

Sorosoke and the Poetics of Righteous Dissidence: Outrage and Memorialisation in *Sorosoke: An #EndSARS Anthology*

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*The Nigerian youth movement against the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) in October 2020, produced an ethical clampdown on the extrajudicial powers of state security apparatuses. This movement not only resonated across Nigeria but also through the digital space as a new and necessary formidable mechanism for outrage and memorialisation. It produced *Sorosoke: An #EndSARS Anthology* collected and edited by Jumoke Verissimo and Yeku James, which suffices within the protest of 2020 and after it, as a way of using poetry as a means of ethical and moral clamour against wanton killings of youths by SARS. #EndSARS, turning on its revolutionary spirit, accrues a poetic outrage and memorialising archive against the erasure by Nigerian government agencies of protesting youths. I conceptualise the demand to speak-up in an oppressive context as captured by *Sorosoke* as poetics of righteous dissidence. This theorisation reveals how #EndSARS and *Sorosoke: An #EndSARS Anthology*, a field of power through its protest tradition and archival life, aligns with the claims that literature is a world. Hence, I read poems in *Sorosoke: An #EndSARS Anthology* to situate #EndSARS within its autonomous yet mediated fields of outrage, dirge, and memorialisation. I draw valuable insights from conceptual underpinnings in Pierre Bourdieu's *Literary Field*, particularly *Habitus* and Pascale Casanova's *Literature as a World*. Reading the poems in the anthology reveals that counterpointing the denials of the massacre by the government can be interpreted as righteous dissidence and that it is not only a tool for dirge poetics and archiving of the protest, but also a significant contribution to new modes of digital protest poetry in African Studies.*

Keywords

#EndSARS; *Sorosoke*; Righteous Dissidence; Poetics of Outrage; Memorialisation; Pascale Casanova

Historical and media protest context of #EndSARS and Sorosoke

The Nigerian youth movement against the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) in October 2020 produced an ethical clampdown on the extrajudicial powers of state security apparatuses. This movement, in palpable terms, relates to what might be termed a form of righteous dissidence, as it carries the protest current that confronted leadership deficit and signalled the defeat of silence against tyranny, among other things. Righteous dissidence, as framed in this paper, hints at the popular expression of logical rage, perhaps a sort of “holy” defiance against any orchestrated state-sponsored violence against citizens, particularly the youth. Generally deployed and now used in the context of protest, righteous dissidence appropriates write-backs to the regime of powers that continually bend the will of their subjects in Nigeria and the developing world generally. At the first real-time righteous dissidence when EndSARS started, Nigerian poets and academics were as agitated as other concerned citizens. The protracted silence on judicial killings came upon a new term borrowed from the African cultural protest idiom, *Sorosoke*, which is a Yoruba catchword or mantra that means “make your voice loud”. It was in October 2020 that the term gained prominence as a demand for victims of SARS to speak up and rise against the culture of silence. Poetry in the form of an anthology of many voices of Nigerian poets – *Sorosoke* – became the response to a movement that defied spatial and temporal politics and poetics.

The *Sorosoke Anthology* fits in the long tradition of protest poetry, but it furthers the engagement in real-time poetry publication, which then aligns with the physical protest locations in Nigeria and the global elsewhere. By engaging with virtual poetry in a protest context, the theorisation of *Sorosoke* fits into the current scholarly debates about virtuality and literary activism in twenty-first-century Africa. This virtual mode of activism connects the current debates around literary activism coming from Ruth Bush, Madhu Krishnan, and Kate Wallis. This epistemic reflection around literary activism spotlights wide-ranging stakeholders: African writers, publishers, festival organisers, and translators. In a recent article, *An Introduction to a Special Issue: Literary Activism in 21st Century Africa*, Bush, Krishnan, and Wallis highlight increased literary activities across social media in the throes of a global pandemic, reporting that, despite the various stifling incidents of curfews and lockdowns, literary festivals like AfroLitSansFrontieres, Ake Festival, and many others blossomed in such digital platforms as Instagram and YouTube. In the context of literary

activism, righteous dissidence signalled by *Sorosoke* fits the project of virtual protest poetry mobilised in the context of #EndSARS upheaval.

Using the platform of *Brittle Paper* as the media channel, Jumoke Verissimo and James Yeku in their immediate response to the Lekki tollgate killings, called for submissions of poems in real-time to share in that parallel dissident moment, albeit through digital poetry. In that spatio-temporality, they document through the virtuality of poetry, pain, anguish, grief, and the spontaneity of shared humanity they recognise between them as poets and the decimated, protesting compatriots. Hence, righteous dissidence finds its summation in the way Yeku and Verissimo respond tellingly to the onslaught against the EndSARS protest of October 2020. In the post that galvanised poets to respond with live submission of poems and later in a print anthology, righteous dissidence as a mandate is rife: “This time, we have evidence. We can tell those who like to silence us we have proof and it is out there on the internet. The dead have names” (Verissimo and Yeku, 2020). This calls for poetry that enunciates the social commitment that took roots in Africa, which Romanu Egudu (1998, 79) views as “...depicting and satirizing the misdeeds and actions that offend social justice, the younger poets (published between 1970 and the present) not only deal with similar issues with like satirical attitudes, but also overtly try to inspire and mobilize the oppressed to fight injustice and change their piteous plight for the better”.

In line with the argument about the broader way to contextualise EndSARS as a network of righteous dissidence, Reuben Abati (2020) claims that “there is a meeting of minds among the youths, North or South, that something terrible has gone wrong with our country that needs to be fixed”. Shedding light on the movement, Nwachukwu Egbunike (12) posits that “the EndSARS was an organic movement led by the Nigerian youths against brutalities by the Police Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS)”. Noting this media development, Egbunike (11) posits that “social movements have labored to overturn the asymmetrical dependence on mainstream media”. *Sorosoke: An #EndSARS Anthology* powerfully illustrates the way in which developments in digital cultures and humanities enable poetry to assume a lever for popular movements, as illustrated by the initial platformised, open submission that *Brittle Paper*, an African online magazine, assumed in EndSARS’s poetic harvest. It might be self-evident that EndSARS as a movement had its life in anomie.

