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THE ROLE OF GRIEF IN THE ENDSARS MOVEMENT

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Abstract

The EndSARS movement emerged as a powerful youth-led protest against police brutality in Nigeria, particularly the abuses perpetrated by the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS). While previous studies have analyzed the role of anger, hope, and other emotions in fueling social movements, this paper examines the role of grief as a driving force in the EndSARS movement. Drawing from grief theories such as psychoanalytic model, the stages of grief process, and the theory of meaning reconstruction, this study argues that collective grief and bereavement played a pivotal role in mobilizing Nigerian youths. Using secondary sources, this study traces how the movement transitioned from initial denial and numbness in the face of repeated extrajudicial killings to anger-driven mobilization, culminating in nationwide protests and symbolic acts of mourning. The study also highlights how the grief-stricken movement found meaning and solidarity through vigils, protest art, and online activism, ultimately leading to the disbandment of SARS. However, the study underscores that the movement's struggle did not end with institutional reforms, as grief remains embedded in national memory, reinforced annually through digital and physical commemoration of the victims. By framing the #EndSARS movement within the lens of grief, this paper provides a deeper understanding of how loss can shape political activism, identity formation, and demands for systemic change in Africa.

Keywords: EndSARS, Emotions, Grief, Nigeria, Protests.

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Introduction

Contrary to the assertion made by some writers that many African youths exhibit disinterest in political affairs and are unlikely to participate in protests or engage in political processes country actively, African youths are at the forefront of movements for change in various African countries. Mampilly (2021) contends that young people play a pivotal role in driving democratic change across Africa. Youths constitute the most sizable amount of the Nigerian population and are the most affected demographic group in the country's socioeconomic and political developments (Effoduh, 2020; Statista, 2022). Despite their numerical prominence, the youths face unjust targeting by law enforcement, leading to routine violence and fatalities (Effoduh, 2020). Paradoxically, these youths emerged as central figures in social mobilization during the #EndSARS movement, a powerful protest against police brutality in Nigeria.

The #EndSARS movement was a potent force propelled by widespread grief and sorrow. The heartbreaking tales of young Nigerians who have been victims of police brutality which included deaths, assaults, and unjust detentions was at the heart of the movement. Many other Nigerians mobilized around these youths, who are seen as the country's future, to stop the systemic abuses carried out by the Special Anti-Robbery Squad

(SARS) and other law enforcement organizations.

Using different social movements and protests as case studies, several pieces of literature, particularly in the field of psychology, have examined the relationship between different emotions, such as anger, disgust, and positivity, that fuel activism and social movements (Ahmed et al., 2020; Field et al., 2022; Sabucedo, & Vilas, 2014; Van Stekelenburg, & Klandermans, 2013; Zhu, & Chou, 2023). Regarding the #EndSARS movement, scholars such as Eniayejuni (2023) have examined the impact of positive and negative emotions on the Twitter posts of the #EndSARS movement. This literature predominantly focuses on anger, fear, pride, and hope as emotions fuel positivity, propelling enduring social movements. However, none of these studies examine grief as an emotion that fuels collective action. This paper argues that the #EndSARS movement was a movement propelled by collective emotion of grief and bereavement and thus aims to examine the roles grief and bereavement played in the movement.

To examine the role of grief in the #EndSARS movement in Nigeria, this study uses grief theories from the field of psychology as the theoretical framework. These grief theories include the classic psychoanalytic model of grief and bereavement, Elisabeth Kübler-Ross' five-stage grieving process, and the

theory of meaning reconstruction. The first section of this paper examined the background of the #EndSARS movement in Nigeria. The second section examines existing literature on the relationship between emotions and social movement. The third section discusses the theories of grief that frame this study. The fourth section analyzes the role of grief in the #EndSARS movement.

