FRAMING INJUSTICE: SPECIAL ANTI-ROBBERY SQUADS (SARS) IN NIGERIA AND THE #ENDSARS PROTEST RESPONSE FROM A SOCIAL MOVEMENT THEORY PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract: This article employs Social Movement Theory (SMT) to examine collective action mobilisation against malfeasance by Nigeria's Special Anti-Robbery Squads (SARS). Created in the 1990s to counter armed gangs, SARS gradually became discredited. Finally, in October 2020, after weeks of public protest, the unit was disbanded. The #EndSARS movement proved instrumental here. The present article explores the origins, nature and decline of SARS until the #EndSARS protests. #EndSARS arguably provoked police reform in Nigeria. Furthermore, whereas social media has dominated the discourse on the protesters' agency, I employ framing theory, as a SMT sub-set, to show that #EndSARS employed diagnostic, prognostic and motivational frames, within "injustice" master frames, towards collective action mobilisation. In conducting this analysis, I situate the #EndSARS case within the broader literature debate on impactful protests against police brutality.

Keywords: *Social Movement Theory (SMT), Framing Theory, Nigeria Police Force, police brutality, criminal justice policy reform*

The Origins of SARS

To curb the specific threat of armed robberies in Nigeria, the Nigeria Police Force created the Special Anti-Robbery Squads (SARS) in 1992. However, whereas the strategic rationale for the creation of SARS was to counter violent armed robberies, its proximate causes were circumstantial, coming after the extra-judicial killing of Nigerian Army colonel Ezra Rindam Ikoyi-Lagos at a police checkpoint in 1992 (CLO 1992: 5). When the details of Rindam's death emerged, soldiers went on a rampage, targeting police personnel around Lagos (Omeni 2022). It was around this time that police

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officers across Lagos withdrew from checkpoints and literally hid in their barracks for fear of being killed by soldiers in reprisal attacks. It took two weeks of talks led by Brigadier Fred Chijuka, the Director of Defence Information and other influential military personnel, to settle the discord (Olagunju 2020).

The police leadership had to make amends. According to a US Department of State Report on Nigeria in 1993, the three policemen who supposedly murdered Rindam had been arrested and charged (UNHCR 1994). On 7 September 1992, the Inspector General of Police, Alhaji Aliu Attah, ordered all police checkpoints nationwide to be dismantled as the Army and the Police were at the precipice of escalated violence. One more checkpoint incident, which the police could not risk at the time, may have ignited the powder keg (CLO 1992: 5).

A major crisis was averted, yet another soon emerged. The police, at the time, were all that stood between the public and the threat of violent armed robbery gangs that emerged as a result of Attah's roadblock moratorium.

By the 1990s, this threat of armed robbery remained significant. The police checkpoints, as it turns out, were not just a deterrent to armed robbery activity; they were a critical one. Indeed, just two weeks after the roadblocks were dismantled, they had to be reinstated due to the spate of robberies (Osifodunrin 2007). The police attempted to redress the rampant armed robberies while not going back to the old checkpoint system to avoid antagonising the military. This is where SARS entered Nigeria's anti-robbery discourse.

Assistant Commissioner of Police, Simeon Danladi Midenda as the 'Father' of SARS

Assistant Superintendent of Police (ASP) Simeon Danladi Midenda had built up a record for himself as the commander in charge of the Anti-Robbery Unit (O/C Anti-Robbery) in Benin in the early 1990s. That unit was still relatively small, reflected in the O/C rank. Nevertheless, it was proficient in its task: at a point in 1992, no armed robberies were recorded in Benin City for nine days – a "feat" that attracted the attention of the Inspector General of Police in Nigeria, Alhaji Aliu Attah (Vanguard 2020c).

Around this time, James Danbaba was posted in and took over from Mr. Abdul Y. Adeoye as Commissioner of Police (CP) in Lagos. CP Danbaba had worked with ASP Midenda in Benin City, where the latter led a Special

Investigative team. Incidentally, Midenda was not Anti-Robbery at the time. The O/C Anti-Robbery was Superintendent Godfrey Okeke, who had been posted to New Benin from Maiduguri, where he was with the Mobile Police (MOPOL), in 1992.