Thus, it is pertinent to understand how its other life, *Sorosoke: An #EndSARS Anthology*, assumes autonomous, visceral, and virtual life, which supports the

claim that literature is a world not necessarily separated from the world of beings, i.e., Nigeria. It is then pertinent for any cultural critic to examine the sympathy of that tragic moment, to distil and re-interpret the poetics and politics arising from it. In order words, this paper examines how EndSARS materialises as righteous dissidence using both conceptual pointers and textual illustrations from *Sorosoke: An EndSARS Anthology* to foreground the poetics of outrage and memorialisation. In three conceptual points, I contend that *Sorosoke*, which embeds the youth's revolutionary capital in its real and virtual poetics, is a form of righteous dissidence and this recurs in all three perspectives.

Conceptualising the idea of righteous dissidence

First, no human society permanently bends to tyranny. This suggests that freedom has its day in history after protracted leadership problems and clampdown against misgovernance. This means that either by peaceful negotiation or violent confrontation, people will confront repressive forces of the state to earn their freedom. The reign of state violence in Nigeria, particularly with bad leadership and oppression meted out to Nigerians who are denied their voices of dissent, amounts to what Kosiso Gabriel Okonkwo calls “state-terrorism” (62). This form of state terrorism, as Okonkwo argues, breeds a sensible form of insurrection, what I consider as “righteous dissidence”. Thus, the pushback against the context of state terror is another way to apprehend righteous dissidence. So far, it might be argued that in the Nigerian context, tyranny corrodes dignity, forcing the victims to react, and such a reaction qualifies as righteous dissidence. From *An EndSARS Anthology* (2021), Soji Cole’s “An Elegy for EndSARS” foregrounds the ironic tendency tyrannical burdens of repressive might suffered by victims of EndSARS. Cole’s poem, therefore, powers the first context for theorising righteous dissidence.

The second dissidence, which is connected to the first, is that the very nature of tyranny generates silence. This suffices from the iteration of the motifs of silence and submission recovered in Biodun Bello’s use of “End Sirs!” that calls for an end to respect for oppressors. The act of dissidence, rebellion as poetics, for instance, recurs in James Yeku’s “Bubu” in an allusive reference he makes to the Czar. The reference to the Czar’s cruelty stages the device of

a pun in replacing Czar for SARS, further intimating the logic of EndSARS as a metaphoric act of righteous dissidence.

Following, the third criterion of dissidence catalyses some kind of abjection, illustrating the bursting phase in the regimen of chaos and crises amidst protracted years of hardship faced by the masses. As a result, the chaos and crisis produced by oppression define the experience of the teeming youth in the regime of General Mohammadu Buhari, who, confronted with the failure of leadership of the Nigerian state, branded the youth lazy. This leadership failure on the heels of goodwill he received as Nigerians demanded change, perhaps, far beyond other deployed preceding democratic governments, made him the butt of criticism. The leadership trails of thoughts on President Buhari's austerity are not lost in the narrative circulating around him as a former Nigerian president (2015–2023 and Military Head of State 1993–1985), following the lazy label pronounced on the Nigerian youths, to worsening economy, multifaceted insecurity challenges, and then EndSARS protest came as the height of bad governance. Some interest groups highlighted this as attributed to former President Buhari in an article that appeared in *Vanguard* by Steve Oko in 2022. Also, in Ademola Adesola's "Hurray for EndSARS", there is a depiction of rebellion, which appears urgent and critical to confront oppression that became more obviously reinstituted in the democratic regime of President Buhari. With a certain level of poetic outrage in the mind of Adesola, it becomes clear that righteous dissidence becomes inevitable with the levels and layers of wrong citizens' permits. Thus, in the way they are governed, the youth through EndSARS were bound to confront amnesia and impunity, forcing them into fever-pitch revulsion, as it happened in 2020. This is arguably the right act against those leaders whose acrimonious silence and failure to feel the pulse of citizens reached its limit.

Contesting the prevailing culture of silence, rot, and religious hypocrisy with the masses as the sustaining agency, Tosin Gbogi's "A Short History of Things at the Base" another poem in *Sorosoke*, paints such a grim picture of Nigeria. He views the country as "a litany of chaos stitched together by prayers/fantasies, vigils, and fasting through the tyranny of light..." (29) Instead of Nigerian youths "ask[ing] god for the impossible" they become dissident, "wake up with hurting hearts (94)" as Stephen Kekeghe writes in "We Chant our Pains". With these excerpts as textual cues that underpin the concept of righteous dissidence, the theoretical foreground is relational to poetry, African protest form, and digital movements such as #EndSARS as a

site of power discourse. *Sorosoke: An #EndSARS Anthology* in its evocation of outrage and memorialisation, connects with extant theories of literature as the textual field of power discourse and power game.

Sorosoke, in its hybrid creative schism, as a resistant act and archival practice, directs its protest signifiers by the interpretive suggestions made by the poems in themselves and is fully motivated by the burden of the arrogated critical authority and context to interpret it as a work of “righteous dissidence”. Considered in the frame of a legitimate act, criticism about protest poetry enacts the position of Bourdieu (35) that “[a]ll critics declare not only their judgment of work but also their claim to the right to talk about it and judge it. In short, they take part in a struggle for the monopoly of legitimate discourse about the work of art, and consequently in the production of the value of the work of art”. Also, Bourdieu hints at the cultural space and the authority of the critic who engages literature, assesses its critical elements, and makes reasoned arguments about its value as an artistic production. The present attempt to theorise *Sorosoke* as righteous dissidence aligns with what Bourdieu calls “the monopoly of legitimate discourse” (35), as this discourse produces and advances interpretive energies from within the text to theorise ideas that shape the cultural currents of a society that produces it.

Sorosoke, in its conceptual ramifications, inscribes itself in the protest dynamics as a literary field, to adopt Bourdieu’s theory. The literary field draws in social participants, editors, and contributing poets, who summon the poetic imagination as the social and technological capital for the dissident onslaught against state power. This also aligns with their positive resistant habitus, as they become symbolic actors in the field of cultural production that underlines Casanova’s theorisation of literature as a world. This sense of *Sorosoke* as poetics of dissidence ties into Bourdieu’s “the field of production”. Expanding on Bourdieu’s theory, Speller notes that, “there is a continuum in micro-textual analysis and macro-social analysis which provides hermeneutic rounds of discourse that help us to understand the literary field and the field of power” (64).