Background: The #EndSARS Movement

The #EndSARS movement is a movement initiated online and executed offline by Nigerian youths, aimed at addressing the misconduct of a division within the Nigerian Police Force known as The Special Anti-Robbery Squad, or SARS. SARS gained notoriety for its involvement in extrajudicial killings, extortion, and brutal treatment of Nigerian youths (Uwazuruike, 2020). Initially established in 1992, SARS operates as one of the 14 units within the Criminal Investigation and Intelligence Department of the Nigerian Police. Its primary mandate is to apprehend, investigate, and prosecute individuals responsible for violent crimes such as armed robberies, murders, kidnappings and hired assassinations in Nigeria (Vanguard, 2017).

However, SARS has been mired in controversy due to its involvement and association with extrajudicial killings, blackmail, home invasions, rape, and

kidnapping. Several unsettling incidents involving SARS have been documented. For instance, in 1996, SARS officers in Lagos arrested two security guards suspected of assisting in a robbery, leading to the guards' bodies being placed in a morgue without explanation in 1997 (Nigerian Tribune, 2020). In 2005, SARS operatives killed a bus driver in Obiaruku, Delta State, for failing to give them bribes (Nigerian Tribune, 2020). By 2009, SARS had expanded its reach into Nigerian universities, initially aimed at arresting fraudsters but eventually leading to harassment and extortion of students (Nigerian Tribune, 2020). Despite governmental reforms aimed at addressing SARS-related issues, justice has eluded the victims, and the unit continued to operate without accountability, thus inciting online and later physical clamors and campaigns for the disbandment of the unit by the Nigerian youths. (ACLED, 2021).

Before the 2020 #EndSARS protest, Nigerian youths communicated their dissatisfaction with SARS in 2013, 2014, and 2017 through various small-scale peaceful campaigns (Alfred & Oyebola, 2021). In 2017, a petition signed by 10,195 people was submitted to Nigeria's National Assembly, calling for a total disbandment of SARS (Mansur, 2017). However, it was not until 2020 that online activism metamorphosed into massive physical action. The national and international protest was motivated

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by a viral video of SARS officers killing a Nigerian youth in Delta State on 8th October 2020. This incident resulted in an online protest against SARS harassment (Ojedokun et al., 2021). A few days after the commencement of the online protest, youths, especially in southern Nigeria, took to the streets with placards to protest against police brutality and harassment of youths who were profiled for being fraudsters based on their clothes, tattoos, and dreadlocks and because they owned iPhones and expensive gadgets (Abati, 2020). The protests were intense between late October and early November of 2020.

The key demands voiced by the demonstrators included the dissolution of SARS, accountability for the deaths of young Nigerians killed by SARS officers, the immediate release of incarcerated protesters, and a cessation of poor governance and corruption (Aniche & Iwuoha, 2022). The protest reached its peak on October 20, 2020, when demonstrators gathered at the Lekki Tollgate, brandishing the Nigerian flag, only to face lethal force from the Nigerian Army (Ukpong, 2020). This tragic event, coupled with the use of impactful hashtags like #EndSARS, #EndSARSNow, #EndPoliceBrutality, and #LekkiMassacre on social media, garnered widespread attention from the global community. Originally initiated as a movement against police brutality, the protests evolved into a broader call for

political revolution and societal transformation, marked by the adoption of hashtags such as #Fixpolitics and #EndBadGovernance (Okpalaeké & Aboh, 2022). The rallying cry of the protesters was encapsulated in the Yoruba expression ‘Sọrọ Soke,’ translating to ‘Speak Up,’ emphasizing the imperative to take action and vociferously oppose injustice (Okesola & Oyeboode, 2023).

While the initial catalyst for the extensive physical campaigning witnessed in the #EndSARS movement was the widely circulated video depicting the killing of a Nigerian youth in October 2020, it is essential to draw connections between this movement and significant historical events. The violence perpetrated by state forces in Nigeria, akin to many former colonies, can be traced back to the moments of pre-colonial and colonial encounters characterized by profoundly degrading rule strategies (Mbembe, 2001). For instance, scholars like Toyin Falola and Kalu contextualize the history of state violence in Africa by examining slavery and the zero-sum culture of survival it instilled in numerous African communities (Orhero & Nwoke, 2023). They posit that the relentless violence stemming from slave raids conducted by pre-colonial African states’ soldiers normalized a survival-of-the-fittest ethos (Orhero & Nwoke, 2023). This form of social evolution encouraged by the colonialists permeated colonial Nigerian

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culture and politics, resulting in the establishment of unequal societies that, in turn, facilitated ongoing and systemic exploitation of the vulnerable (Falola & Kenneth, 2019).