Together, Okeke as the O/C of the anti-robbery unit and Midenda's team caught dozens of armed robbers and recovered over 27 cars. It was based on his team's performance in Benin City that in 1992, SP Midenda was promoted to the rank of Superintendent. Meanwhile, CP Danbaba left for Lagos and insisted that SP Midenda be posted to Lagos to assist him there (Okeke 2020b).

In Lagos, ASP Midenda would also work with Sir Mike Mbama Okiro.[1] Okiro was an experienced anti-robbery police officer and member of the Armed Robbery & Firearms Tribunal, Lagos State. By the time Midenda arrived at the Lagos State Police Command, Okiro was Deputy Commissioner of Police (Operations). Working with them was Abdulyekini Adoeye, who was Deputy Commissioner of Police (Administration).

Within this Lagos State Police team, ASP Midenda was tasked with setting up an anti-robbery unit capable of ending the impunity of violent armed robbery gangs in the state at the time (Vanguard 2017). Midenda started with a well-armed police unit of 15 men, and the unit was to keep a low profile: no marked police cars or sirens. Instead, they employed two plain Peugeot station wagons. Mr. Taiwo Lakanu[2] was assigned to Midenda as his Second-in-Command (2iC). ASP Midenda's task was not unique at the time. The Lagos State Police Command had already begun trialling small anti-robbery units. Furthermore, by 1993, there were already three such units operational in the Lagos area (Vanguard 2020c).

How the name SARS came about

That three anti-robbery units were already operational in Lagos at that time is relevant to the background of SARS. It was the fourth unit, formed by ASP Midenda, that became known as SARS. Midenda's unit was not different from the three existing units in terms of tactical mandate (effectively to kill or capture violent anti-robbery gangs), administrative support (which all three had from the Lagos State Police Command) and equipment. Consequently, ASP Midenda had to find a way to differentiate his team from the three existing anti-robbery squads in Lagos. In his own words,

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1   Mike Okiro would later become an Inspector General of Police, former IGP (2007-2009).
2   Later Taiwo Lakanu rose through the ranks to the post of Assistant Inspector-General of Police.

> I needed a unique name with which my team was to be called and communicated with. After several days of trying to coin a name, I failed to develop a unique name, catchy and strong enough to send a message that somebody different was in town. At the end, I simply added the word 'Special' to the already existing Anti-Robbery Squad and it came up with 'Special Anti-Robbery Squad' abbreviated as SARS. That was how the name SARS came into the Nigeria Police vocabulary. Before this time, Special Anti-robbery Squad as a name or the abbreviation SARS never appeared in police communications. (Vanguard 2017)

The SARS Vision

SARS was created as a highly specialist tactical unit. Its operatives took on special missions as the tip of the police spear against Nigeria's most violent robbers. As Evelyn Usman writes, the name SARS, on its own, "usually sent cold shivers down the spines of criminals who saw the unit not just as an antidote to their atrocious acts, but capable of sending them to their graves at the snap of the finger" (Vanguard 2020a). Their reputation was all the more impressive, considering that SARS units were tasked with bringing down the most violent armed gangs (Vanguard 2020a).

There was no confusion within the SARS units. The armed robbers they were fighting did not employ Dane guns or pistols. They employed General Purpose Machine Guns (GPMGs), tactical shotguns, sawn-off shotguns, FN FAL rifles, and *Kalashnikovs*. These gangs made a point of killing police officers and taking their weapons, making many gang members at least as well-armed as the police. Ergo, the SARS operatives' separator could not be just weapons and hardware. Skill, logistics, credible intelligence, communication, and, crucially, the element of surprise were all force multipliers for SARS originally. This meant that these teams had to be elite, and in many ways, they were: in the jobs they took, the way they worked as a team, in their training, and even in the way they dressed; they were not average police personnel. A SARS team in the field was not "weapons-free" (authorised to shoot) until it made contact with armed gangs. Yet at the same time, these teams were "fully combatant and combat-ready at all times." Members of SARS did not need to openly carry weapons and equipment because they were a covert, cover-oriented squad; which is to say, they kept a low profile, monitored the regular

radio communication of the conventional police squads, and only swung into action at high speed and with full tactical oversight to engage threats, when the need arose (Vanguard, 2020c). As Okiro observes of SARS in the field,