Therefore, as what fits in the frame of dissident poetics, Bourdieu’s literary field is a reaction to the existentialism of Jean-Paul Sartre, the structuralism of Claude Levi-Strauss, and the post-structuralist praxis of Jacques Derrida. The structuralists and the post-structuralists emphasise the internal world and organicity of the text, separating the object from the socio-historical currents of its writer. Bourdieu frames the text as a field of power. His theory derives from sociology; however, he relates the field space within a contrived

metaphor, that is, the depiction of the object as a Russian doll. As Thomas Nulley-Valdes explains, “Russian dolls represent a concentric level of power relations, their relational character, and the various levels of analysis” (11, 12). Bourdieu begins by extrapolating the large space: “the field of power”, and as Nulley-Valdes (12) puts it again, “a national structure defined by unequal internal power relations”. This is the sense in which we argue that *EndSARS* becomes a field of power pitched against the powers of repression. There is some conceptual correspondence between Bourdieu’s and Michel Foucault’s iterations of power. Both of these power theorisations tie with Sorosoke, in that Foucault’s *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, might be related, where the ubiquitous power dynamics determine the flows of authority and hierarchies of social agents – EndSARS youth protesters in this case – also find themselves in a similar field of power discourse as Bourdieu points out. Foucault in another book, *The History of Sexuality: Volume 1, The Will to Knowledge*, restates the power that seems diffused and available irrespective of form of agency and structure. He argues that “[p]ower is everywhere and comes from everywhere, so in this sense, it is neither an agency nor a structure. Instead, it is a kind of ‘metapower’ or ‘regime of truth’ that pervades society, and which is in constant flux and negotiation” (63). Perhaps, there is a sense in which Sorosoke profits from this ubiquity of power, but through the agencies of poets alive to their social responsibility.

Foucault’s discourse of the regime of truth connects to the power generated from the state through its institutions’ implicated mechanism, sanctioning certain things to be “truths”. Foucault attempted by this regime of truth, to explicate how knowledge and truth become vectors of power in society. Bourdieu’s theorisation of power in the alternative world of literature as field and Foucault’s power discourse of truth finds useful analytical cohesion with *Sorosoke*, as a literary field of power, inscribing itself as pointed regimes of contested truths. The Nigerian state’s regime of truth becomes a counterpoint of youth’s version of truth that inscribes massacre, which frames an institutional truth authorised and disseminated by the state as a phantom massacre. For Bourdieu’s theory of field, the social strata of the areas or groups in the struggle for space reenact the pattern in which the extent of social capital determines social power and influence. Bourdieu argues that the value of a text is the ripple effect of a literary game and that it is predicated on “collective belief”, or the “illusio” (Nulley-Valdes 12). Bourdieu postulates “illusio” as a wide-ranging validation of what I frame as “game time participation”, which recurs in many areas of knowledge, such as science, politics, literature, and

religion. The truth value of literature, even with its imaginative propensity, is its reliance or depiction of plausibility to real events in life.

Thus, Bourdieu contends that the literary field suffices as “a separately functioning *illusio* to that of the ordinary commonsense world” (Nulley-Valdes 12). The concept of *illusio* perhaps repudiates the symbolic authority of the literary world, consigning it to mere games with no actuality. While that might be true, the representational world of literature supports the real world in such symbolic cultural capital. This possibility of the exactitude, or the blurring of the illusion and the real world, problematises what exists and what does not. This is so that when a textual experience replays its game in the world of commonsense, like the poems in *Sorosoke*, which recapture the lived experiences of #EndSARS, what then is the “*illusio*”, as conceived by Bourdieu? *Illusio* relates to “field of production”, pointing to the collective currents that foreground “the value of the work as art” (Nulley-Valdes 12). Bourdieu clarifies that it is more the universe of the belief that makes the work possible and not exactly the artist. Accordingly, this is a “fetish by producing the belief in the creative power of the artist” (Bourdieu 1993, 222). #EndSARS, by first its social media field and hashtag, and its counterpointing power of memorialisation, assumes Bourdieu’s *illusio*, which propels both physical and digital resistance against the power structure in Nigeria.

Nodes of righteous dissidence and protest poetry

Framing the concept of righteous dissidence relates how the *#EndSARS Anthology* takes on a new mode of real-time and print-archive activism. *Sorosoke: An #EndSARS Anthology*, then suggests a counter power mechanism leveraging digital technology to break barriers of distance among contributors and readers interested in the moral resistance summoned by *Sorosoke*. Thus, the real-time submission, sharing of poems, and subsequent print publication of the dissidence inherent in the movement defying political powers transcended the spatial spread of Lagos and other Nigerian states the movement reached. There is to this new mode of digital protest, the twin-fold dissidence. First, is the physicality that is the actual live protest in Lagos, and second is virtuality as alternatively viewed from the mode of media coverage. Both forms of dissidence connect at that parallel zone of counterpointing powers of real life and the digital space against state authority. Thus, the *#EndSARS Sorosoke Anthology* by its literary life absorbs and archives the spontaneity of grief, the

memorialising of rage over the decimation of the youths at the Lekki tollgate. *Sorosoke*, also, fits in the remit of World Literature as both its technology of imagination – spatially dispersed poets around the world – in a new protest scheme: the virtual mode of participation of contributors in the dissidence art of documenting the EndSARS protest with poetry.

Therefore, the EndSARS protest and its imaginative rendering recall the poetics of outrage, dirge, and memorialisation. I argue, therefore, that there is an insidious power play from the concerted efforts on the part of the government to gaslight and consign to amnesia the military force unleashed on the youths at Lekki. I suggest it is politically and discursively inappropriate to perhaps disregard #EndSARS, the most recent cataclysmic movement in the history of Nigeria. Both EndSARS and its signal anthology, *Sorosoke*, in its online submissions, publication and distribution, as well as its simultaneous, physical poetic memorial, relate the broad iterations of activism in African literary production. In engaging with activism in literature, I place side by side, righteous dissidence and protest poetry, to track the history of creative and critical work, engendering varied critical attentions in African literary studies.