The post-colonial Nigerian state, emerging after the departure of colonial powers, constructed a framework of meaning deeply influenced by a patrimonial mode of interacting with the world (Orhero & Nwoke, 2023). Concerning state violence, Falola and Kalu (2019) illustrate how the legacy of state violence lingers in everyday life in Nigeria, particularly through repressive policing. They note that ‘the colonial Police Force functioned as a tool of subjugation and exploitation. Instead of safeguarding citizens' rights, it served to intimidate, harass, and exploit Nigerians. This institutional philosophy within government organs persisted even after Nigeria gained political independence’ (Falola & Kenneth, 2019, p. 9).

Much like the historical roots connecting state force violence against citizens, the resistance against such brutality and broader injustices by the state holds a long history. Nigeria's legacy of protests stretches back to various events, from Abasi Edem Archibong and indigenous women of Calabar protesting police brutality in 1925 to the 1929 Aba Women protest against unfair market laws, the 1940s Abeokuta protest, the 1953 Kano riot, the Enugu coal miners' strike in 1949, the

Maitasine protest in the 80s, Fela's musical demonstration against his mother's death at the hand of Nigerian soldiers, the Jos riots of 2008 and 2010, and more recently, the Bring Back Our Girls (BBOG) protest (Domale, 2024; Ezeugwu, et al., 2021).

In the same vein, throughout history, as part of movements against state violence, Nigerians have turned to music and literature to express their discontent. Renowned Nigerian creatives like Fela Kuti, Wole Soyinka, Chinua Achebe, Ken Saro-Wiwa, and Bisade Ologunde (Lagbaja) have utilized their music and writings, often at significant personal cost, to confront state violence, thereby documenting the grim memories of state brutality (David, 2023; Olorunyomi, 2005). This historical archive of memory came to life during the #EndSARS movement, as contemporary Nigerian artists like leveraged their creative works to denounce police brutality and advocate for complete change.

The #EndSARS movement is a significant chapter in Nigerian history and merits thorough examination. This movement witnessed active participation from many of Nigeria's marginalized youth, marking one of the largest demonstrations since the country's shift to democracy in 1999 (ACLED, 2021). Beyond being a call for comprehensive police reform, this social movement evolved into a symbol of hope and

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change (ACLED, 2021). The youth, along with other citizens who have borne the brunt of a flawed democratic state, took it upon themselves to address persistent injustices in the nation. They stood up against an ostensibly democratic but authoritarian Nigerian government, advocating for governance that prioritizes the people (Agbashi et al., 2021).

However, the #EndSARS movement, while symbolizing hope and change, also laid bare a failure in leadership. Many leaders addressing the protesters demonstrated a significant disconnect between those in power and the average Nigerian (Agbashi et al., 2021). Instead of addressing the substantive demands of the protesters, leaders were more focused on quelling the protests (Agbashi et al., 2021). The culmination of this disconnection occurred on October 20, when the government deployed the Nigerian army with orders to open fire on protesters at the Lekki Tollgate after they refused to disperse (Agbashi et al., 2021). This Lekki massacre resulted in at least a dozen casualties, casting a dark shadow over two weeks of initially peaceful protests (Agbashi et al., 2021).

The #EndSARS movement was decentralized, although specific prominent figures were key in organizing protests across various states. Led entirely by Nigerian youths, the movement lacked a formal leadership structure or mentorship but relied heavily

on social media as a driving force. #EndSARS became symbolic of a ‘Soro Soke’ (a Yoruba phrase meaning ‘speak up loud’) generation, refusing to succumb to the shortcomings of inept leaders and corrupt politicians. The dynamic energy of Nigerian youth, traditionally perceived as excessively compliant, emerged as a potent driving force. These youths recognized their right to voice dissent against a system that was killing them and failing to address their needs and aspirations (Agbashi et al., 2021). The protests sparked a new wave of conscientious and engaged citizenry demanding accountable leadership. Nigerian youths demonstrated creativity and resourcefulness in mobilizing and supporting the movement. Their contributions ranged from medical assistance to freely leveraging technological expertise to circumvent state censorship (Agbashi et al., 2021).

