including in Abuja, Lagos, Osun and Edo. Against this backdrop, the youths according to Sahara Reporters avers that “our energy is derived from the long term suffering, deprivations and repression Nigerians have had to endure for generations. Our wisdom is sourced from the heroic struggle of our forebears, those who have laid down their lives so that a better future is guaranteed for the toiling mass of our people”. More so, the protesters according to Sahara Reporters noted that “We derive our resilience from the brutality we have suffered in the hands of those we pay to protect us but who have suddenly turned their guns to us; they rape our wives, kill children and turn Nigeria into a hell meant only for those anxious to live in misery and die in penury,” a statement signed by three members of the group including Mallam Yisa Aliu, Bolaji Falayi and Chuks Egbe stated.

Finally, the protesters according to Sahara reporters added that "We oppose a system that sustains itself by the blood of Nigerians. We oppose a system that treats Nigerians as footnotes. We oppose a system that kill us before we can grow and a system that turn Nigerians to the laughing stock of local and international community's". To buttress these claims, the protesters according Sahara Reporters stated that "We ask for police reforms, we ask that they should stop shedding the blood of Nigerians, we ask that they should put an end to rape of young people, rape of our mothers, we ask that they should lead young people with decent examples, we ask they should protect us from the heat of the sun, we ask they should allow us to speak against what leads to the deaths of our people, they responded with bullets and armored vans.

Effects of “End-SARS” Demonstration in Nigeria

The End-SARS agitation in the Nigerian space in the 21st century has unequivocally affected the Nigerian state in all fronts-politically, socially, economically, religiously and otherwise. First, the protestation has led to the death of over seventy (70) Nigerian youths, leaving scores, severely injured. Secondly, the protest was maliciously hijacked by hoodlums, cultists and extremist who meticulously uses the peaceful agitation to assert some pervasive, albeit negative acts which pragmatically threatened the existence of the state.

Furthermore, the activities of the hoodlums, cultists, and extremists through shop breaking, looting, wanton destruction of governmental and non-governmental establishment, theft, and social disorderliness, governors in states such as Lagos, Cross River, Edo, Enugu, Imo, Akwa Ibom, Delta, Kano, Kaduna, Ebonyi, and Bayelsa ultimately declared curfew in their state capitals. The declaration of curfew in major cities in such states distinctively disrupted the movement of goods and services and economic activities were halted.

On the political perspective, the demonstration pragmatically questions the unity that the Nigerian state professes from its amalgamation, as the aggrieved Movement for the Sovereign State of Biafra and Indigenous people of Biafra under the umbrella of “ENDSARS” justifies their claim for agitation for self determination. They obliged that the country as at this time has thus, metamorphosed to the point of division which seems to be the only form of holistic alienation to the pending catastrophe that would escalated in the near future.

Nigerian Government and “End-SARS” Demonstration

The issue of “End-SARS” agitation in the Nigerian space in the 21st century which started as a peaceful demonstration but was later hijacked by hoodlums has caused lot of upheaval such as the vandalism of governmental and non-governmental establishments, which has affected the state in strata's-political, social, economical, and otherwise. It has therefore threatened the wholesomeness and existence of the Nigeria state. It is against this backdrop that President Muhammadu Buhari, in his speech, according to Vanguard News (23rd October, 2020) avers

Fellow Nigerians, It has become necessary for me to address you having heard from many concerned Nigerians and having concluded a meeting with all the Security Chiefs. I must warn those who have hijacked and misdirected the initial,

genuine and well-intended protest of some of our youths in parts of the country, against the excesses of some members of the now-disbanded Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS). On Monday 12th October, I acknowledged the genuine concerns and agitations of members of the public regarding the excessive use of force by some members of SARS. The choice to demonstrate peacefully is a fundamental right of citizens as enshrined in Section 40 of our Constitution and other enactments, but this right to protest also imposes on the demonstrators the responsibility to respect the rights of other citizens, and the necessity to operate within the law.