Relating to the thematisation of protest in African literature, Manyaka observes that modern African poetry is replete with the theme of protest. Thus, protests about the postcolonial Nigerian state have brewed creative works and shaped critical discourses. Protest poetry has defined the trajectory of Nigerian writers from the contested problematics of periodisation. In the view of Pius Adesanmi and Chris Dunton, there are specific matters that define first- and second-generation writers, which they describe as: “massively over-determined by the colonial event, ‘third-generation’ writers are shaped more distinctly by contemporary notions of cosmopolitanism, globalization, nomadism, and liminality than their predecessors” (14). The representative poets of the first generation: Wole Soyinka, J.P. Clark, Michael Echeruo, and the second generation, Niyi Osundare, and Femi Fatoba’s poetry possess different germs of protest schisms. Soyinka for instance, uses sarcasm extensively in “Telephone Conversation” to critique the racist clampdown on black immigrants in England, as a specific case of the disapproving racist politics of White. Soyinka in many of his literary works explores protest language to deconstruct tyranny and power drunkenness in Nigeria and Africa. Osundare’s protest style is revolutionary, and it is ardent and subtle in equal measure. The mass-nimble protest tone that permeates Osundare’s work marks a departure from the private esotericism of Soyinka’s poetry (Chinweizu).

Tanure Ojaide notes the difference between the kinds of poetry of Soyinka's generation from those of Osundare when he remarks that "there is also movement from the private self, the individualistic and the universal to the public and socially relevant". Some other instances range from the colonial and neocolonial depiction of Nigeria in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, and *Anthills of the Savannah*; Femi Ademiluyi's *The New Man* to the sharp and mild excoriating poetics of Tanure Ojaide's *Fate of Vultures*; Adewale Gabriel's *Naked Testimonies*, Funmi Gaji's *The Script of Bruises*, and Ifesinachi Nwadike's *How Morning Remembers the Night*. In these works, the reader or audience distils the latent and manifest angst in which writers relate issues of postcolonial disillusionment that normally highlight such poetics in protest mode.

An important critical work in African protest poetry scholarship is Egya's *Nation, Power, and Dissidence in Third-Generation Nigerian Poetry in English*. In the book, Egya draws upon wide-ranging theoretical perspectives. In establishing the grounds for protest habitus, Egya frames how Nigerian poets, and writers – in general, those Adesanmi and Dunton describe as "third generation writers" – confront the hegemonic blocks and military oppressive dispensation of the 1980s and 1990s in Nigeria. To Egya, the period was marked by abuses of human rights, poverty, and a decline in the standard of living for the masses. As some context to this poetics of resistance in the 1990s, there are the numerous poetry harvests by the Poetry Club at the University of Ibadan. Harry Garuba edited the agenda-setting *Voices from the Fringe: An ANA Anthology of New Nigerian Poetry*, which marked the renaissance point in poetry production in Nigerian literature. The range of poets Egya highlights, and notes their revolutionary anger, includes, among others, Abubakar Othman, Olu Oguibe, Toyin Adewale, and Unomah Azuah, whose poetry foreground the subjectivity directed at the oppressor, through dirge-intoned dissidence, and feminist pushback against patriarchal overlords.

Protest writings mostly derive from the determination to cause revulsion in people, stop oppressive schemes, and foster freedom and justice for citizens. In this light, Owomoyela (131) avers that "protest poetry may be thought of as a Black expression of liberalism – the poetry of personal response to oppression based on assumptions of justice, rights, and human dignity". Owomoyela's perspective finds resonance in protest as an expression and a postcolonial condition in Egudu's *Modern African Poetry and the African Predicament*, from 1978, where he highlights the decimals of negritude and Apartheid as a festering protest tradition in modern African poetry. Negritude was a protest mechanism that tended to reimagine, ideologically, Africans in the policy of assimilation.

This was the notion to present the “Frenchified Blacks” with disguised cultural inclusion in the French policy of making Frenchmen of Black men while subjugating them. According to Oyeniyi Okunoye, Negritude is correlated to the impact of the French policy of assimilation. From Okunoye’s articulation of Negritude as a movement, it is possible to understand the broader impetus of protest poetry against leadership misnomers in Africa, not exclusively the political adventure of French colonial presence in Africa but also the dispiriting neocolonial politics that has been a fertile ground for protest poetry to thrive. If Negritude protest involved colonial and historical resistance against the denigration of French Africans, the EndSARS protest, taking on the calculus of dissidence, contests neo-colonial power hegemonies on the counterpointed rejection of youth of police brutality and bad governance.

EndSARS and Righteous Dissidence: Outrage, Dirge, and Memorialisation in the *Sorosoke* Anthology

The seeming paradox of the adjective “righteous” as co-occurring with the noun, “dissidence”, not only explains the sacrosanct devotion to confront oppression, but also reveals the need to examine the internal, textual conflicts at play in the anthology of poems, *Sorosoke* for the 2020 movement. Within the protest regime, the Nigerian youth demanded good governance, but the forces of power, in turn, moved to quell the legitimate clamour for social justice with military force and deny the youth their rightful voice to dissent. *Sorosoke* gained its first life in Yoruba orality, meaning “speak up or loud”. *Sorosoke*, the drive for dissidence, informed by revolutionary rage, contends with forces of tyranny and attempts to reveal perennial leadership deficits, to negotiate social justice, and to engender accountability in Nigeria’s system of governance. It becomes clear that the word, *Sorosoke*, from its cultural semantics and revolutionary ideational import, now transcends its Yoruba idiom, transforming itself into power poetics, as well as assuming a real and virtual protest mechanism.

