

Relevance of African Traditional Moral Values in the Justification of Human Rights Violation during the ENDSARS Protest in Nigeria

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Abstract:

It has been suspected that Nigerian youths have not been happy with the operations of a segment of the Nigerian Police Force known as Special Anti – Robbery Squad (SARS) for their humiliation and intimidating activities against humans, against their rights in the country. Hence, the enforcement of an EndSARS protest by the young people of Nigeria in the year 2020. The problem this research stresses on in this protest process, is, the emergence of violence between the agents of Nigerian government and the Nigerian youths which led to unlawful destruction of the lives of innocent people and properties. These acts of inhumanity amongst aboriginals of Nigeria is majorly attributed to lack of adequate knowledge and recognition of the relevance of African traditional moral values by the citizens. At anytime the citizens of the country begins to recognize and acquire an adequate knowledge of the relevance of African traditional moral values, such actions will go into extinction or reduce to the barest minimum be the traditional moral values forbid shedding blood and tampering negative to one's neighbor's properties. It is in fact, discovered in this article, that dedicated regard to traditional moral values goes to a very far extent in helping to justify that the act of embarking on violent actions affecting majorly, the innocent people during the EndSARS protest were fundamentally human right violation. This study therefore aims at addressing the areas of human right infringements in the EndSARS protest in Nigeria, in 2020. This article employs historical, evolutionist and phenomenological research approaches. Data are organized and sourced from both primary and secondary sources, which include: direct oral interviews, internet materials, textbooks, journals, etc. It is recommended among other things that there should be a pragmatic recognition of African traditional religious and cultural institutions through encouraging and motivating them on the basis of structural and human development. This will enable the citizens to place first in their conscience the African traditional moral values in all they do. The data collected are analysed with descriptive style of data analysis. The research also adopts American Psychological Association (APA)'s style of referencing.

Keywords: EndSARS, African Traditional Moral Values, Human Right Violation, Protest and Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

The year 2020 was a remarkable year across the globe, but much more remarkable among Nigerians at home and in diaspora. It was COVID -19, for the entire world but for Nigeria and her citizens, they faced both COVID-19 pandemic and End Special Anti Robbery Squad (EndSARS) protests. The problem that bothers this study is the emergence of violent actions between the government agents and youths and the unlawful destruction of innocent people's lives and properties, because the relevance of African traditional moral values are not adequately recognized among the citizens or aboriginals of Nigeria. It is found in the study, that regard to traditional moral values helps to justify that the violent actions experienced majorly against innocent citizens in the EndSARS protest were mainly human right violation. Therefore, the research aims at.

addressing areas of human right violation in the EndSARS exercise and the relevance of African traditional moral values, in building Nigerians conscience to always reject unnecessary violence and violation of human rights. The EndSARS protest in Nigeria showcased a lot of violation against human rights. In 1999, the constitution of Federal Republic of Nigeria and Fundamental Rights (Enforcement procedure) Rules 2008 (2008: 34) section 33 classifiesthus:

Every person has a right to life, and no one shall be deprive intentionally of his life, save in execution of the sentence of a court in respect of a criminal offence of which he has been found guilty in Nigeria.(2)A person shall not be regarded as having been deprived his life in contravention of this section, if he dies as a result of the use, to such extent and in such circumstances as are permitted by law, of such force as in reasonably necessary (a) for the defence any person from unlawful violence orfor the defence of property....

Experiences and actions displayed during the EndSARSprotest in the Nigeria state present a whole lot of trends of violation against human rights as it affects lives and properties as it is contained in the