> The idea was that they would be in mufti [plain clothes], and armed, simply for the critical element of surprise. They would take cover, and, communicating with walkie-talkies, would hit the armed robbers. They did that two or three times, and the robbery attacks went down drastically and then stopped altogether. Soon SARS started spreading from Lagos to other states. And I began to notice that at every roadblock, you will see armed policemen, but in mufti. So now, how do you differentiate between a policeman and an armed robber? (Daily Trust 2017)

This is not to say that SARS was without achievements or that even as the institution began to decline, it failed so catastrophically in its remit that it had no positives. On the contrary, anti-robbery units in Nigeria continue to be a deterrent against violent robberies and crime. As an example, Mobile Police (MOPOL) 2 Squadron Command, Lagos, was responsible for removing several violent gang members associated with the notorious criminal kingpin kidnapper, Chukwudi Onuamadike, alias "Evans." Evans, who was arrested by the police Intelligence Response Team (ITR) in 2017, had been tracked by the police, and more specifically SARS operatives, for five years (Nwanze 2017; Malumfashi 2020).

Despite the institution's shortcomings and the anti-SARS movement, there were several other instances of SARS functionality across the federation. For example, in Ogun State, in 2020, even while the #EndSARS protests were ongoing, SARS helped break up an armed robbery and human ritualist syndicates (Oludare 2020; Oludare 2020b). In Imo state, SARS helped apprehend a number of armed robbery and violent carjacking gangs in 2019 (Okeoma 2019; Famuyiwa 2019; Okeoma 2019b). Furthermore, crime incidents since the disbandment of SARS in October 2020 also indicate that some robbery gangs have exploited this outcome of the #EndSARS protests (Ani 2022). Notwithstanding such roles in deterring violent crime, directly or in support of other police units, SARS had become dysfunctional over the years and became unfit for purpose for a range of reasons discussed next.

What Sars Became, and Why

By 2004, SARS had spread across Nigeria, unlike the preceding decade (1992–2002) when they could only be found in Lagos and the Zone 2 Police Command (South West) (Vanguard 2020a). As SARS operatives began to duplicate traditional police duties, institutional drift set in. However, in departing from its first principles, SARS undermined itself more than funding cuts or violent armed gangs did. SARS operatives began to act with impunity. From there, it was a swift and downward spiral.

One of the reasons why SARS personnel could eventually act with the impunity they did was because they existed outside the regular chain of police command. Unfortunately, this also meant that SARS operatives did not report to the same command structure as the average police personnel.

For example, the Force Criminal Investigation Departments (CIDs) within each state are accountable to the Commissioners of Police. And because the overall record of a Commissioner of Police within his or her state(s) of posting influences where they are headed next (and potentially, how much further they will rise in the Force), most commissioners take special care of curb excesses of the CIDs. Police Commissioners and their offices lay out clear rules; implement a system of accountability that applies from the rank and file, upwards to the higher levels, and ensure that frontline police units endeavour to follow the rules of engagement and that all operations are duly authorised. By contrast, what functioned as the now-defunct SARS was, by and large,

> [An] unaccountable unit of the force reporting centrally to a Commissioner of Police at the Force headquarters. They were not accountable to anybody. The vehicles, cash and other things they seized from suspects are not in police custody. At the state command level, they were headed by inexperienced officers, mostly ASPs so they misbehaved. (Eastern Pilot 2020)

This meant that the buck of responsibility was passed around. This led to a vicious cycle in which SARS became more notorious, leading fewer senior personnel—the careerists in particular—wanting anything to do with it.

In some ways, the decline of the Special Anti-Robbery Squads seemed inevitable. Like its parent institution, the Nigeria Police Force, it slowly but

surely became a failed security organ. As the Network on Police Reform in Nigeria (NOPRIN) put it, over a decade before the SARS riots, the NPF's recruitment process had already been compromised, leaving the police with a poorly trained, badly paid workforce prone to corruption and violence. Unable or unwilling to ensure public safety, many officers turned to crime (Network on Police Reform in Nigeria 2010). In the actions of SARS operatives, this view is given substance; yet, the unit was not always this way.