Revealing not only the tragedy of the Lekki-gate massacre, Verissimo and Yeku in the Introduction to the anthology, recapture the angst, pain, and grief that EndSARS brought in its wake: “Despite the senseless killings of unarmed protesters, the #EndSARS movement gains traction online and in cities across Nigeria and around the world. It rips our hearts in many places as we follow our brothers and sisters on the ground as they document the protest” (10). In

the introduction to *Sorosoke*, written in that bloodshot moment, Verissimo and Yeku, put forward *Sorosoke*, to become the clarion of consciousness, as well as the dissident agency summoning poets to write poetry with righteous rage. The introduction is written in real-time, with its post-*Sorosoke* re-introduction – in the print text – anchored on outrage, dirge, and memorialisation.

Sorosoke, placed against its intensified movement to clamp down on police brutality, is a revolution that goes beyond EndSARS across Nigeria, and connects to the #BlackLivesMatter movement. In Minneapolis, the killing of George Floyd by Derek Chauvin happened in the same year as EndSARS. For this reason, one makes sense of the call on the Nigerian government to stem extrajudicial killings of helpless citizens by police officers, which received intense publicity on social media, Twitter, in particular. These poets submitting their poems in real-time were impelled by the sudden mood and apprehension of that moment: “We are unsure of what to do with the conflated emotions inside us”. Furthermore, the editors of the anthology – Verissimo and Yeku – struggle to distil the horror of the moment, particularly as the iterative tropes, repetition, and anaphora relate, “We are unsure.../We are angry” (10), carry through the persistent verve of indignation. With the pronoun “we” repeated many times, the figuration implying a shared visceral and virtual suffering produces the necessary pathos for not only rage but grief in the reader. This collective voice of Verissimo and Yeku approximates the poets’ urgent answerability, particularly for those who responded to the call for the real-time poetry of EndSARS lamentation. And the first-person plural sign: “We” is tracked by the anaphoric reiteration of:

...we follow our brothers and sisters on the ground as they document the protest... *We know* that many of us are feeling helpless right now... *We are* unsure of what to do with the conflated emotions inside us. *We are* angry, numb, and traumatized.... *we are* afraid of what gory image would next scroll down our timelines or the next morbid tale that might welcome our eyes as swirling fingers encounter smartphones (10).

The rhetorical fluidity of the introduction powers the collective anguish and dirgy atmosphere of EndSARS, so that Verissimo and Yeku, as poets, call on rhetorical strategies to elicit outrage even to a non-witnessing reader, who may later encounter the work as history. It is easy to visualise the upheaval that has fermented a retinue of voices whose poetry connects to the righteous dissidence: “These poems will speak in their intensities, reinventing inchoate

metaphors; they are here to convey the tense expressions of Nigeria's struggles with oppression, injustice, and social maladjustment" (10). Obvious in *Sorosoke* is an obligation to engage with poetry, write the skewed moment with tropes of outrage, and collect as a poetic archive the spontaneity of killings of countrymen during EndSARS and particularly at Lekki. Following through the traditional mandate of poetry, one realises there is a suggestion that, in the act of rage, speaking to unsettle the structure of silence, the poets become a dissident army of wordsmiths. Positioning this righteous dissidence in collecting the *#EndSARS anthology*, Verissimo and Yeku, citing Audre Lorde, write „the farthest horizons of our hope and fears are cobbled by our poems, carved from the rock experiences of our daily lives" (10).

Therefore, *Sorosoke* harvests the tapestry of EndSARS rage, dirge, and memory already summoned by the grim situation: "We no longer have words adequate to share our grief in tweets, messages, phone calls, sighs, and prayers" (10). In the main poems contained in the collection, the obligation is inscribed by rhetorical strategies for the dissidence couched in the angst, and tenors of the poems, which are simultaneously real and visceral, virtual and memorial. However, with the analysis that follows, apart from underscoring the factuality and virtuality of the gory EndSARS situation, the paper will suggest ways in which the poems become a literary event. The literary event follows the power game that *Sorosoke* assumes. Poetics of rage in the sense of *Sorosoke* relates as the textual buzzword with Pierre Bourdieu's *habitus*. His suggestion of poetry as *habitus* in the context of the field of power is readily explicit in the first poem in the anthology.

The first poem, Su'eddie Agema's "A Ritual of Flames and Silence", viewed in the *habitus* of power, projects a sort of requiem, directed to: (the late Joan Jonathan, "Pius Adesanmi and the October 2020, and many others who winked in the dark"). The tense deathly context of Agema's poem, even if it introduces a different kind of victim of death in Joan Jonathan and Pius Adesanmi, the peculiar and dedicated anthology of EndSARS speaks to the human proclivity for the expression of grief and lamentation over the loss of their beloved ones. This memorialising *habitus* of death, as common to humans, is obvious in: "There is a ritual of flames atop candles/red caps swaying, casting shadows on walls/whose heights decrease/lives whispered away to eternities of silence-/ or hopeful peace" (19).

Agema's poem achieves its virtually contrived, dialogic life in righteous dissidence, but it gathers the dirgy life and approximates the sodden world of the victims and participants in the memorialising movement for post-print.

For Agema's dirgy habitus, it is not uncommon that whatever he projects about life and living has death in its shadows. Evident for all humans is that death assumes the point "where the reaper harvests hope, /taking souls to gates". The anaphora – "There's a ritual of walking corpses/ carrying crosses few people note/ and as we say hell is and byes" (19), which flags the second stanza, even more, relates to how people witness death. This metaphor of the reaper accentuates the grief that *Sorosoke* as a field of counteractive power enables.

The foregoing recasts itself here as a *grief habitus*, and of course, the connection subsists in requiem acts performed within the mortal temporality marked in „the clock taking rounds/till silence becomes us all" (19). The persona of the poem, "A Ritual of Flames and Silence" no doubt retains the human tendency to rethink the place of silence that death consigns people. Agema's metaphoric attempt at dirgy documentation of the tragedy of EndSARS, which is to bear witness to bereavement, is as important as summoning poetics to the memorialisation of the EndSARS victims. How is this poem related to dissidence if we agree it is not a form of protest poetry? This, perhaps, lies with the mention of Pius Adesanmi, the renowned Nigerian scholar and public intellectual, who, until his death in March 2019, in an air crash at Addis Ababa, was a fierce social critic and a terror to the regimen of silence for politicians. Adesanmi was the Director of the Institute of African Studies at Carlton University, Ottawa, Canada. If he was alive from his base in Canada, Adesanmi would have, in his usual role of a public intellectual, supported the virtual protest as the rest of the EndSARS victims. To someone like Adesanmi memorialised by Agema, *Sorosoke* is not a mantra or a metaphor; Adesanmi inhabited the term, for, as a public intellectual speaking truth to power, he was a symbol of righteous dissidence. The postcolonial woes that EndSARS constitutes are in Adesanmi's discourse of nationhood and leadership challenges.