This statement and many other which summed the long speech by the president helped calm the End-SARS agitation in the Nigerian society. The Nigerian governors on the other hand have painstakingly positioned some avenues towards containing the end-SARS issue. For instance, Emmanuel (2020) avers that “The Nigeria Governors' Forum (NGF) has appealed to End-SARS protesters to call off their nationwide protests”. To this, Emmanuel noted that the forum made the call in a communiqué issued by its Chairman and Ekiti State Governor Mr. Kayode Fayemi, in Abuja on Monday after its 20th emergency meeting. By quoting the statement of Nigerian Governors forum, Emmanuel avers that “the continuation of the protest has exposed the fragile economic fundamentals of the country, particularly as criminal elements and hoodlums have hijacked the protests by maiming innocent citizens, looting and destroying properties.”

The forum according to Emmanuel noted that it deliberated extensively on the nationwide protests and issues relating to the development, thus, condemned the attack on Gov. Adegboyega Oyetola of Osun by armed youths while the governor was addressing protesters in Osogbo. They told the protesters to dialogue with government at both national and state levels to ensure that the protests were not taken over by hoodlums, who were instigating breakdown in law and order nationwide. “The governors according to Emmanuel (2020) resolved to activate a judicial panel of inquiry to receive all cases of police brutality by officers of the disbanded SARS unit. “Each state is also expected to kick-start a compensation mechanism for all victims. The forum according to Emmanuel resolved to endorse the call by demonstrators for improved governance, predicated on an enforcement regime that takes into cognizance the fundamental human rights and liberties of all citizens in the country”.

Conclusively, Emmanuel (2020) noted that “the NGF disclosed that the body had also resolved to act on every demand made by the End-SARS protesters”. It, however, expressed concern over the shifting nature of the demands, saying that the development creates uncertainty over the exact expectation and ultimate goal of the protesters. The state and the federal government have also created avenues such as job creation and other social rehabilitation programmes towards engaging the Nigerian youth.

Theoretical Framework

The issue of “End-SARS” protestation in Nigeria can be addressed on so many theories. Theories are embedded in some truth, law or assumption which portrays some essential qualities or elements that determine some intrinsic nature or characteristics proposition from

which orders are derived. In studying the cause and effect of “End-SARS” agitation in Nigeria, thus, changing the behaviour of the protesting youths in the Nigerian society such as portrayed in Uzo Nwamara's *Dance of the Delta*, certain theories are subsumed but for this study, Social and Behavioral Change Communication Theory (SBCC) is employed as guide to action.

Social and Behavioral Change Communication Theory (SBCC)

SBCC by Crosby Richard (2010) according to Amiriheobu (2019) can help understand why people act the way they do and why behaviours change. The theory according to Amiriheobu exposes why people change from good to bad, considering the fact that so many phenomenon may trigger a good person into doing things that affects his immediate society and his people. SBCC is an interactive process of any intervention with individuals, communities and or societies to develop communication strategies and to promote positive environment which will enable people to initiate, sustain and maintain positive and desirable behavioural outcomes. This theory can also help to direct attention on what or who to address for social change. SBCC helps in explaining behavioural change and area of focus-the individual, their intention to change their behavior or their surrounding environment (Crosby and Noar, 2010, in Amiriheobu, 2019). Therefore, the goal of every behaviour change campaign according to Amiriheobu is to induce long-lasting behavior change.

Methodology

The nature of a subject matter often determines the kind of methodological approach adopted for researching relevant materials, thus, this research work employed the content analytical survey study. The methodological approach utilizes primary and secondary sources. The primary sources include the researcher's personal experiences and observations in the course of carrying out this research, regarding the magnitude of corruption in the Nigerian space in the quest of containing the novel Corona virus, while the secondary sources include written materials relevant to the topic from interne, articles, scholarly journals, conversations, interviews etc.