In the extent to which SARS has gone beyond its constitutional remit, part of the concern relates to metropolitan policing tenets. The unit largely or wholly ignored these tenets long before its disbandment in 2020. SARS, in many respects, became the worst of what police practice had to offer in Nigeria. As one report puts it,

> SARS officers typically target and detain young men by accusing them of being online fraudsters, simply on the evidence of owning a laptop or smartphone, and then request arbitrary and exorbitant bail fees before they regain their freedom. In more extreme cases, SARS officers abduct civilian targets and force them to make withdrawals at an ATM in exchange for their freedom, sometimes at gunpoint. The unit also targets young women as well, often claiming, again with scant evidence, they are prostitutes, which is illegal in some parts of Nigeria. There have been several reports of women being sexually assaulted while in detention. (Kazeem 2020)

Such security concerns informed the #EndSARS movement. Yet, how was a peaceful social movement in Nigeria supposed to force police reform? This is a relevant question insofar as the democratic expression of Nigeria has been marred by repression of student protests and riots.

Furthermore, the same repressive tactics were employed against #EndSARS protesters. Since the protests began, unarmed protesters were tear gassed, sprayed with water cannons and even met with live rounds by the police. Additionally, there were "widespread reports of arbitrary arrests of protesters who are being slapped with trumped up charges," including attempted murder; a claim debunked as "bogus" (Kazeem 2020). #EndSARS protesters were largely peaceful, yet, via collective action, they provoked police reform in a way that had not been possible in the past: both at the state and national

levels. In some ways, the authorities themselves contributed to the eventual success of the #EndSARS protests.

The Lekki Shooting and SARS' Disbandment: In Broader Context

On 20 October 2020, the Nigerian Army opened fire on a gathering of peaceful protesters—who could not be classed as rioters or violent agitators— at the Lekki Tollgate in Lagos State, Nigeria. There are various accounts of the numbers injured in the shooting. However, news outlets such as the BCC set the death tally at around 12 (The BBC 2020).

The protesters at the Lekki Tollgate were not there by coincidence. After weeks of anti-police brutality protests in Nigeria, there was a sense that if the violence and rioting could end and the crowds could gather peacefully, exercising their democratic right to protest, something more positive could come of the chaos of the past few weeks. In those weeks, and chiefly in October, there had been hundreds of riots across Nigeria, especially in larger cities.

What was supposed to be a genuine protest of police brutality, extortion, and extra-judicial killings soon turned violent and anarchic. Mass lootings, property destruction, and violence perpetrated were carried out by "hoodlums." The protest movement, it seemed, had been hijacked from its original purpose. What was meant to be a democratic exercise had turned into a free-for-all outlet for people to vent their anger, frustration and disappointment at a Nigerian government that seemed initially unmoved by the demonstrable anger on public display.

Nevertheless, there seemed to be some recognition by the police that some change would be required in response to public anger. At the state level, in Lagos, Governor Babajide Sanwo-Olu, in an unprecedented show of transparency coming from such a highly-placed government official, "published a list of 23 police officers who have been charged or are waiting to be charged with various offences relating to brutality. The charges include murder, manslaughter, involuntary manslaughter, armed robbery and causing grievous body harm" (The BBC 2020). According to Sanwo-Olu, the list was published to demonstrate that his government was "rebuilding Lagos and ending police brutality" (The BBC 2020). Even before the Lekki Shooting, however, SARS was already set to be disbanded. On 11 October 2020, the Inspector General of Police in Nigeria, Mohammed Adamu, announced that,

The Special Anti-Robbery Squad of the Nigerian Police, otherwise known as SARS, is hereby dissolved across all formations, the 36 states police commands and the Federal Capital Territory, FCT, where they currently exist. [And that] All officers and men currently serving in the unit are to be deployed with immediate effect. New policing arrangements to address the offences of armed robbery and other violent crimes that fall within the mandate of the dissolved SARS shall be presented in due course. (Vanguard 2020b)

Whereas this significant step towards reform by the police institution might seem internally generated, the reality is that the disbandment of SARS, at the peak of the #EndSARS protest movement, was far from coincidental. After all, as Ojedokun, Ogunleye and Aderinto caution, within their critique of police accountability in Nigeria, "law enforcement agencies rarely confront problems of excessive use of force or undertake substantial internal reform on their own" (2021: 1895). Instead, a significant means by which police forces are prompted towards self-examination and perhaps even outright institutional reform, is through protest movements (Clark and Livingston 2017; Reynolds-Stenson 2017).