1999 constitution of federal Republic of Nigeria. As stated herein, this part of the constitution lost its application during the EndSARS protest in protection and prosecution of innocent citizens and offenders respectively. It is on this background that relevance of African Traditional Moral Values become explicit. Naturally, in the African traditional religious setting actions of this nature could mistakenly happen in exception of war, but offenders are treated accordingly, and they submit in expiation. But in the case of EndSARS protest there were criminal participants, there was neither a sincere apology nor punishment. The only rumour or information circulated was plans for compensation for the affected families and condolences. African traditional moral psyche completely discourages such evil actions and punishes it accordingly. In fact 2020 cannot be erased in the history of Nigeria social, religious, economics, and health challenges. Though, the entire globe faced COVID-19 menace but Nigeria suffered both COVID-19 pandemic and EndSARS as an addition. That notwithstanding, the problem that gives serious concern to this paper is the introduction of violence actions by both government agents and the youth, and unlawful destruction of innocent people's lives and properties, because the relevance of African traditional moral values are not adequately recognized among the citizens or aboriginals of this era. It is found in this research that the regard and attention given to African traditional moral values helps to justify that the violent actions and reactions from different bodies experienced mainly against.

innocent citizens in the EndSARS protest were principally human right violation. It is on this basis that this research intends to address areas of human right violation the EndSARS exercise or protest which was approved by the Nigerian government, and powered by the Nigeria youths, and the relevance of African traditional moral values in building Nigerians' conscience to always reject unnecessary violation and violation of human right. This article adopts Nigerians' historical, evolutionist and phenomenological research methodologies. Data were gotten from both primary and secondary materials. It is recommended among other things that practical recognition of African traditional moral values should be placed first in the people's conscience, African traditional religious institution should be encouraged and motivated through structural and human development.

Definition of concepts:

The terms that are offered definitions/explanations in this research include: African traditional moral values, human right violation and EndSARS protest. African according to Summers (2001:23) has been defined as: "... from or connected with African or someone from Africa". Summers (2001) explains that traditional is: "being part of the traditions of a country or group of people..." Moral itself is gotten from the noun morality. Anyacho (2005:104) points thus "... morality as a concept tends to connote goodness and all attributes. It is a parameter used in measuring the degree of the acceptability of human action". As early as 1967, Edward (1967) had perceived morality as constituting a standard for determining what is right or wrong, appropriate or inappropriate, just or unjust, good or bad in social relationships. In addition to what has been said about morality, Agha (2003:35) adds thus:

What actions constitute standard of moral judgment to which human conduct must conform so as to be regarded as right or wrong? ... that is to say that an act is right if it conforms to norms of the society by which it is judged. Therefore moral conduct of a man is that which produces the greatest possible good in the situation. It means that the conduct has desirable qualities which satisfy some valuable need. It has value for persons and it makes for social welfare.

In a similar realm, Okwueze (2003:67) examines morality thus:

Morality, frankly speaking is not an easy concept to define.....Morality just like ethics involves the idea of good or right conduct and it is utterly hostile to bad or wrong conduct.

Morality involves a more or less clearly articulated set of beliefs about the nature of man, ideals about what is good or merely desirable or worthy of pursuit for the sake of orderly co-existence. In other words, morality is only relevant and has meaning within the society no matter the way it may be conceived.

Akulue (2013: 59) stresses on values as behaviour when she posits that:

Wide conformity, social values, and social pressure are objective indices by which we can determine mores, folkways and usage among the behaviour patterns. Ultimately, however, the social values attached to a set of behaviour patterns exert strong pressure on people so that they conform to

the value. This means that social values act as norms or standard of behaviour patterns. When society in general approves or disapproves a certain course of conduct, it is in effect saying that the behaviour in question is right or wrong, correct or incorrect.

The phrase African traditional moral values has four concepts that make it. African has been seen as what is connected to Africa or someone from Africa. Traditional is discussed there as being connected to traditions, while morality and values appear to be connected with expected standard behaviour approved by the society for mutual or harmonious and orderly relationships and co-existence among members of any given society. In the traditional African society, there are laid down moral values which every member of various traditional societies tries to conform with. It is these laid down moral values that this paper focuses on their relevance to justifying the extent and judgments on the violation of human right during the EndSARS protest in Nigeria. Another concept that demands explanation in this article is human right violation. In the words of Okwueze and Kanu (2003:27) they state thus:

Human rights are often understood as those rights contained and enshrined in constitutions of various nations, states and governments, the United Nations conventions, Bill of rights, International laws, as well as continental/regional human rights treaties. Chapter four of the constitution of Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999 which is currently in use in the country contains clauses dealing with human rights protection. These are sub-divided into right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, right to freedom of expression and the press, right to peaceful assembly, and association, right to freedom from discrimination, right to acquire and own immovable property anywhere in Nigeria, and so

on. Unfortunately, violation of people's rights go on unabated in spite of the fact that Section one (1) of the 1999 constitution and the previous constitution deals with the Supremacy of the Constitution.