Before Adesanmi was the legendary Nigerian writer, Chinua Achebe, whose writings dwelt on leadership problems in Nigeria. Achebe in his book from 1983 *The Trouble with Nigeria*, highlights the problem of leadership in Nigeria in the early history of its post-independence. Many opinions have tended to suggest that followership is also a problem, as the EndSARS movement has demonstrated; the youth inveighed against dominant silence with such unexpected dissidence, which had most often been missing in the country. Noting the context of the 2020 uprising, Ignatius Chukwumah, in a comprehensive review of *Sòròsókè: An #EndSARS Anthology*, observes that "the

sixty poems from sixty poets (320)” dramatise “the shades of cruelty that the Nigerian government meted out to the most vibrant and productive segment of its citizenry” (320).

Bad leadership in Nigeria formed such concerted revulsion in the youth and the minds of EndSARS protesters as it would have formed in Adesanmi had he been alive. For the many victims and activists against police brutality that translated to the mass outrage of October 2020, there was evidence that EndSARS activism was already brewing on Twitter and other social media sites before other mainstream media started reporting it (Knudsen and Andersen). Thus, it had begun even before 2020, around 2017 (Akinyetun; Egbunike). For Akinyetun, it has become pervasive for youths to deploy social media in social activism. He asserts that these youths engage with such media platforms as Facebook, X (Twitter), Instagram, WhatsApp, and TikTok to spread social activism.

The possibility for this digital platform to assemble poets, or what James Yeku, by citing Michael Hauben calls “netizens” (21), means that social mobilisers can convey digitised information through technological tools, and the information can spiral and generate responses in real time (Meyer David S. and Nancy Whittier). The specific example of the capacity for platforms such as *Brittle Paper* feeds into what Shola Adenekan considers “literary network” (3). Literary network, as modified here, assumes the nodes of digital possibilities for the simultaneous expression of a rebuttal of political oppression through poetry. It summarises the specific context of the network economy and the sharing of data related to literary activities. Social media, this way, gains a sort of network capital, for as it is, “modernity in the twenty-first century revolves around digital everydayness” (146). More closely observed, any social media becomes a tool, and the process of digitally connected poems responded during EndSARS. As a platform, it serves as leverage for calls for submission of poems to grieve or protest police brutality and bad governance through mediated poetry.

Thus, EndSARS – a youth-led, online-offline resistance to police brutality and poor governance – is historic in both its politics and poetics. In the thick of the protest, Okechukwu Obi-Enadhuze’s last tweet, “Nigeria will not end me”, which foregrounds the battle of the youth to contend with state agencies, becomes not only partly the axiom of the protest but also, it assumes a poem and perhaps a sort of memorialising poetics after he died in the EndSARS struggle.

In Verissimo’s “Nigeria Will Not End Me” there is a collective rage, although subdued and trenchant in the way she situates the tweet which

somewhat reveals the interminable struggle of citizens, it perhaps deflects all the machinery of death and lamentation that surround them. Take, for instance, that the effect of grief that a protester wished away ironically becomes the mantra of dirge and lamentation, which Verissimo replays in the rhetorical question:

How could we not have known that our land drinks only young blood
 We ask for bread; it gives us stone; we ask to live; it takes our breath
 We stand up tall: it cuts our legs: we sit wearily; it shoots us down
 Don't we know it already, don't we?
 To age in this land is to arrive in a grave? (21)

The last line of the poem blurs the boundary between a healthy, active youth and a summary death that claims him at Lekki. It is not impossible that Verissimo's poem can rile a reader and produce apprehension and righteous dissidence in them. The writer's call to be right is expeditiously dispatched by Verissimo when we consider that, as Niyi Osundare (7) pontificates, the words of a writer are "the nagging, unremitting images in his mind, his words are an incitement to revolt, to disrupt the deathly equilibrium, the mendacious peace, and stability of a truly violent system". Moreover, Verissimo reveals the tyranny that forced youths to take to the streets to demand an end to repressive police force and leadership insensitivity. The persona fronting as a youth brings out the contrast between citizens' just demands and the state machinery's caveats, representing the state habitus of pain and death as substitutes for democratic dividends. Foregrounded in the poem are the real and palpable, virtual sordid experiences of the youth who are plucked off daily by state agents. The poem thrives on what Verissimo had earlier called "inchoate metaphor". While the raw context of #EndSARS outrage is obvious in the tweet: "Nigeria will not end me", the dirge that provoked the gloom context of the Lekkgate shooting temporarily reclines only to reappear as the dirge in Rasaq Malik's "Elegy for Those Murdered at Lekki".

Against serial denial of murdering its youth by the Federal government, what the then Minister of Information, Lai Mohammed, calls a "phantom massacre", Malik's poem, aptly dissident, not only relates what might be a forbidden metaphor to the structure of government but also it recovers his imagination of EndSARS through an elegiac mode of poetry. Like Verissimo earlier, Malik poses the question: "How can we count the names/ of the dead in this register of losses?" for which he seems to poeticise that, symbolically,

the birds are a witness to the threnodic realities of EndSARS. Lamentation over senseless killings has become a norm, and this seems to be “dishes for a country vanishing in the inferno of unrest (22). The poem, as it is, points out that instability and chaos are not strangers to Nigeria. Therefore, the negative, habitus atmosphere of the elegiac in Malik’s poetry is intensified: “I can hear the screams of those whose voices fade in the protest against this government of bullets” (22). Like Verissimo, the “lexia” of grim and grief portends that the commonality of this poetry of dissidence and the corresponding Lekkgigate grief can be retrieved as some memorialising archive. Malik, also like Verissimo and Yeku, calls on anaphora as a trope, seen in the instances of “I can hear the screams of those...I can see in the eyes of children, the blood that gleams on the bodies of their fathers...” (22).