A noteworthy facet of the #EndSARS movement is how ‘non-partisan digital activism was utilized to mobilize and garner resources for protests beyond the digital realm’ (Bangura 2022, p. 78). Predominantly orchestrated on Twitter, the mobilization efforts included dropping protest locations on the platform and disseminating information related to logistics and assistance. The Nigerian Diaspora, particularly in the United Kingdom and the United States, extensively utilized Twitter for mobilization. Nigerians residing abroad

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actively engaged in the movement, contributing a plethora of videos and photos shared across platforms like Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, and LinkedIn. The expressions of support took diverse forms, from preparing traditional food and singing the national anthem while displaying the Nigerian flag to wearing T-shirts adorned with various hashtags.

Furthermore, the #EndSARS movement employed diverse campaign methods: protests, public speeches, signed petitions, musical carnivals, sit-ins, obstructions, street sleeping, and boycotts. Nigerian youths utilized striking phrases and symbolic gestures to convey their unity, discontent, and grievances to the government and the global community. These varied campaign methods, linguistic expressions, and symbolic gestures drew inspiration from past protests and movements occurring in other countries, such as the United States.

Crucially, the #EndSARS movement demonstrated a departure from the ethno-religious and class tensions that typically frame Nigeria's domestic security and political issues. Nigerian youths from all six geopolitical zones, irrespective of ethnic group, religion, or political affiliations, united under a shared objective to end police intimidation, oppression, and brutality. Demonstrations spanned at least 25 of the country's 36 states, with notable events in

Lagos, Abuja, Rivers, Enugu, Kano, and Plateau (ACLEDE, 2021). Young artists collaborated with Christian and Muslim leaders to contribute to the movement, showcasing a unity where individuals from both faiths joined hands to pray and advocate for justice physically and on social media.

Class barriers were also breached as Nigerians from all walks of life worked together and played a significant role in the #EndSARS movement. Ordinary citizens worked alongside healthcare professionals working without compensation, lawyers tirelessly worked to release unlawfully detained individuals, and civil rights activists actively bailed out protesters facing unjust arrests (ACLEDE, 2021). The support extended beyond the protests, with ongoing initiatives such as providing free legal aid, crowdfunding for prosthetic limbs, and offering scholarships for children born in detention (ACLEDE, 2021). This underscores the notable contributions of Nigerian civil society, such as the Feminist Coalitions, a Women's group established in July 2020 to advocate for women's equality (ACLEDE, 2021). This group played a crucial role by utilizing their platform for fundraising and disbursing funds to support social services such as food, shelter, healthcare, physical security, and legal aid in sustaining #EndSARS demonstrations nationwide (ACLEDE, 2021).

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There are a lot of studies on the #EndSARS movement. However, most of this literature focuses on the use of social media in the movement and its political and economic impact. Also, some literature has focused on interpreting the tweets and messages used to push the movement forward on social media. However, little to no literature examines the symbolic emotional meanings behind the various activities the protesters resorted to in their physical protests and demonstrations.

Literature Review: Emotions and Social Movements

According to classical theories, people join social movements as a rational or logical reaction to their perceived unfairness, relative deprivation, or frustration (Berkowitz, 1972; Gurr, 1970; Lind and Tyler, 1988). The emotional component of collective actions was given less attention in the face of the above logical viewpoints (Izard, 1972; Marcus et al., 2000). Nonetheless, social movement scholars have recently focused on the function of emotions, particularly in psychology (Van Zomeren et al., 2004).

Emotions are a part of every human action and are fundamental to social interaction (Jasper, 1998). As a result, studies have examined how emotions might intensify or hasten social movements (Van Stekelenburg &

Klandermans, 2007), thereby increasing the speed and force of a movement. Gamson (1992) recognized the importance of emotions in interpreting political protests, especially those that tackle injustice. According to his theory, anger is a key emotion that motivates group action and gives such movements legitimacy (Gamson, 1992). Usually, such protests are framed by ideas of identity and injustice. However, anger becomes a powerful catalyst for mobilization and participation when associated with a feeling of injustice (Turner & Killian, 1987).