This implies that human rights are those rights accorded by the Constitution to persons or person as a citizen or member of a country or in society. Then, human rights violation from the explanations above could be defined as any sort of contravention against the rights of any human being, as citizen of a country or society. EndSARS protest, according to Barr. Chukwuemeka Igboekwu (Personal Communication, 17 December, 2020), he states that the EndSARS protest was an expected peaceful protest organized by the Nigerian youths with the approval of Federal Government of the Republic of Nigeria to show disapproval of the existence of Special Anti-Robbery Squad of the Nigeria Police Force due to their excesses in discharging their special assignment. Mr. Temple Chika (Personal Communication, 27 February, 2021) is of the view that the youths of Nigeria had other worries that bother on bad governance, insecurity corruption, unemployment etc, but EndSARS was used to actualize their mission. He further states the basis of his conviction on the conditions given by the youths to the Federal Government of Nigeria after the protest before they can resolve their grievances.

EndSARS therefore means, end the existence and activities of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad of the Police in Nigeria is timely an action that indicates the level or how rampant corruption and inhumane actions have grown. In the protest itself more corruptible actions were discovered, for example, the hiding of COVID-19 palliatives, killing of the innocent souls to mention but a few. In fact, EndSARS Protest went beyond its nomenclature in Nigeria.

EndSARS as a Disguise of the Nigerian Youths Mission

The protests popularly known as EndSARS which took place between 20 and 22 October, 2020 in Nigeria was later showcased as an arrangement for a movement championed to fight for a changed government in Nigeria. Nigeria today, appears to be one of the populated states in Africa, and is endowed with material, natural and human resources. It is on this background that one can suspect that even the international community would be interested in the affairs of Nigeria; hence the youths would envisage such a movement as an effective means of actualizing the change in governance they would achieve. Effoduh (2020:2) Stresses thus

The EndSARS campaign isn't merely about Nigeria's corrupt Special Anti-Robbery Squad. It is also a brooder cell for social justice from Nigerian youth in the most populous black nation on Earth. The protests, and their fundraising structure, have created a microcosm of a properly functioning nation. The EndSARS campaign has drawn worldwide attention to Nigeria. With support from both

international corporations and celebrities, it has become the latest protest or movement to attract solidarity on a global scale especially after security forces opened fire on unnamed protesters in Lekki, Lagos on 20 October, 2020 reportedly killing 12 people. At least 56 people have died in Nigeria since the protest began. Beginning as a call to dismantle the country's Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) unit, EndSARS is a battle Nigerians have fought for years.

But beyond the fact that it echoes the Blacklives Matter Protests, it is significant on its own merit because it is a movement across the whole youth spectrum in the most populous black nation on Earth. The SARS Unit was disbanded on 11 October, but the campaign's momentum rolled on hence the violent response. The political class is running scared because EndSARS is demanding nothing less than wholesale change in how Nigeria is governed.

The implication of what Effoduh presents here is that the youths in Nigeria want a transformed Nigeria. They want a change of the hard condition of living that affects mostly the youth to a more favorable condition for all citizens. The matter appears not to be channelled on EndSARS, but EndSARS protests become anchor base, because the special Anti-Robbery squad was obviously identified with her corrupt practices and brutalities with her merciless eye on the youth in Nigeria. Henceforth, the youth want a Nigeria flourished with her countless employment opportunities industries, fairness, free and fair elections, youth involvement in governance, and corrupt-free activities. This is where African traditional moral values become very pivotal in day to day activities of Nigerian leaders and their government.