The impact of the Black Lives Matter movement in the USA, which incidentally coincided with the #EndSARS protest movement in Nigeria, is a case in point of the agency of the protest movement and its impact on police reform (Williamson, Trump and Einstein 2018; Byrd and Cole 2020). Indeed, the Black Lives Matter movement, which emerged in response to repeated police killings of African-Americans in the USA gained sufficient political capital such that it "was successful in helping to generate some level of criminal justice policy reform, such as legislative changes […] in at least 10 states" (Bordonaro and Willits 2018: 113).

Before such changes, and even before the Black Lives Matter movement generated momentum, both #Ferguson and #HandsUpDontShoot were online protest "injustice frames" employed against police brutality and departmental malfeasance in the US (Bonilla and Rosa 2015). Furthermore, Ball *et al.* point to the August 2011 North London riots, observing the high likelihood that aggrieved citizens who feel wronged by the police may feel emboldened by mobilisation, sufficiently so as to confront the police as the offending "other" (Ball *et al.* 2019). Furthermore, as Stott *et al.* note within the Hong Kong case, even diverse groups could be mobilised for collective

action against the police where the institution's brutality and perceived injustices are observed broadly across society (Stott *et al.* 2020).

Along these lines, the emergence of #EndSARS, the scale of its mobilisation, and the agency the movement would eventually demonstrate are not necessarily without precedent in the broader context. Nor can it be taken for granted that collective action mobilisation against the police will not lead to changes in institutional behaviour. In the instance of Nigeria, for example, SARS was disbanded. And in the case of the USA, police killings indeed declined after the Black Lives Matter Protests (Daley 2021).

Yet, exactly how did #EndSARS protesters manage to provoke the disbandment of SARS and some police reform at the federal level (Ojedokun, Ogunleye and Aderinto 2021: 1898)? On the surface, it might appear that historical protest movements in Nigeria, lacking new media and social media, and how these social movement instruments challenge the traditional tools of statecraft, struggled to mobilise widespread collective action.

By contrast, according to this train of thought, social media and the low barrier of entry provided access to large audiences. The network effects of Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and Periscope meant that the calculus of protestation has shifted dramatically in favour of the public. No longer does it need to be alleged that police or army shootings occurred. Geo-satellite imagery, real-time satellite tracking, mobile phones, social media and live stream all mean that allegations of police, and SARS, brutality have been captured, documented and extensively compiled.[3]

As for SARS abuse of checkpoints, social media and Twitter made it possible for Nigerians to photograph SARS at these locations and post them online – not to shame them, *per se*, but to warn other motorists of what to expect there (The Washington Post 2020).

Aside from the rapidly evolving discourse on the #EndSARS protests and the force-multiplier effect of social media within it (Erubami, Ufuophu-Biri, Anorue, Nwabunz and Orekyeh 2021; Nwafor and Nwabuzor 2021), there also is a robust body of work around social move activism in Nigeria.[4] However, the existing discourse fails to present a social movement theory-

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3   See, for example, Ayitogo (2020); Al Jazeera (2020); Amnesty International (Amnesty International 2020a; 2016); Orjinmo (2020); Ukomadu *et al.* (2020); Busari *et al.* (2020); The BBC (2020); Premium Times (2020; 2017); The Washington Post (2020).

4   See. As examples, Ojedokun (2021), see supra note 14; Osiki (2009), see supra note 6; Olayode (2007), see supra note 4; Iweriebor (2003, 107-125).

based interrogation of the #EndSARS protests' mobilising power. Attempting to fill this gap by employing SMT, the present article's final section examines #EndSARS as a social movement and employs framing theory to examine the movement's building of collective action.

#EndSARS as a Social Movement

A social movement is a set of opinions and beliefs in a population, which represents preferences for changing some elements of society's social structure or reward distribution (McCarthy and Zald 1977: 1217–1218). With respect to the use of collective action, a social movement can also be defined as "(1) informal networks, based (2) on shared beliefs and solidarity, which mobilise about, (3) conflictual issues, through (4) the frequent use of various forms of protest" (della Porta and Diani 2006: 16).