Drawing from Gamson's research, numerous scholars (Goodwin et al., 2009; Sabucedo et al., 2017; Sturmer and Simon, 2009; Van Troost et al., 2018; Van Stekelenburg et al., 2011) contend that anger plays a pivotal role in social movements by fostering a collective and relatable identity. Leach et al. (2007) investigated the inclination toward political protest among Australians in opposition to governmental efforts to rectify disparities faced by disadvantaged Aborigines. Their findings revealed that symbolic racism and perceived relative deprivation elicited group-oriented anger, consequently fostering a readiness for political protest (Leach et al., 2007).

However, the spectrum of emotions that propel social movements goes beyond rage. According to Leach et al. (2006), grief is another feeling that

might inspire people to join social movements. According to Van Stekelenburg and Klandermans (2013), people from privileged backgrounds may feel guilty about their advantages because they believe they are unfair. According to Jasper (1998), positive feelings like pride and hope can also act as catalysts for people to get involved in social movements. Mainly, hope represents the expectation that group efforts will bring about change, encouraging involvement (Bar-Tal et al., 2007; Jarymowicz & Bar-Tal, 2006; Landmann & Rohmann, 2020). The mere hope of achievement is enough to cause this sensation; action or confirmation of success is unnecessary (Sabucedo & Vilas, 2014). Páez et al. (2013, pp. 22) stress that this emotion emerges 'when the worst is feared, but one trusts in obtaining the best or least worst.' Another positive emotion that has been linked to social movements is optimism. According to Kemper (1978, 1991), optimism and hope are feelings connected to anticipating advancements in the standing or influence of the in-group. Librán (2002, as cited in Sabucedo & Vilas, 2014) and Culver et al. (2003) both associated optimism with the hope of attaining favorable results.

Anger seems to be a significant motivating and mobilizing factor for social movements. However, other negative emotions like humiliation, fear, and despair can encourage participation (Klandermans et al., 2008; Taylor, 2009).

However, the previously described positive emotions are typically necessary for anger to effectively mobilize participation. When combined with optimistic feelings such as hope, anger among the underprivileged can be positively directed towards group activities that result in advantageous consequences. On the other hand, unbridled anger, devoid of positive emotions, can be highly harmful to the marginalized group and even lead them astray. An empirical study by Sabucedo & Vilas (2014) on the relationship between protests, rage, and positive emotions in a 2012 student movement in Spain lends credence to this theory. The study's results highlight the importance of anger as a mobilizing factor and show that participation intention is strongly influenced by both anger and positive emotions, with positive emotions having a more significant effect than anger (Sabucedo & Vilas, 2014). Anger plays a significant role in influencing positive emotions, as highlighted by Sabucedo & Vilas (2014). Essentially, anger acts as a catalyst for positive emotions, jointly shaping students' inclination to engage in protests.

Moreover, Field et al. (2022) shed light on the significance of positive emotions in Black Lives Matter (BLM) social media discourse. Their research indicates that tweets featuring pro-BLM hashtags exhibit higher positive emotional levels than those with anti-

BLM hashtags, underscoring the role of positive emotions in sustaining social movements. Similarly, Eniayejuni (2023), in an analysis of emotions within #EndSars movement tweets, observed a notable shift in emotional dynamics following the movement's triggering event which was the killing of a young Nigerian by SARS. The study found a marked increase in negative emotions and a corresponding decrease in positive emotions post-event, underscoring the fluctuating emotional landscape within social movements. According to Eniayejuni (2023), fear emerged as the predominant emotion during the #EndSARS movement, closely followed by anger. However, during protest actions and various demonstrations, there was a notable surge in positive emotions. Also, following the announcement of the SARS disbandment, joy became the prevailing emotion. However, despite exploring various emotions' impact on mobilization within social movements, little attention has been given to the role of grief, especially within the #EndSARS movement's context.