Implications of the Human Right Violation during the EndSARS Protest in the midst of African Traditional Moral Values in Nigeria

The implications of the human right violation during the EndSARS protests in Nigeria run a whole gamut of social, economic, academic, political, health and religious as well as culture tentacles. On the realm of social implication, the action itself has a social interest undertone. The

National Youth Council of Nigeria as an association is a social organization. Though, the EndSARS protest could be said to have been organized by the Nigerian youths without specific identification to a particular youth association. But within the period of the protests, the National Youth Council of Nigeria presents the demands of the Nigeria youth the government and citizens according to Mr. Temple Chika (personal communication, 27 February, 2021). The fact here is that EndSARS took its pace from asocial forum, but its demands spread to economic, political academic, health and even in some way, religious. These demands contribute to the implications of the human right violation in the EndSARS protest Ogunyinka (2020:4) states the 23 key demands of the Nigerian Youths thus:

List of what Nigerian youths want the Federal Government to do before they cancell off their protest, 1. EndSARS, 2. Sack security chiefs, 3. Improve security, 4. Full deregulation of the oil and gas sector to allow more investments for job creation, 5. Immediate passage of PIB, 6. Full deregulation of the power sector to allow investment capital flow to generate, transmit and distribute more power and create jobs, 7. Should hand off petroleum pricing to enable free –market determination of pricing , 8, Close our Northern borders to stop the free entry of Fulani herdsmen and bandits, 9. Inclusive government for all tribes and Religions of Nigeria with 50 percent youth in charge of governance, 10. Allocate more fund to the education sector to provide better teaching tools and to pay better salaries to end ASUU strike, 11. Change our academic curriculum to reflect modern – day realities, 12. All politicians should be placed on minimum wage to attract genuine public servant, 13 Migration to hundred percent electoral reform with electronic voting tied to our BVN and GSM, 14. Return Nigeria to a regional governance structure or restructure the country and embrace true federalism. States autonomy must be paramount, 15. Disband the bi-cameral legislature and adopt uni- cameral, 16. Immediately reform Nigeria police force and let every state or region create its own police service, 17. No more budgets for running private affair for elected and appointed public servant, 18. Enthroned university education as a minimum qualification for public office holders at all level of government from the president to the local government and ward Chairpersons, 19. Strip ex-governors and all elected and appointed public servant of all benefits after office, 20. Increase salaries of our doctors, nurses, teachers, public military officers and civil servants, 21. Government should hand –off ownership and management of businesses at all levels, 22.Name and shame

looters and make criminal offenders and looters face trial in their home state and villages to shame them and their families,²³. Stop foreign medical trips for public servants. Let them be treated here in Nigeria.

A critical look at the demands of the Nigerian youths reveals a serious collapse of traditional morality and value. The implication centrally anchors on denial of human rights in the country because Nigerians have sold out in their conscience the positive contents of original and traditional moral values of Africans as a continent and Nigeria as a sovereignty state. These spheres of their demands affect every ramification of human life in Nigeria. Unfortunately attempt to actualize these wants by the youths, further destroyed souls, and properties of innocent citizens of the nation. Let us take these demands one after the other according to their implications on different areas of life of the people.

Socially, EndSARS, sacking security chiefs, improving security, the full deregulation of power sector, immediate reformation of police force, enthronement of university education as minimum qualification for public office holders at all levels of government, naming and shaming looters are all filled within social implications. In all these, they youths need the social welfare of the citizens to improve with immediate effect. One of the implications of these demands on social welfare is that only those part of their demands that are already protected and enshrined in the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, as the right of the indigenous members of the country (citizens) which are not honoured to the letter are implemented if the authorities that are in charge are sincerely wish to salvage the adverse state of the nation. Secondly, any of these demands that are not captured in the central constitution of the country will not easily receive urgent attention. Thirdly, as a social front of the young people of these contemporary Nigerian society, any change in their leadership, and lack of mature mindedness, would make them lose stamina in tackling sensitive issues as it affects their demands. That notwithstanding, on the social dimension, the protest has created some positive impact. It opened people eyes and restored some coverage among Nigerians. Again, the Special Anti-Robbery Squad as an arm of the Nigeria Police Force has been displaced. More so, collection of proceeds from road users has slightly reduced. Lives of innocent people were also lost, robbers saw opportunities to rob other citizens during the exercise proper, etc.