The effects of the preponderant use of anaphora are in the dissident write-back against the “phantom massacre” as the Lekki massacre was dismissed by the Buhari government. It relates to the virtual retelling of the grim hordes of bodies in the horrendous EndSARS event. The picture of the catastrophe is not only enough to reveal its traumatic underbelly, but also to propel a memorialisation of EndSARS, to serve as a note of warning against recurrence. If Malik’s first poem touches on memory, similarly, then he plays an artistic habitus, but righteous dissidence, hinged on the failure of state recognition and memorialisation of victims of the protest. It is also interesting that, like his first poem – elegy-steamed, Malik appropriates another English poetic mode, the ode, in his second, “Ode to EndSARS”.

“Ode to EndSARS” lays bare the politics of fictive massacre that the government makes of the calamitous EndSARS. The instance is clear in the inquisition: “Where are the Bodies”, where Malik, through his concerted images of EndSARS, maps the massacre recalled in the government’s denial. Unlike the people with a vested interest in politics who would deny, the creative artist responds to moments such as EndSARS, because as much as Malik knows, “[i]n the streets, people are searching for their loved ones, people singing a dirge for the missing, for those whose last prayers are heard through the sound of bullets” (23). There is some correspondence between Malik’s poetic truth and the EndSARS activism demonstrated by Catherine Obianuju Udeh, popularly known DJ Switch, whose short Instagram live video revealed the carnage that happened at Lekkgigate. The witness that DJ Switch bears in the Instagram live is as dissident as Malik’s poetics. The virtuality of both modes might be an indication of the state of affairs at Lekkgigate. Malik’s fluid sign of silence frames a real virtuality: “Tonight, the

anthem of this country begins with silence/*Silence roams* like a kite in the air. *Silence reminds* people of those /whose dead bodies are carted away/in the dark by men whose hands hold the guns that erase the hope of the masses” (23, emphasis mine). Implicit is the effect of the EndSARS anomie as Malik reveals. Critically considered, this is seen in the idea of righteous dissidence with the propellant agency as silence. Here, silence feeds off the autonomy of literature, recovering the poetic rendition of a world existing as an alternative, independent world against the repression of Nigerian youths. This silence, which Malik metaphorises, is transformative. It first becomes an anthem; an automated conflict sign against free speech, yet the silence is poeticised as an anthem, sometimes a riotous song, but also the song that is a conscious reiteration of a group’s avowal for the struggle they believe in and pursue.

Again, Malik further objectifies this abstract, but peripatetic phenomenon of silence, characterising it as a locomotive metaphor: “kite that roams in the air”. In Agema’s poem, which begins the *Sorosoke Anthology*, silence at the end appears forlorn, revealing the end of all things. But for Malik, unlike Agema’s poem, silence becomes an agent of memory, suggesting that it can foreclose, perhaps, EndSARS amnesia, tending towards a memorialising poetics. Silence, pointing to Bourdieu’s habitus as Malik deploys it, is *plus habitus*, which is overwritten by such righteous dissidence against the *minus habitus* inherent in the complicity of the Lekkgate massacre, where Nigerian soldiers opened fire on defenceless protesters. The intervention of poetry amid the social apprehension visited upon Africa is continued in scholarship, but above all, it converges on the social function of writers as righters. Echoing the thesis of the writer-righter again, Osundare explores the burden of the African writer to involve his imaginative sensibility towards social redemption. So far, Verissimo, Agema, Malik, and all the *Sorosoke* poets included in the anthology have embodied the critical function of the writer and the righter in an African society.

Extending the notion of righteous dissidence, Tayo Bello’s “Soldierman Strong”, poeticises the sudden transformation of the scene of protest to a scaffold. There is the virtuality of grief’s immediacy and the spontaneity of bloodshed on par with the bloody experience at Lekkgate as captured in the apostrophised opening lines, “Soldierman Strong, commander of our souls,/ Cries of ahoy from your red sea of our blood!” (24). Thus, in the first part of the poem, Bello documents the largely peaceful demeanour of the protesters seeing that the persona collectivising the protest says: “We held no gun and took no knife” but, as in the experience at Lekki also widely reported in

the dailies and social media as accurate, what they had was: “song in our mouth, the song of our country”. There is the vivid rhetoric of revolution or a revolution of rhetoric, which, as relayed earlier, powers the dissident trope employed by Jumoke Verissimo and carried further in Malik’s poetry. Like the poems of Verissimo, the restive candour of the EndSARS movement seems rhetorically transposed in the run of anaphora Bello uses in the poem: “We sat, but you shut/We sang, but you shut /We waved, but you shot” (24).

Whether by the stark metaphor: “red sea” of our blood, or the stylistic clause inversion or repetition of “But no gun we held”/ “But no knife we took”, Bello’s poem pivots the grief and outrage of youth, which returns us to the carnage that Lekki became on the night of 20 October 2020. The Lekki massacre is not only the immediate subject of the elegiac mode, but also the evocation of the grief of EndSARS mayhem visited on the youth. This is pervasive in the short piercing lines that co-textually link Tayo Bello’s poem to Jude Nwanbuokei’s “Night Song in Lekki”. Furthermore, the poem recalls another impoverishing poem, “Night Rain” by J.P Clark. However, the poem, “Night Song in Lekki” in the literary world of *Sorosoke* unlike Clark’s “Night Rain”, is a replay of the Lekki massacre. The scene at Lekki is blood splattering, and the dirgy atmosphere is alive once more in the virtual experience of reading “Night Song in Lekki”. The poeticising of the grim realities at the Lekki tollgate is evident in Bello’s poem, and this dramatises Casanova’s concept of literature as a world. If we think of EndSARS as a phase in Nigeria’s recent history, Bello in another poem, conducts us through an experience of how it feels to be born and live in Nigeria.