The #EndSARS protest movement meets all of the above criteria. The movement presents a specific preference for changing police behaviour against the citizenry in eliminating the Police Special Anti-Robbery Squads (SAS). Second, #EndSARS employed highly informal networks, organised on an ad-hoc basis within particular localities. Third, protesters demonstrated shared beliefs in solidarity as witnessed in the singing of the Nigerian national anthem when confronted by armed state operatives at the Lekki Tollgate incident (Amnesty International 2020a). Fourth, the conflictual issue in question was that of police brutality and the enduring impunity of the practice (Channels TV 2020). Finally, there was a high frequency of protestation within #EndSARS, with a selection of tactical repertoires employed: from marching, sitting and blocking roads, and, in some instances, riotous behaviour.

Such definitions of social movements are relevant as they enable us to critically explicate fluctuations in collective action and activist behaviour (Beck 2008; Jackson *et al.* 2009). Along these lines, Social Movement Theory (SMT) provides

> An analytic framework that combines attention to macro-environmental contexts, meso-organizational aspects, and micro individual motifs and paths […] highlighting a historical and cross-national perspective, the specific social and political context that moves collective actors' strategic choices, their

particular ideological and organizational resources, and the characteristics of their values and motivations. (della Porta and Haupt 2012: 315–216)

Within discourses of collective action, there are several explanations for why groups mobilise and employ various contentious repertoires to challenge state power. Deprivation theory is one such explanation for the emergence of a social movement. According to proponents of this theory, some social movements are born when certain people or specific groups of people in a society feel deprived of a specific good, service, or resource (Opp 1988; McAdam and Zald 1988).

Defending his Relative Deprivation Theory, Gurr, as an example, argues that the gap between expectations of a social movement and reality contributes to violence (1970). Nevertheless, a possible counter-argument to the relative deprivation thesis is that it fails to explain why in some cases deprivation fails to provoke collective action mobilisation.

This incongruity suggests that deprivation may be necessary for a social movement's emergence but insufficient for collective action mobilisation. In other words, for a social movement to be born, deprivation alone is not enough: it must be present along with other factors. This is where other theories of social movements hold explanatory power.

More specifically, in the instance of #EndSARS protest, citing relative deprivation as the primary driver of mobilisation would be problematic. Deprivation, after all, is a common theme across Nigerian society and not a recent social phenomenon. Moreover, issues of poverty, rights deprivation and "injustice" are identifiable and well-researched within the discourses (Ucha 2010; Akinyemi, Magareth and Oluwafemi 2018; Danaan 2018; Olowa 2012).

Furthermore, brutality against civilians, as a manifestation of deprivation of fundamental human rights, is not peculiar to the police. The military, for example, has a storied history of brutality and rights deprivation of Nigerians (Omeni 2018). Therefore, a social movement theory-based examination of the enablers of the #EndSARS protest movement should pivot away from relative deprivation. Consequentially, I apply a framing theory within an interrogation of #EndSARS protesters' agency.

Master Frames and #EndSARS Protesters' Agency

Goffman (1974: 21) argues that frames are culturally determined definitions of reality that allow people to make sense of objects and events by enabling an individual or group to "locate, perceive, identify, label" events "within their life space and the world at large." Frames "simplify and condense the 'world out there' by selectively punctuating and encoding objects, situations, events, experiences, and sequences of actions within one's present or past environments" (Benford and Snow 1988: 198). Therefore, social movement actors are "signifying agents" who, in employing frames, "assign meaning to and interpret relevant events and conditions" in ways deliberately "intended to mobilise potential adherents and constituents, garner bystander support, and demobilise antagonists" (Benford and Snow 2000: 614).

Such framing builds on the "valued-added approach" developed by Smelser (1962). Within this approach, Smelser contends that the problems of a system are most effective in mobilising action when they depart from the expectation of those within it (Smelser 1962: 51). This approach also suggests that collective action agents amplify selective interpretations of events, which are first "diagnosed" as problems.

This idea of the diagnosis of a problem as the first step of collective action is recurrent in the work of Benford and Snow, who develop three core framing tasks (1988: 199–204). The first, diagnostic framing, identifies the problem and attributes blame or causality. Here the "punctuating" function of frames refers to the accenting, "underscoring or embellishing" the interpretation of a situation to redefine it from being merely unfortunate to being intentionally unjust.

In the #EndSARs movement instance, the problem was not just SARS as an isolated outcome of police malfeasance. Instead, the movement also sought to identify and contest the more general issue of police brutality and the lack of adherence to democratic principles by the police, which SARS operatives epitomised.

