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EXPLORING NIGERIA`S ENDSARS MOVEMENT THROUGH THE NEXUS OF MEMORY

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Introduction

On 3 October 2020, a 22 years young man identified as Joshua Ambrose was shot dead by a team of the Nigerian Police Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) in Delta State, Nigeria, on the allegation that he was an Internet fraudster (Dambo et al., 2021). The SARS was established in 1992 to curb crimes such as robbery and kidnapping. However, the SARS has been accused of gross human rights violations (Wada, 2021). Joshua's shooting was captured in a video. The audio in the video states that the Police just shot and killed the owner of the Lexus SUV and zoomed off with his car (Agbo, 2021). The viral video generated outrage that condemned Joshua's ordeal and reflected the long-standing frustration about police brutality in Nigeria. In a few days, the online agitation had transformed into vast decentralised street protests in major cities in the country, mainly organised through social media. Again, on 20 October 2020, the Police, in an attempt to disperse peaceful protesters, shot and killed untold persons at a popular protest site, Lekki Tollgate, Lagos, Nigeria (Uwalaka, 2022).

Since 20 October 2020 to date, the Movement has had two commemoration protest Anniversaries. The Movement has continued to construct memories across time, an area dominated by Western studies (Daphi & Zamponi, 2019). Researchers have explored the EndSARS Movement from diverse angles; comparison to Black Lives Matter (Nwakanma, 2022; Wada, 2021); the influence of celebrities on the protest (Uwalaka, 2022; Ajaegbu et al., 2022), queer solidarity at the Movement (Nwabunnia, 2021); young people, their social media use and #EndSARS protest (Abimbade et al., 2022; Dambo et al., 2021); feminist movement and #EndSARS (Nwakanma, 2022). Despite the burgeoning literature on EndSARS, the literature is devoid of studies from the memory study perspective, a critical area in social movement studies (Smit, 2020; Daphi & Zamponi, 2019; Merrill & Lindgren, 2020).

Besides, I argue that considering the online feature of the Movement, the current literature on EndSARS needs to include the novelty and methodological rigour of virtual ethnography. Consequently, this study attempts to understand how protesters use Facebook, WhatsApp, and Instagram "Stories" (Ephemeral; 24-hour "Story") to

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construct a memory of the EndSARS Movement in Nigeria from 2020 until its Anniversaries in 2021, 2022, and 2023.

Social Movement-Memory Studies Nexus

The scholarly synergy between social movements and memory is expanding, and the study boundaries in the social movement-memory synergy is still blurry (Daphi & Zamponi, 2019). It is largely characterised by dispersed studies rooted in their respective disciplinary orientations.

Three factors within social movement research have crucially spurred the growing interest in memories. Firstly, the increasing focus on collective action that characterised social movements studies has engendered the movement-memory synergy. In this vein, the *cultural turn* in social movement studies has meant that growing attention is being paid to how protesters make sense of themselves, their environments, and the past (Baumgarten, Daphi, and Ullrich, 2014; Johnston, 2009). Secondly, the social movement-memory nexus has witnessed considerable growth in the context of recent calls for widening the temporal perspective within social movement studies (Daphi & Zamponi, 2019). Thirdly, social movement researchers' interest in memories is growing due to the debates and deployment of new media, precisely, social media in social movements (Smit, 2020; della Porta & Diani, 2020; Barassi, 2017; Vivienne, 2016; Merrill & Lindgren, 2020; Chidgey, 2018). Consequently, the inclusion of memory studies in social movement research has provided useful insights into the symbolic construction of the reality in which collective action takes place. Consequently, interpreting memory not as a mere mirror of past events, but as the result of collective practices able to reveal insights into present ways of interpreting reality (Daphi & Zamponi, 2019).

Why "Story"?