Synopsis of *Dance of the Delta*

The play *Dance of the Delta* according to Amiriheobu and John (2018) revolves around Ikem, a young, honest, determined, and head strong boy who decides to take to arm to continue the fight against grabbers, greedy and sleazy vultures, whose sole aim is to perpetually oppress and repress the people. These oppressors according to Amiriheobu and John impose ignorance, poverty, hunger, disease and pain on the people. In order to alleviate the community from these problems, Amiriheobu and John (2018) avers that “Ikem decides to form a revolutionary group which he thinks will assist him in killing the corrupt Chiefs and sanitizing the community. Before now, the management of Swampland Energy Exploitation Company Limited, led by Mr. Brown (a white man) had called a meeting of chiefs and rulers of the community for a discussion regarding the development of the community, which Chief Eziokwu, Ikem's father, who was the Oji-Offor (bearer of truth), was present”.

During the meeting, the chiefs led by Chief Apkan, rejected the development agenda presented to them by Okwu, the Company's community development manager. The Chiefs

according to Amiriheobu and John suggested that the development project be monetized, so they as community leaders would provide the kind of development that their people would like. The meeting was rescheduled by Mr. Brown as a result of the fight that came up between the Chiefs and Chief Eziokwu, who was representing the council of elders. Chief Eziokwu who spoke against the Chiefs suggested that the people would prefer the development of the community and not by monetizing the future of the people.

Earlier on, Chief Eziokwu according to Amiriheobu and John (2018) had dreamt of Chief Apkan's plot to eliminate him. His dream came to manifestation, when Chief Apkan's assassins attacked and burnt Chief Eziokwu in his house, as his wife Ego and two children escaped. Ikem (his first child), who lives with a close Uncle, arrives to receive the news of his father's death. As the new Oji-Offor, the mouth piece of the gods, he decides to fight against corrupt Chiefs and their thugs in order to restore peace to the community. He forms a revolutionary group, whose aim is to exterminate the oppressors of the community and restore the glory of the land. This aim becomes a reality when Ikem and his revolutionary group succeeded in killing Chief Apkan and his allies.

Subject Matters Discussed in *Dance of the Delta*

The related subject matters discussed in the play *Dance of the Delta* are as follows:

1. **Betrayal:** As an issue rose in the play, betrayal is seen on the aspect of the corrupt Chiefs (Apkan, Kalada, Wariso, and Tanure). These chiefs were appointed to represent their people in matters that concern the community and the well being of the people. In one of their crucial meetings which were to decide the faith of the community with the management of Swampland Energy Exploitation Company Ltd, the chiefs led by Chief Apkan convinced the management of the company to monetize the community development plan which could have assisted in alleviating poverty and suffering from the people.
2. **Violence and Death:** In the play, violence and death became prevalent as Ikem decided to form a revolutionary group to fight against the corrupt chiefs and their thugs. The reason for this is to avenge the death of his father (Chief Eziokwu) and restore development to his people.
3. **Conflict:** In the play, conflict resulted when Ikem decided to form a revolutionary group in order to confront the thugs who Chief Apkan positioned to terrorize the people. The same thugs were also involved in the killing of his father (Chief Eziokwu).
4. **Poverty and Unemployment:** It was due to poverty and unemployment that led the youth in the play to agitate against the previous oil companies in the play. It was equally because of poverty and unemployment that made some youths take to the part of working with the corrupt chiefs as thugs. Youths in the community decided to join the revolutionary group founded by Ikem because they felt that their future lies in their hand. It was because of poverty that led Chief Timi to betray the elders to the chiefs.
5. **Love and Sacrifice:** It was because of the love that Chief Eziokwu has for his community that made him challenge the Chiefs even when he knew the danger ahead. He is willing to sacrifice his life for his people.

Dance of the Delta and Theme of Demonstration in Nigeria

Uzo Nwamara's *Dance of the Delta* discusses the theme of protestation, violence, wanton destruction of lives and properties, betrayal, poverty, unemployment, brutality, conflict, love, and sacrifice. These themes are microcosm to the macrocosm of the malicious and audacious phenomena's in the Nigerian space, which are heinously caused by proceeds of corruption such as nepotism, tribalism, favouratism, divide and rule system, greed, embezzlement, and money laundering.