Such diagnostic framing can be captured within one of the protester statements: "The unified voices of Nigerians have been treated as a threat to democracy instead of an expression of it. We unreservedly condemn the government's use of violence against peaceful protesters" (Dambo, Ersoy, Auwal, Olorunsola and Saydam 2021: 10). Indeed, as Akinteyun puts it, the protests were underpinned by 'calls to end police brutality in Nigeria; particularly among SARS" (Akinteyun 2021: 369).

Viewed this way, we see that frames are much less total than an ideology. By acting as relatable symptoms of broader problems with the existing

order, frames can, but do not always, serve as a gateway to ideologies. Consequentially, it is critical not to conflate both. A master frame is a collective action frame employed within an overarching social context. Such a frame "lacks the elaborate social theory and normative and value systems that characterise a full-blown ideology," providing a narrower perspective on a particular problem (Benford and Snow 1992: 138). Examples of such master frames are social issues such as injustice or human rights.

A movement can apply, and mobilisation recruits can adopt, a master frame without espousing the ideological perspective around that frame. Indeed, multiple social movements with different idea systems can employ the same master frame. For example, "injustice" is a master frame employed by movements as diverse as Boko Haram and human rights movements (i.e. movements that operate very differently than such ones as #EndSARS).[5]

Nevertheless, within the #EndSARS case, the master frame was that of injustice. This master frame enabled #EndSARS protesters to appeal to all those dissatisfied with SARS and police brutality, irrespective of political beliefs, ethnicity, tribe, or gender. The movement often employed these master frames in order to generate emotive responses from the public. The aim was to mobilise those "sentiment pools" of people aggrieved by similar injustices. When employed within diagnostic framing, the use of a master frame involves problem identification, in this case, via "injustice frames," to quickly identify the source(s) of the blame for a bad situation (Benford and Snow 2000: 614).

As an example of injustices framed by the #EndSARS protesters, the SARS detention centre in Abuja, given the pejorative name "Abattoir" due to its treatment of detainees, was visited by Amnesty International in June 2016, where 20 detainees were seen who had been in detention for at least six months, with one 20-year-old man detained since February 2014 (Amnesty International 2016). Nor are such instances isolated. As Amnesty International observed, "many detainees in SARS custody are subjected to long periods of detention without trial" (Amnesty International 2016: 11).

Similar allegations were made by the Network on Police Reform in Nigeria [NOPRIN]. For instance, Ifeanyi Onuchukwu, whom SARS detained between October and November 2004, allegedly witnessed 20 persons extra-judicially murdered by SARS, after armed robbery accusations in Awka, Anambra State (Network on Police Reform in Nigeria 2010: 57). As another instance of the injustices perpetrated by SARS, 'another [SARS] detainee

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5   See, for example, Omeni (2022b).

held between June and July 2006 in the SARS detention centre in Awka, Anambra State, reported that an average of four detainees died every day from torture, executions, or inhuman conditions' (Akinyetun 2021: 377).

Whereas the #EndSARS movement has framed such incidents within its use of "injustice frames," even the realisation of a bad situation is not enough. Collective action is required. This is where the second core framing task, prognostic framing, emerges. As a next step beyond the use of diagnostic and injustice frames, prognostic framing is concerned with the formulation and implementation of solutions and strategies. The #EndSARS protesters employed prognostic framing both before the protests and *in situ*, with Twitter often employed as a mobilisation mechanism. One such tweet read that,

> The Govt said no one died! This is it. We can't let this slide. If you have pictures, videos, or names of people you know. Pls share it here. This is for justice. This is for Nigeria. #EndSARS. (Dambo, Ersoy, Auwal, Olorunsola and Saydam 2021: 11)

Viewed this way, prognostic framing entails expressing possible solutions (i.e. sharing of media or victim-naming in order to hold the authorities accountable), as shaped by diagnostic frames (i.e. the government-endorsed threat of SARS). Furthermore, the movement's prognostic framing was evident from the name "#EndSARS" as a clear indication of the problem and, crucially, what the movement sought to do about that problem.

