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“SORO SÓKÈ WEREY” – SPEAK UP CRAZY PERSON

For many years I have heard my mother say in our native language how corrupt the powers that be are in Nigeria and how little they care for their people but most importantly, how none of this will ever change. I wasn't aware of how true this was until the outbreak of the #EndSARS protests and watching it all unfold before my eyes, unfortunately, proved her right. Along with her claims, almost everyone I knew that either lived or had visited Nigeria had one distressing story or another to write home about of an experience involving harassment, violence and/or bribery by policemen who were sworn to protect them. Was it a shock to me that the main culprits of these heinous acts were a 'special' 'designated' group called the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS)? No.

Disgusted, but not surprised.

The National police force came about as a result of the armed forces that were established by the British to enforce colonial rule in the various territories that became Nigeria. During the colonial era, it was common to find that the police engaged in various abuses of human rights, including extortion, killing, maiming and looting (Yusuf, 2020). Again, it wasn't a shock to find out that the British had something to do with what was going on. To know that even after sixty years of independence, the effects of colonisation were so deeply inherited in the roots of institutions in Nigerian society that are repressing and violent.

But I digress.

As a Nigerian child, brought up by Nigerian parents, one thing we are constantly taught is to respect our elders. Ephesians 6:2-3 says, “Honour your Father and Mother – which is the first commandment with a promise – so that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on earth.” (The Bible New International Version, 1978) In a nation where cultural beliefs are so entangled with religious ones, this is one doctrine that seems to withstand time and a number of different versions.

What Nigerians have cleverly done is use the value of 'respect your elders' to maintain dangerous hierarchies and prevent individuals, especially young people from speaking up, questioning and/or rebelling when threatened by an elder or someone that is deemed to be in a position of power. The unquestioned obedience for authoritative figures is what groups such as SARS thrive off and is the one of the main reasons, I believe, they have been able to get away with maltreating unenlightened and unsuspecting citizens.

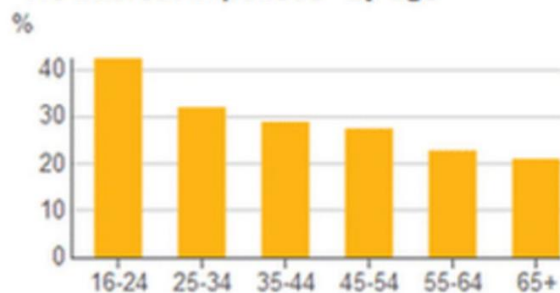
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The author of 'This House has Fallen', Karl Maier, takes the words right out of my mouth when he says that "it is as if [Nigerians] live in a criminally mismanaged corporation where the bosses are armed and have barricaded themselves inside the company safe."

The #EndSARS protests first started out on Twitter, as many of this generation's protests usually do, with a #hashtag. If this didn't happen I, amongst many, would certainly not have known the depths of the issues at hand.

For a number of years, it has been said that today's youth are becoming more and more disinterested in having an involvement in politics and political issues. The lack of participation in political events such as elections are often used as evidence to claim that the younger generation are not interested in anything political (Pometsey, 2020). But it is easy to say that the youth of

"No interest in politics" by age



Source: Understanding Society Study, 2011

today don't get involved in politics when they are consistently dismissed and silenced at every opportunity they have to speak up. Being able to take socio-economic and political issues online and create essentially what is an online protest bringing awareness and change to issues in the fastest way possible, I would

argue is one of the best, if not THE best way to do politics.

The news of the movement spread like wildfire across many social media platforms, encouraging the likes of famous names and faces such as Beyonce, Rihanna and Serena Williams to post photos with the caption #EndSARS to show their support. Not to mention politicians like the former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton who also decided that the campaign was worth her 180 characters. Seeing that President of Nigeria Muhammadu Buhari lose 100,000 followers on Twitter due to the campaign also brought the 'social media activism' full circle. It didn't take long after this before rallies and street protests were held across London, Washington DC and several Nigerian states.

The government's response to the protests clearly reflects just how non-existent governance and accountability in Nigeria are. The protestors in Nigeria were barricaded in, beaten, shot at and arrested for several days on end by the very people that represent the institution whose existence they were attempting to challenge (Ideh, 2020). The fear was stark in everyone. Knowing that that could have been me in their shoes, simply fighting for basic human rights, was a terror that truly surpassed nightmares.

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But what we were witnessing was history, regardless. It is now clear to see that youths, especially Nigerian youths in this instance are more than capable of operating large scale change, despite the forces against them. Using social media tools, that many do not even have access to, as a way of activism to make sure their voices are heard.



BENSON IBEABUCHI/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

This is just the beginning.

The biggest takeaway for me from whole campaign was one of the slogans that the youth coined. 'Soro sókè werey'. This immediately translates to 'speak up crazy person' and I think that says it all. Being political to me is simply about speaking up to challenge those in power. The phrase was used to attack those with large platforms, connections and the ability to enforce change who simply did and said nothing. The use of hashtags, likes, shares, comments and retweets is just as active as on street protests simply for the fact that it gets people speaking up and speaking out for what is right, for change, for peace and much more.

So, it should no longer be said that young people are not as involved in politics, when many are doing more online, than those in power are doing offline. If the youth continue to be seen as the problem but thought to never have problems of their own, it cannot be expected of them to contribute to

political discussion when they are seen as disposable anyway.

"If young people feel they are not part of our village, they will burn it down to feel its warmth." (Pinkney, 2016)

As they should!



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