One may ask, what might be responsible for these ill behaviours among Nigerians. This is where disregard to traditional moral values becomes one of the major causes of maladjustment

among the citizens of Nigeria. Okwueze (2003:69) opines on the traditional means of maintaining morality thus:

Right from the family level, various ways are devised to ensure the maintenance of morality in the society. The attempts made in the family to protect morality determine the order in the general society. In other words, if the moral principles of different families that make up a general society is in confusion, the moral principle of the same society is bound to be chaotic ... The Chief Protagonist in the question of protecting morality in the family are the parents and other elderly relatives ... The children are taught to tell the truth, to form habit of helping others, and to be hardworking among other virtues. In the family, children are taught to be respectful and hospitable to all relations, to other members of the society and even strangers. To carry out these moral obligations, the parents have to be upright too in order to impress on their children the necessity and usefulness of behaving orderly.

The family is a social setting, from which the traditional moral values are being inculcated to the children of the traditional society. The communalistic system of living in the traditional Nigerian society has extended the responsibility of the children upbringing to rest on both the parents and elderly relations. These parents and elders also try to be upright on their own side to authenticate their teachings. With these teachings from the family circle, as a nucleus of the traditional Nigerian society, both the young and old, live to make the entire society orderly and peaceful. But today, most parents are too busy. They hand over the care of their children to hired services, which in most cases make the children to lack the knowledge of traditional moral values. Hence, they do not bother being hospital, helping others, being respectful, truthful, etc. thereby developing violent oriented attitude. Thus, they feel free in violating rights on human seven when they serve as government officials and citizens.

Economically, even though EndSARS was not as severe as the Nigerian Civil War, meanwhile it

was not a war, rather a protest; similar economic implication experience during the Nigerian Civil War was seen in the protest. Okwueze and Kanu (2003:94) refer to Nigeria Civil War thus;

The South Eastern Part of Nigeria was declared “Republic of Biafra” on 30th May, 1967 as a result of unprecedented hostilities unleashed by the rest of the country on the Easterners. The Federal Government of Nigeria regarded this action as a rebellion because it interfered with her territorial integrity. Measures taken by the Federal Government to restore order

were unsuccessful. It was first economic blockade... As a result, people within the area delimited as Biafra suffered untold hardship. They were denied many basic things that make life bearable to the modern man and also went through various degrees of human right abuse. Indeed, the people passed through many ordeals.

EndSARS really affected the economic rights of some Nigerians as experienced during the civil war. People did not go for their economic activities for at least 3 days. After 3 days, roads were blocked by the law enforcement agencies. This increased cost of transportation for majority of Nigerians depending on one's location. Properties were destroyed including Banks, and people's houses. Human resources were also wasted, etc. In the demands of the Nigerian youths some economic welfare of Nigerians were captured. They include: No more budget to running private affairs of elected and appointed public servants, increase salaries of our doctors, nurses, teachers, police, military officers, and civil servants, government should hands-off ownership and management of businesses at all levels, name and shame looters and make criminal offenders and looters face trial in their home states and village to shame them and their families, increase distribution of power supply to create more jobs, etc. This set of the youths' demands, will stabilize the economic problems of Nigerians if well considered by the government. But it is worthy to note that the government has pretended to have looked into these demands as it affects economic wellbeing of the citizens. It has given effect to youths empowerment fund, increase in COVID-19 survival fund, more grants to farmers and small and medium scale industrialists, electric supply has been improved etc. but the major part of the demands have not been given serious attention. For example, the petroleum pricing, allocation of funds to government officials for their private affairs, etc. These demands and other conflicting demands or interests of other social movements in Nigeria have increased insecurity in every part of the country. According to Elder Cletus Ezeko Okafor (personal communication, 26 May, 2021) he laments that unknown gunmen burnt police station at Iwollo Oghe in Eziagu local government Area on 25/5/2021 killing policemen, etc. On 26 May, 2021, a suicide bomber killed himself when the bomb he was carrying exploded at Afikpo, Independent National Electoral Commission, (INEC) Enugu Headquarters had been under military guide since May, 2021. After the EndSARS there have been more economic loose and economic survival strategies. For example, bank increase their interest on extended banking business partnerships like POS banking agents etc. It is pertinent to note the observation of Odetola and Ademola (1987:212) when they emphasize on social movements thus: “...represent collective attempts to bring about a change in certain social institutions or to create completely new social order”. It can also mean the socially shared demands for change in some area or dimension of social order. Any social movement and government in power should not under rate traditional moral values because of customs, values, and folkways are hardly interrupted by the state legislation or social force the society would be better than what it is now. William Grahain Sumner in Igbo and Anugwon (2002: 63) points that: “.....