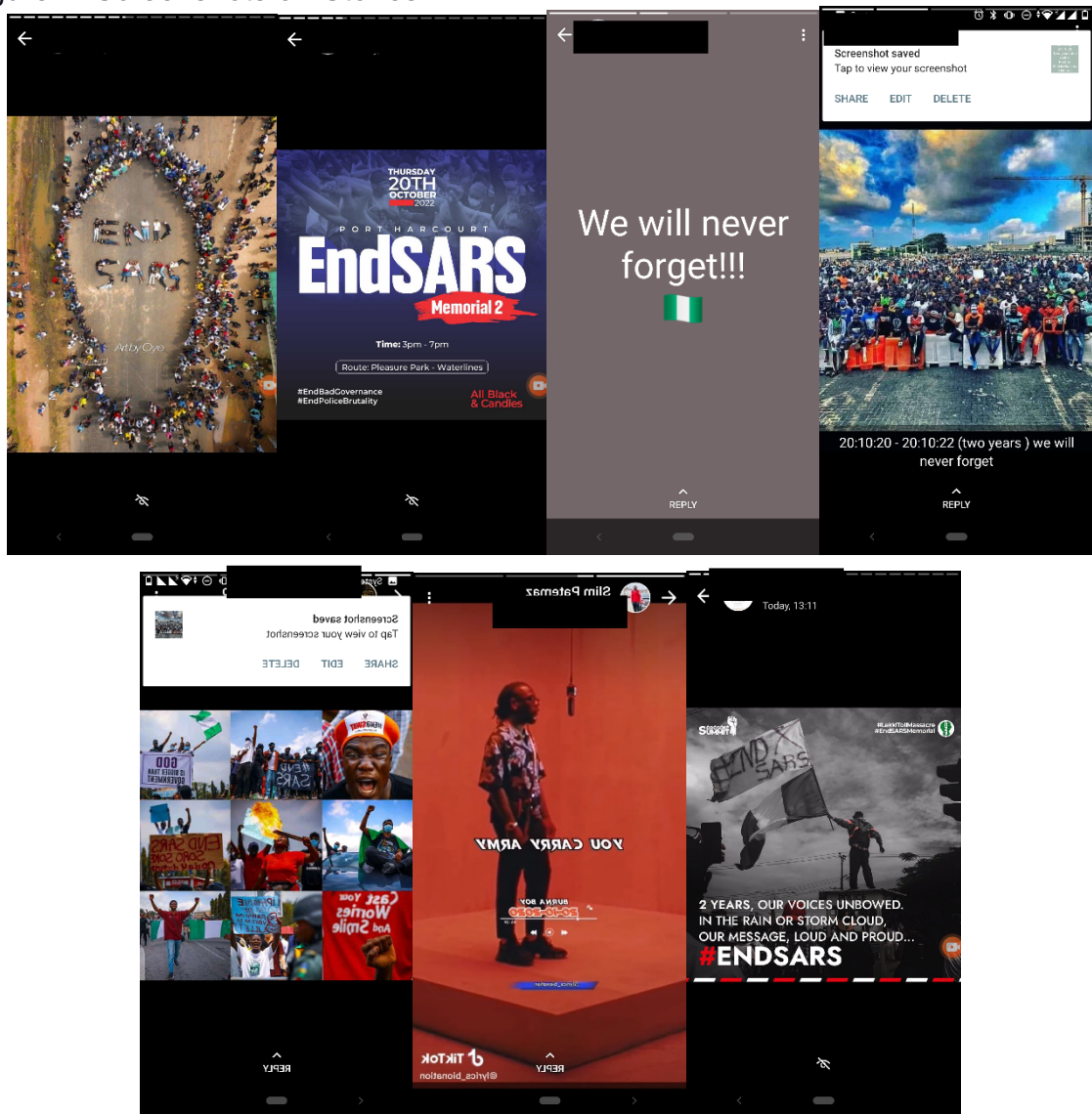
The ability to tell stories parallels the progression of human history. Our earliest memory is telling or listening to stories and keeping track of the past (Amâncio, 2017). Stories can engage our minds, question our beliefs, and rekindle old memories (Garrety, 2008). We are encouraged not only to listen to stories but also to tell them. Overtime and with the advancement of communication technologies, the modalities for storytelling have transformed tremendously, for instance, through social media.

Snapchat pioneered the "Story" feature of social media and innovated the main features (Amâncio, 2017). Calling the feature "Your Story", "My Story", "Story" in most social media, and "Status" on WhatsApp, serve a significant purpose and role in how the users interact with the feature. As Lambert (2012) explains in his book "Digital Storytelling - Capturing lives, creating communities", another way to understand digital storytelling is to look at who is telling the story. Different subjects can tell stories - I, He, She, and They. The difference between these subjects changes the story's perspective. For Lambert (2012), there are, "My Story", "Our Story", "Their Story", and also "No Story", all of them having different specifications.

The possessive adjectives give a sense of personalisation to the feature; it belongs to the user. That is their story, and they are the ones to decide how, when they will use it and what they will post. Either they are the main character in the story, the narrator or both. According to Erstad and Wertsh (2008), these possessive

expressions hold essential meaning. Erstad and Wertsh argue that by using these possessive adjectives, we see combinations of personal expression and mediational means used in an integrated way. Recently, researchers (Johnson & Morley, 2021; Bainotti et al., 2021; Villaespesa & Wowkoych, 2020; Ferrari, 2022) are beginning to pay attention to studying the "Story". However, there is a dearth of studies on the exploration of the feature on the social movement-memory nexus perspective. This is yet another research gap this study attempts to fill; the connection between "Story" and memory.

Figure 1: Screenshots of "Stories"



Methods/Procedure

Using the virtual ethnographic methodological approach (Hine, 2000; Hine, 2015; Pink et al., 2016) and my reflexivity as an insider (Finefetter-Rosenbluh, 2017), this research contributes to this growing domain.

this project gathers screenshots of "Stories" from selected accounts, forming an integral part of the primary data. Visual cultural researchers argue that images dominate our lives (Ownby, 2018), and image-based culture thrives within diverse aspects of social media (Jhally, 2003). Studies (Shanaathanan, 2015; Ownby, 2018; Heng, 2020) have infused visual data with other approaches such as interviewing, focus groups, and textual/discourse analysis.

I have been a part of the Movement before it was popularised in 2020. I have archived and analysed over hundred screenshots. Besides, I have been keeping notes as a participant observer. Presently, this study has conducted nine interviews. I incorporated the interviewing method and participant observation to ensure reliability, credibility, and trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, 1986), and improve the study's methodological rigour. The data were analysed using a combination of Braun and Clark's (2021) reflexive thematic analysis and visual essay analysis (Heng, 2020).

Preliminary Findings/Conclusion

Preliminary results indicate that the "Story" enables connective memory and constructs memetic resurrection, networked commemoration and digital narration of the EndSARS agitation. I argue that the current discovery illustrates that the *memory* of the EndSARS Movement is both retrospective and prospective, a repertoire for protesters today and in the future.

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