Finally, motivational framing acts as a "call to arms" or "rationale for action." Framing of this nature involves outlining the justification for employing contentious repertoires within collective action. The #EndSARS protest movement extends its motivational frames beyond just street-level protests and includes requests for donations as part of "action mobilisation." As an example, after the Leki Tollgate shootings by security operatives left at least a dozen people dead on 20 October 2020, the following tweet was sent:

> My whole chest is on fire watching these videos. Meticulously planning to shoot protesters is nothing short of literal evil. I cannot believe we're watching this unfold in real-time. I am floored #EndSARS. Where can we donate? (Dambo, Ersoy, Auwal, Olorunsola and Saydam 2021: 12)

The resulting product of this framing activity by social movements or social movement organisations (SMOs), such as the #EndSARS protest movement, are "collective action frames" defined as "action-oriented beliefs that inspire and legitimate the activities of SMO" (Benford and Snow 2000: 614).

Employing such framing, the #EndSARS protest movement has been able to tap into Nigeria's youth bulge, the low barrier of entry into internet-based technology and information, and access to social media. The movement employed such features of Nigerian society for information dissemination, protest mobilisation calls and live broadcasts.

The government response to this framing has been mixed. To begin with, there was no indication of the use of counter-framing (refutations) (Benford and Snow 2000: 614). For example, the government did not present SARS as the opposite, or even substantively different, to what its detractors allege. On the one hand, the government did not block or limit access to social media, which emerged as a primary means by which protesters organised and shared information (Erubami, Ufuophu-Biri, Anorue, Nwabunz and Orekyeh 2021). Nor was there a blanket ban on protestation. Yet, on the other hand, the government has been accused of a heavy-handed response. This led to the deaths of protesters and may have seen prominent activists monitored online. Nevertheless, the movement's use of frames was sufficiently resonant that even with a crackdown on mobilised protests, and despite the slow speed of the government disavowing the SARS unit initially, the #EndSARS movement ultimately achieved its primary objective: the disbandment of Nigeria's Special Anti-Robbery Squads (SARS).

CONCLUSION

As Ojedokun, Ogunleye and Aderinto write regarding the social impact of #EndSARS, the movement's collective action mobilisation,

> Does not only call into question the legitimacy of the police organisation, but equally signals citizens' scepticism and general loss of confidence in the willingness of the law enforcement agency to make its erring officers accountable for their unprofessional conducts. (2021: 1894)

The trajectories of SARS and #EndSARS were studied within the present article. When SARS was first founded in 1992, it was viewed as "a welcome development by many Nigerians" (Ojedokun, Ogunleye and Aderinto 2021: 1896). However, its positive outlook would change over time as the image of the police institution as a whole in Nigeria was tarnished (Hills, 2008). Indeed, corruption, human rights abuse, brutality, and other forms of malfeasance were so entrenched within Nigerian police culture that Agbiboa points out how "policing is not work: it is stealing by force" (2015: 94). SARS came to embody this phrase while simultaneously abandoning the expectations of its remit.

Even as SARS came into decline and disrepute, the #EndSARS movement gained momentum, on- and offline. The movement's use of "injustice frames" as a master frame resonated across a Nigerian society where few could claim ignorance of police brutality. The use of "diagnostic frames" clarified who was to blame: the corrupt and now reputationally-ruined SARS unit. Third, #EndSARS use of "prognostic frames" sought to provoke a "call to action," evidenced even by the movement's name. Finally, in its use of "motivational frames," the #EndSARS movement sought to justify actions that would take movement members from "the balconies to the barricades" (Benford and Snow 2000: 613).

By leveraging the Internet to employ all three core framing tasks and by riding the momentum that emerged as the collective action was mobilised, #EndSARS protests were instrumental to the eventual disbandment of SARS. However, there is even more room to examine this case using a social movement theory lens. For example, questions remain around why the Nigerian government failed to employ counter-frames, which, employed as a repertoire of counter-propaganda, can be quite effective against social movements' framed narratives. Similarly, other areas of SMT, such as political opportunism, and structural strain theory, can be employed across the cycle of contention in order to extract findings around the agency of the protesters.

Overall, whereas the application of social movement theories has a rich history within Western contexts, it is evident that the discourse around SMT relates to instances of contentious politics in Nigeria and even across Africa remains embryonic and ripe for future research. Within Nigeria specifically, protest movements have exponentially increased their politically contentious activism since the country transitioned to democratic rule in 1999 (Ojedokun U. A. 2021: 3). This trend provides further food for thought around how social movement theory could feature within scholarly analyses of the country's current and future activist landscape.

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