Theoretical Framework: The Theories of Grief

The term grief then refers to 'the emotional experience of the psychological, cognitive, behavioral, social, and physical response to the loss of something or someone' (Boerner et al., 2017, p. 979; MAPS, 2011, p. 2). Human

existence is inherently characterized by the experience of loss and grief (MAPS, 2011). Many ideas and models have been established to help understand the grieving, bereavement, and mourning processes.

Freud (MAPS, 2011; Worden et al., 2021; Spring, 2020) made a groundbreaking contribution to understanding grief. According to Worden et al. (2021), Freud understood mourning as both a necessary process that follows the death of a loved one and an unavoidable effect of loss. Grieving people take on the difficult task of assessing the truth of the loss and incorporating it into their lives during this phase (Worden et al., 2021). According to Freud's (2005) theory, the purpose of grieving is to reroute emotional attachment from the deceased (cathexis), enabling the bereaved person to separate from their loved one (decathexis). Although grieving is a complex process, it is necessary because it allows emotional energy to be redirected to other relationships and pursuits. It requires the bereaved person to communicate their feelings, especially anguish and fury, and to actively engage with memories and ideas of the deceased (hypercathexis) (Worden et al., 2021). Neglecting this procedure can negatively impact physical, mental, and emotional health (MAPS, 2011).

Another grief theorist, Kübler-Ross, believed that grieving occurs in

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recognizable activities, phases, and stages (Kübler-Ross, 1969). Kübler-Ross states that there are five stages to grieving: shock and denial, anger, bargaining, sadness, and acceptance (MAPS, 2011). The bereaved person may experience emotional numbness during the shock and denial period, finding it difficult to accept the reality of the loss fully. Nonetheless, denial functions as a coping strategy, helping the bereaved individual get over the early upheaval (Kressler, n.d.). Denial can be viewed as a defense mechanism that lets people deal with the loss at a manageable pace (Kressler, n.d.). Subsequently, anger comes up. Anger can offer a brief sense of order amid the turmoil of bereavement and frequently reflects a combination of underlying emotions, including pain (Kressler, n.d.).

Usually, when anger is expressed, bargaining takes place. To either reclaim what has been lost or save themselves from the agony of the loss, the grieving person may feel forced to seek a temporary ceasefire during this phase (Kressler, n.d.). Feelings of emptiness then surface, and grief deepens. Deeply depressed, the bereaved person may distance themselves from life (Kressler, n.d.). Deep depression is a common reaction to the loss of a loved one and is regarded as normal and reasonable (Kressler, n.d.). After a loved one passes away, it would be strange not to experience depression (Kressler, n.d.). Acceptance is the last phase of mourning.

It means accepting the hard truth that a loved one is no longer physically present and accepting that this is a new reality forever (Kressler, n.d.). Grieving people progressively learn to live with loss, even if they may never fully accept it. They must adjust by rearranging tasks, assigning them to others, or taking them independently (Kressler, n.d.). Weeks, months, or even years may pass throughout the grieving process, and people may experience cycles of different emotions, going back to those they experienced in the past (Kressler, n.d.).

Like Kubler-Ross, William Worden lists the phases of tasks that people go through during the grieving process. Accepting the truth of the loss on an emotional, mental, bodily, and intellectual level is the first challenge (MAPS, 2011; Worden et al., 2021). The second task is to recognize and deal with the suffering that comes with the loss or sadness (Worden et al., 2021). The third step is adjusting to a life without the deceased, which entails modifying one's daily schedule and self-perception in light of the loss (MAPS, 2011; Worden et al., 2021). Finding a way to continue life's journey while paying tribute to the departed is the fourth task (MAPS, 2011; Worden et al., 2021). In contrast to Freud's decathexis theory, Worden suggests that grievors look for honorable methods to remember the deceased person (Worden et al., 2021).