By continuing with the many demands of youth to be governed right, Bello’s “Let This One Live”, figuratively attempts to retrieve the youth from the pangs of leadership woes in Nigeria. The many deprivations of the Nigerian citizens are characterised in the referential third person pronoun, “she” who is addressed as a “child” at the beginning of the poem. The odious report on what the child faces is rendered in a very simple language that is laced with silent rage, even though it might also read as an appeal to politicians: “Let this one live/She is but a child, bearing /No hand in the evils of here.../(...) deprive her not of what is hers” (25). This scene of struggle and survival accrues meaning when we consider that EndSARS is situated in the desire to achieve good governance; thus, Bello’s sub-literary field hints at the literary game, pointing to Bourdieu’s field of power.

Dissident poetics caused by Nigeria’s postcolonial condition, where social justice is a mirage have produced a different dissident reaction in the youth

that had long been quiet. There is such correspondence between cumulatively weak leadership and the EndSARS protest if influencing a group to achieve a common objective counts as effective leadership (Northouse). Thus, the dissidents of EndSARS are the youths whose realities are poverty and a constant struggle to access the basic dividends of democracy. As with his first poem, “Soldierman Strong”, Bello, in a bid to drive home his message, adopts the device of anaphora again: “Stay she must without water and the food /Stay she will without the road and the light/Stay she shall without the book and the job”. The effect of the dominant use of anaphora, even if it appropriates outrage from its emphasis, also memorialises the pains and abjections that have become the common experience in Nigeria. In “Soldierman Strong”, we encounter a micro-textual field that reanimates a certain lamentation over the sudden transformation of the scene of protest to a scaffold. There is the poetics in dissident virtuality and spontaneity of bloodshed on par with the bloody experience at the Lekki tollgate as captured in the lines “Soldierman Strong, commander of our souls,/ Cries of ahoy from your red sea of our own blood!” (24).

Thus, in the first part of the poem, Bello documents the largely peaceful, positive *habitus* of the protesters seeing that the persona collectivising the protest says: “We held no gun and took no knife” but, as in the experience at Lekki also widely reported in the dailies and social media as accurate, what they had was: “song in our mouth, the song of our country”. “Soldierman Strong” is primed by the virtuosity in the metaphor “red sea” of our blood or the stylistic clause inversion intensifies the grief and catastrophic moment of EndSARS. The repetition of “But no gun we held”/ “But no knife we took” conveys the grief and outrage of youth, which returns us to the carnage that Lekki became on the night of 20 October 2020. The protesters at Lekki wielded all the tendencies of a rational, miniature society that itself counteracts the chaos of the government it turns to for good governance.

There is strident dissidence demonstrated at the Lekki tollgate, as a field of cultural production, which Abati describes as “a cultural melting point where solidarity is the normative code and rebellion is the spirit of the congregation” (n.p.). Within the anthology is the poem analysed earlier, Jude Nwanbuokei’s “Night Song in Lekki” (26), which serves as an intertext. But the poem in *Soroso*, unlike “Night Song”, is a replay of the much-contested massacre. The Lekki scene attests to the gory sight of blood seen and suggested by the Nigerian flag. These blood-shedding and grief enunciations are alive once

more in the virtual experience of reading “Night Song in Lekki”, as indeed in many poems in the collection.

Even as a poem, it occupies an alternative world linked to the real world of the night recalled of Lekki. Reading “Night Song in Lekki” unfolds how a poem is a sub world and a habitus of power. It is possible that one who has witnessed the EndSARS protest indeed connects with the experience of bloodshed at the Lekki tollgate, which is also a memorialising point for victims and other witnesses of the carnage. However, this world possesses righteous dissidence as habitus and portends a text-context continuum. The memorialisation of #EndSARS in the frame of dissidence is obvious, if we realise to what extent the government in retaining their field of power, erased the Lekki massacre, and has worked purportedly to imagine the horror as a “phantom”. In line with this, Tobi Idowu in a review of the anthology realises the memorialising function of the anthology despite the government’s attempt to egregiously deny and absolve itself of the massacre they authorised. The anthology’s documentation of outrage and grief, and memorialisation is the substantive gain of the movement.

Conclusion: World literary implications/digital literary activism

Sorosoke, as both a conceptual category or an Anthology of poetry appears to have a religious duty: righteous dissidence. It therefore assumes a pointer to rebellion embossed by the *Sorosoke Anthology*, which stretches and sustains its virtual and real revolutionary weight against full-blown police brutality, violence against the youths of Nigeria, and the endemic leadership failure that is the root cause. Examining the context of the EndSARS, the study reveals a new mode of activism. Along this new form, it is evident that the poems occupy their mediated, virtual space and make up the #EndSARS Anthology. They intersect the real struggle at Lekki, recouping the spirit of righteous dissidence as real-time protesters demonstrated. If social media provided the voice for the #EndSARS revolution, *Sorosoke*’s adoption of real-time submission and subsequent print publication of poems, galvanised many activists and poets to condemn the mayhem that poor leadership produced.

In both #EndSARS real-time and post-publication of the *Sorosoke Anthology* is the righteous dissidence at once memorialising and archiving the youth-

driven movement. X (Twitter) and other social media platforms become, as it were, the prompt for the poetry of righteous dissidence and outrage. With the publication of the book on #EndSARS Anthology in 2021 by Noirledge Press, its life beyond social media intensifies its archival other-life, a memorialisation, therefore, materialises. With this archiving of EndSARS through poetry, readers and scholars might now reflect on the tragedy of #EndSARS as a cultural event, history, and the poetics of dissidence. Thus, the *Sorosoke Anthology*, has, with righteous dissidence, distilled imagination into an archive of national/global grief and haunting memory. This means that it now opens diverse contemplations for scholars in history, archaeology, political science, sociology, literature, and cultural studies.

Righteous dissidence, conceptualised and demonstrated in the *Sorosoke Anthology*, extends literary criticism on grief, dirge, and memorialising acts in Nigerian/African poetry, literature centred on violence and digital pushbacks. In all, the study connects with recent conversations on digital literary dissidence in African/World literature, and it emerges as an instance of a text-to-theory reading approach rooted in African cultural studies.

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