Social change must be slow and change in people's attitudes must come before change in legislation. In other words, you can hardly legislate attitude into existence. He believes that law should not move ahead of customs of people but should rather be dictated by the dynamics of the customs.... State ways cannot change folkways”.

It should be understood here that social movements and the state will create very good impact for positive change, only when they first and foremost consider the people's customs and folkways. These customs and folkways are built on the traditional moral values of the people. Until Nigerian/African traditional moral values are well developed in the attitudes of Nigerians, positive change will hardly be feasible.

Academically, the youth demands point at ASUU strike, more funds to education sector, provide better payment for lectures, teachers, etc. First degree is demanded to be the minimum qualification for

any political office. Other demands on the political state of the nation include: minimum wage to politicians, electronic voting to be tied with BVN and GSM, return to regional governance, etc. On the area of religion and culture, their demand to close northern boundaries could be suspected to a suspicion against Islamic religious and cultural threat. For example Boko Haram and Herdsmen attacks have been perceived as quest to Islamize Nigeria into Arabians religion and culture.

On the request to close northern borders, no reasonable actions have been effected. Bombing, herdsmen activities and migration from the northern border seem to be on as usual. No minimum wage for politician, no 100% electoral reform in progress, etc. On the side of academics, ASUU issues have not been resolved up to 80%, funds allocated to education sector are still wrongly managed, etc. These are the strongholds of corruption in Nigeria.

Menas Associates (2020) emphasizes that

At least 20 of Nigeria's 36 states have established judiciary panels of inquiry into police brutality following a directive from President Muhammadu Buhari to do so. The Lagos State panel is attracting the most attention because of its mandate to look into the alleged killing the army of at least ten EndSARS protesters at the Lekki tollgate. The army has changed its story after having initially claimed that it was never at the tollgate to now saying that troops from the local barracks were there at the invitation of Lagos State's Governor Babajide Sagnwo-Olu. It is now struggling to cover up its tracks of the shooting of unarmed protesters.

Infact, the judiciary panels of inquires established in many states revealed the degree of actions taken without regards to value of tradition and human life and properties of fellow Africans or Nigerians as the tradition preserves and prescribes.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Practical recognition of Africa/Nigerian traditional moral values should be placed first.
2. Significance of collaboration of traditional moral values and the state laws for protection of fundamental human rights should always be bore in mind.
3. Violence should not be seen as fun rather it may momentarily serve as a measure to effect lasting solution with dialogue.
4. If there should be one Nigeria, ethnic sentiment should be discouraged to its barest minimum.
5. NGOs, government, civil society organization should partner for an enviable Nigeria.

CONCLUSION

Though EndSARS has instigated the fear in all and sundry that anything can happen at anytime. Politicians and other Nigerians in public and private firms/ offices are more careful. But, the veritable tool for obedience and regard to human rights remains complete attention to various Nigerian traditional moral values.

EndSARS as a social movement is suspected to have been planned with good intentions. But the protest turned to be more harmful than expected. Life and proprieties were lost, people lost their jobs etc. The after effects of EndSARS seem to linger in different forms in Nigeria up till today. But it is agreeable that police brutality has drastically reduced. SARS itself has been dissolved, yet issues of corruption and insecurity still increase gradually. Based on this, it is a resort to traditional moral values that will help to do the magic

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