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In stark contrast to the previously discussed viewpoints that emphasize cutting links and going through phases of grieving, the social constructionist perspective on grieving views continuing relationships as beneficial resources for improved well-being and the reconstruction of meaning (Neimeyer, 2001- Neimeyer et al., 2010). The things that need to be done after a loved one passes away have a purpose and are important (Spring, 2020). Continuing the relationship with the deceased, even if it is different from the prior one, honors the memories and relationship of the departed loved one while also acknowledging the permanent aspect of death (Spring, 2020). The bereaved person may turn to spiritual ideas or ask questions that they might or might not find answers to process the loss (Davis & Nolen-Hoeksema, 2001; MAPS, 2011).

In addition, it is imperative that the bereaved person find some comfort amid their loss (Folkman, 1997; Taylor, 1983). These advantages could include strengthening relationships, developing new viewpoints, and growing personally. However, these advantages might not show up immediately after the loss; instead, they might take time to materialize (Neimeyer & Anderson, 2002). The grieving person experiences personal reconstruction, takes on new responsibilities, grows, and becomes more robust, autonomous, and self-

assured through sense-making and benefit-finding (Gillies & Neimeyer, 2006).

The Role of Grief in the #EndSARS Movement

The passing of a cherished loved one often leads to profound personal transformation (Lebel & Ronel, 2009). For Nigerian youths, change had been brewing. Although the #ENDSARS movement became widespread in 2020, it has been actively in motion since 2013, when Nigerian youths communicated their dissatisfaction with SARS through various small-scale peaceful campaigns (Alfred & Oyebola, 2021). The period of small-scale online and physical protests and demonstrations was a grieving stage of shock and denial for the Nigerian youths who were mourning and grieving the loss of their fellow youths, their dreams, and their future. Kressler (n.d.) suggests that individuals in mourning may encounter emotional numbness during the initial shock and denial phase, making it challenging to grasp the loss fully. Similarly, between 2013 and 2020, Nigerian youths appeared to employ denial as a coping mechanism. This is evident in their limited engagement, primarily through sharing experiences of SARS harassment online and expressing condemnation of SARS' actions on social media without taking proactive measures to demand justice.

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The phase of numbness and denial was succeeded by a surge of anger directed towards SARS for the loss of Nigerian youths and their aspirations, as well as towards the Nigerian government for its complacency regarding SARS' actions. The killing of a youth by SARS in Delta State in 2020 served as a wake-up call for Nigerian youths, jolting them out of their state of numbness. This tragic event prompted them to recognize the magnitude of their losses and the ongoing threat posed by inaction, compelling them to take decisive action. For a grieving population that has not only suffered the loss of their peers but also the erosion of their freedoms and aspirations due to the unlawful actions of SARS, it was natural for anger to emerge. Fueled by an underlying sense of pain, Nigerian youths embraced this anger as a catalyst for action. This collective emotion was a unifying force, empowering them to organize the #ENDSARS movement without centralized leadership. Their goal was to reclaim their rights to freedom and life while seeking justice for those lost.

Nevertheless, the grieving Nigerian youths' expression of anger through protests and demonstrations was met with violent crackdowns, ultimately resulting in the tragic events of the Lekki Massacre. But rather than moving on to the next stage of grief, which is depression, according to Kubler-Ross, the Nigerian youths directed their grief to meaning-making activities that focused

on continuing relationships as beneficial resources for improved well-being. Nigerians collectively engaged in grief-laden moments, such as candlelight vigils and public displays of mourning, which underscored the gravity of the situation and the human cost of the struggle for reform and were also necessary outlets for the emotional toll of the struggle.

Folkman (1997) underscores the necessity for bereaved individuals to seek solace amidst their grief, which may involve strengthening relationships, adopting fresh perspectives, and undergoing personal growth. Following the harrowing events of the Lekki Massacre, Nigerians from all walks of life mobilized to demand justice and systemic reforms. This collective outcry fostered stronger bonds among diverse civil society groups and bridged gaps between individuals of varying religious and ethnic backgrounds. The tragic loss of young Nigerian lives reverberated across cultural divides, igniting a unified movement for inter-cultural and inter-religious collaboration. This collaboration aimed not only at advocating for the disbandment of SARS but also for attaining justice and accountability.