The resultant effect of these heinous acts by corrupt politicians in the Nigerian society ultimately creates unemployment of the people and underdevelopment to the Nigerian state. Such as in the play where poverty, suffering, pain, sickness, and the clandestine death was apex, which made Ikem to mobilize some youths in the community and protests violently, thereby killing Chief Akpan, Chief Kalada, Chief Wariso, and Chief Tanure the Nigerian youths are also agitating, against the Nigerian leaders both at the national, state and the local level. Most of these leaders in the Nigerian space who distinctively betrayed the candid trust of their people who voted them as their representatives in matters that ultimately affects them, both at all governmental levels, are presently on the run, as the properties which they bought with the peoples treasures are riotously destroyed by the angry youths.

More so, such as the angry youths in the play agitated violently because the Chiefs killed Chief Eziokwu, the Orji Offor (bearer of truth of the community) because he peacefully and patriotically requested that the fund for the developmental project of the community that was given by the Swampland Energy Exploitation Company, should be used to develop the community and not to be monetized and shared amongst the chiefs, the peaceful End-SARS agitators in the Nigerian society have unequivocally switched their method of agitation which were public demonstrations and blockade of governmental establishments to include hostile agitations such as youth restiveness, shop breaking, theft, looting and destruction of properties because the governmental agents heinously killed over seventy (70) peaceful protesters that were holding the Nigerian flag and reciting the Nigerian National Anthem at Lekki Tool Gate, Lagos State on the 20th of October, 2020, leaving scores injured.

Such as in the play where Ikem goes and mobilized some angry youths from nearby community, to increase the willing youths in their community, the Nigerian youths also allowed some street hoodlums, cultists, and bandits who are mostly youths to join in the protest, to protect them against the government agents whom are gravely armed and ready to shoot at slight command, since they are without ammunitions.

Extensively, the wanton police brutality against the Nigerian youths which resulted to the End-SARS agitation were vehemently visible in the play most especially when the corrupt Chiefs, led by Chief Akpan decided to order their thugs to go terrorize the people in the community and kill those who stand against their corrupt practices. Such as the death of some notable Nigerian youths in the hand of the Nigerian police men, Chief Eziokwu, Ikem's father was killed by the thugs of Chief Akpan.

Conclusively, the such as in the play where the community youths decided to agitate against the corrupt chiefs who maliciously deprives them their means of livelihood, thus, targets at killing the corrupt youths and their thugs, the Nigerian youths are agitating to address some fundamental issues are affecting the Nigerian front in the 21st century. These issues include police brutality, corrupt governance, hardship, weak political system, incessant killings, poverty, tribalism, divide and rule system, and suffering.

Conclusion

From the study, it is established that the thematic thrusts and subject matters discussed in Uzo Nwamara's *Dance of the Delta* are also the major issues in the Nigerian space that prompted the Nigerian youths to agitate for End-SARS which is a frontier and a metaphor for real restructuring. Under the agitation of End-SARS, the youths are also agitating for End-Bad governance; End-bad leadership; End-insecurity; End-corruption and other ills bedeviling the society. Against this backdrop, the Nigerian government has succeeded ending the activities of the Federal Special Anti-Robbery Squad, but promises to address the other demands in no distance time, which if not addressed, would reiterate and aggravate the End-SARS agitation.

Suggestions

To put a hurt to youth agitation in the Nigerian society, the following suggestions are listed.

1. Job opportunities should be made available to the Nigerian youths as that would help decrease the rate of crime which paves room for establishment of SARS and other crime related agencies that are positioned to tackle crimes in the Nigerian state.
2. Thorough restructuring of the Nigerian state should be made to allow states manage their resources and returns should be made to the Federal government as task. This will also help to reduce crime in the Nigerian society.
3. Human right panel should be established in the federal, state and local level, to investigate the brutal activities of the SARS operation and any SARS officer found guilty should be made to face the law.
4. The Nigerian youth should as a matter of urgency engage in politics in order to partake in the decision making which would ultimately better the lives of the Nigerian youth.
5. The families, whose children were victim of the hostile police brutality either before the End-SARS agitation and the killing at Lekki killing, should be compensated.

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