

Rattling the Rattlesnake: Nigeria, #EndSARS and the End of an Epoch

If you ever meet a rattlesnake, the rules are simple: remain calm, stay away, do not throw objects to chase it away, do not try to kill it, alert others to its location and recommend that they respect it and apply caution. Nigerians have mostly kept to the rules in the face of inconceivable treatments in the hands of the rattlesnakes that make up the majority of its political class.

The structure that set the boundaries between those who govern and those who are governed in Nigeria was set by colonial authorities. Ingrained in that culture is that the governed should keep their distance from those in governance and to expect looting, dehumanization and injustice as part of the package of being governed. The tradition of being beaten up, locked up and occasionally killed for no cause was set up as a foundational part of Nigeria's nation-building process. Rebellion against colonial authorities by previous generations of Nigerians attracted such fearful consequences that it became entrenched in the culture to stay calm, stay away, do not throw objects, do not try to kill the snake, alert others to its location and recommend that they apply caution.

While many formerly colonized entities especially in Asia have fundamentally transformed societal culture through formal, non-formal and informal education, Nigeria is one of many African countries that are yet to do so. The governance software installed by the colonial governments for the sole purpose of looting and exploitation of the country's natural resources for onward transfer to Europe is still intact. The strategies for achieving that singular aim, which is oppression, suppression, inciting inter-ethnic rivalry,

manipulating civil society, and using the judicial and security systems against the masses are still the blueprint for the current ruling class.

Over the years, as infrastructure degenerated, the morale of Nigerians degenerated as well, while the quality of much of the political class degenerated even further. As power supply became even more unreliable, unemployment soared, wages dwindled and cost of living skyrocketed, the anger that seethed below the surface among many Nigerians bubbled closer to the fore. The decline in public education has continued unabated until it is now almost a mockery of teaching and learning. Concomitantly, the extortionate cost of private education has been touted by many middle-class parents as the major reason they are emigrating to North America and Europe.

Desperation drove Nigerians to unimaginable places, through unheard-of routes. Nigerian women with babies strapped on their backs floated on the Mediterranean Sea as they attempted the treacherous ride on inflated balloons across to Europe. Barely recognizable bodies of Nigerian young men, half consumed by Egyptian vultures, litter the Sahara Desert as they sought to stay as far away as possible from the rattlesnake that is the government back home. The few lucky ones who made it to Europe and North America would go on to excel; Nigerians are the most well-educated group of immigrants in the United States, for instance.

But there is a younger generation, not as before only socialized by their parents and community, but partly, if not wholly by the internet. This generation of Nigerians have tried to understand, have tried to stay calm and stay away but find no wisdom, precedence or convention to support that disposition. After spending hours following the Black Lives Matter Movement and joining in the protests online, Nigerian young people decided that if it will not be given to them, then they would reclaim their humanity from those who have never recognized it in the first place. They could be

restrained no longer.

Nigeria's younger generation looked behind and could see the armies of Egypt closing in on them in the form of dehumanization, poverty deprivation, death and indignity, while before them lay the rattlesnake sea of politicians. Like Moses, they raised their fist. Damning the rattlesnakes, the younger generation screamed as they trooped out to the streets to rattle the rattlesnakes. The imminence of death, either way, pushed many young Nigerians out to the streets, the equivalence of over the cliff; it is now or death.

Nigeria's political class is rattled and like the rattlesnake, it is fighting back by killing innocent civilians and imposing 24-hour curfews across the states of the nation, but that will not help. There is a new generation that have read about good governance and watched it being demanded across the globe by fellow mortals. A generation that have rejected the imminent death of their destinies, which being Nigerian living in Nigeria means. Their demands are simple: stop extra-judicial arrests, torture and killings, stop stealing public funds, simplify and reduce the outrageous cost of governance and invest the funds in health, education, and infrastructural development.

Face to face with the rattlesnake fangs, the dynamics are no longer the same between younger Nigerians and the current political class. Without doubt, young people have formed a thick, impenetrable forest which the now blunt machetes of the ruling elite cannot cut down as they did their forebears.

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