Mourning and grieving for the lives lost during the #ENDSARS movement resulted in Nigerian citizens taking on a new role, changing from citizens who do not care to citizens who rallied on the street demanding that the

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government administer justice and protect the lives of the youths. This aligns with Gillies and Neimeyer's (2006) stance that a grieving person experiences personal reconstruction, takes on new responsibilities, grows, and becomes more robust, autonomous, and self-assured through sense-making and benefit-finding. However, contrary to Neimeyer and Anderson's (2002) view that these changes do not happen immediately after the loss and take time to materialize, the loss of precious youths considered the country's future galvanized Nigerians into immediate sense-making and identity-finding. Numerous civil society groups that had been passive or not very active in condemning the actions and inactions of the Nigerian government took to the streets to demand justice and change.

As posited by William Worden (2021), individuals undergoing the grieving process often encounter a phase where they strive to navigate life's journey while honoring the memory of those who have passed away. Similarly, within the context of the #ENDSARS movement in Nigeria, participants perceived the movement as a means of seeking closure while simultaneously fostering national unity and acknowledging the sacrifices of those who lost their lives. By engaging in protests and advocating for social justice reforms, Nigerians sought to address longstanding grievances and systemic

injustices, thereby contributing to the healing process of individuals and the country. During the demonstrations and protests carried out by the participants of the movement, the names of the victims of SARS officials were written on placards and shared on social media platforms (Arotiba, 2020). Thus, the #ENDSARS movement served as a platform for collective mourning, reflection, and action, enabling citizens to commemorate the lives lost while striving for a better future grounded in justice, equality, and accountability.

Acceptance is the last phase of mourning. It means accepting the hard truth that a loved one is no longer physically present and accepting that this is a new reality forever (Kressler, n.d). Grieving people progressively learn to live with loss, even if they may never fully accept it. The #ENDSARS Movement eventually led to the disbandment of SARS as a police unit and the establishment of a council to investigate the crimes committed by SARS officials as well as what happened at Lekki Toll gate. The outcome of the #ENDSARS Movement can be seen as a manifestation of the final stage of mourning: acceptance. Just as individuals in mourning gradually come to accept the reality of their loss and adjust to living with it, the #ENDSARS Movement, through its activism and advocacy, pushed for institutional changes that acknowledged and addressed the

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grievances of Nigerians affected by police brutality and violence.

The disbandment of SARS and the establishment of accountability mechanisms represent the government's eventual, although forced, acknowledgment of the need for change and the recognition of the grievances and demands of those impacted by the unit's actions. This institutional response reflects a societal acceptance of the need for reform and justice, marking a crucial step towards healing and moving forward from the trauma and injustices inflicted by SARS.

The disbandment of SARS enabled Nigerians to come to terms with the loss of lives and move on with their lives. However, it is essential to note that the events precipitating the #ENDSARS movement, as well as the lives tragically lost during the Lekki Massacre, remain indelibly etched in the collective memory. Every October 20th, Nigerian youths utilize various social media posts to commemorate and honor the lives lost, ensuring that their memory endures, and their sacrifices are never forgotten.

Conclusion

The #EndSARS movement exemplifies how grief can transcend personal loss and serve as a catalyst for collective action and societal transformation. Nigerian youths, who had

long been marginalized and subjected to police brutality, channeled their grief over lost lives and stolen futures into a mass movement demanding justice and accountability. The movement's evolution, beginning with denial and shock, escalating into anger and mobilization, and culminating in meaning-making and structural demands, mirrors established grief processes in psychology. Through public mourning, candlelight vigils, and digital activism, Nigerian youths created a space where grief was transformed into political resistance and a rallying cry for reform. The eventual disbandment of SARS and the formation of investigative panels marked a significant, though incomplete, victory, symbolizing a collective acceptance of loss and an attempt at systemic redress. However, the scars of the movement persist in national memory, with the Lekki Tollgate massacre serving as an enduring symbol of state violence and unfulfilled justice. The annual commemoration of the movement underscores that grief continues to shape political consciousness in Nigeria. Ultimately, this study underscores that social movements are not only fueled by anger and injustice but also by grief, a powerful, mobilizing force that binds communities in collective remembrance and resistance against oppression.

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