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Digital Activism and the Making of a Decolonial Public Theology: Revisiting the 2020 # EndSARS Protest as a Theological Provocation

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Abstract

This article explores the 2020 #EndSARS protest in Nigeria as a theological provocation that calls for a decolonial public theology. The protest, which demanded the disbandment of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad due to systematic police brutality, exemplified the transformation of digital activism into embodied resistance. Employing an incarnational hermeneutic, in which words took on meaning through action, I argue in this article that the protest challenged both the colonial rationalities underpinning state violence and the complicity of Nigerian Christianity in structures of domination. Drawing on the decolonial framework and liberation theology of Jean-Marc Ela, I demonstrate how the protesters compelled churches to rediscover their prophetic voice and engage in resistive performances. The analysis reveals two forms of theological provocation: the demand for churches to speak prophetically against injustice, and the call for concrete ecclesial action in solidarity with those experiencing dehumanization. By conceptualizing the digital activism of the protest as an incarnational and decolonial moment, this study proposes a theology from below that critiques the colonial matrix of power, affirms the grievability of all lives, and reclaims Christianity's radical commitment to abundant life and social transformation in postcolonial Africa.

Keywords: #EndSARS protest, Decolonial theology, Digital activism, Jean-Marc Ela, Incarnation, Grievability, Africa, Church, Nigeria

Introducing the #EndSARS as a Campaign for Social Justice

Studies at the intersection of theology and socio-political movements have traditionally followed a top-down methodology, imposing pre-established theological frameworks onto the analysis of real-world events. A shift from such a prescriptive,

predetermined theology gives way to a contextual framework that considers the peculiarity of any given event, in what is known as “theology from below”. Such an approach incorporates a hermeneutics that moves from context to theology, and from theology back to context. The #EndSARS protest is an example of a contextual matter for theology, an instance where a civil resistance borne out of digital activism would eventually attract religious/theological support. Thus, writing from within African Christianity, and shaped by the decolonial turn in theological method, I read the #EndSARS protest not as an object of detached analysis but as a provocation that demands theological accountability. More still, I approach this study as a theologian who is convinced that incarnation is not merely a doctrinal category but an epistemological and political one, and that truth, including theological truth, is always enfleshed in particular bodies, histories and struggles.

Indeed, the emergence of the protest had a semblance of an incarnational process. As Christ was enfleshed, the digital world was also made *flesh* on the streets. The verbal agitations online became real actions offline. While the theological implication of this process is yet to be sufficiently addressed, I consider its pattern of emergence as a starting point for a theological exploration of the #EndSARS protest with a methodology that proceeds from context. Given the focus on local agitations and a “theology from below”, some of the sources of this study are taken from social media reactions, newspaper reports, and opinions on the protest. Beyond this empirical information, the incarnational orientation of this article will be grounded in theological explorations of a decolonial response to violence within a postcolonial society like Nigeria. My analysis equally responds to the fact that rather than leading from the front, churches were compelled to join the protest by the young people, which invariably raises questions about Christianity’s role as a colonizing force (Conradie and Sakupapa 2018). In scrambling to align themselves with a movement whose legitimacy they had not initially recognized, churches in Nigeria managed to sidestep any serious self-examination of their own historical complicity in colonial violence. As a caveat, I shall use the term “church” in an ecumenical sense since the quest for social justice is a mission that concerns all Christians.

To provide some background, I am a Nigerian theologian who has experienced police brutality. Although I was abroad during the #EndSARS protest, I collaborated with like-minded friends to provide support to the protesters since their demands resonated with our collective desire for justice and civility in policing. Historically, the #EndSARS protest is part of Nigeria’s long history of civil disobedience, stretching back to the colonial era. Nigerians have repeatedly resisted oppressive rule, from the Ekumeku movement (1898–1910) and the Abeokuta Women’s Tax Revolt (1914), to the Aba Women’s War (1929) and the Iva Valley Miners’ Strike (1949). This tradition of resistance continued after independence (1960), as citizens pushed back against decades of government oppression, most notably during the military regimes that

lasted until 1999. The #EndSARS protest is the latest expression of this resistance. Led by young Nigerians, who constitute about 70 per cent of the 250 million population, it demanded the disbandment of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS), a notorious unit of the Nigeria Police Force (NPF) known for brutality and abuse (Ovaga et al. 2025). These demands were due to multiple incidences of police brutality, in the forms of torture, extortion, molestation and even extrajudicial execution, largely carried out by the SARS unit. Amnesty International (2016) reported 58 cases of torture in its 2016 report, and at least 82 cases between 2016 and 2020. The Amnesty International Report 2020 indicates that “most victims are young men between the ages of 18 and 35, poor and from vulnerable groups, and are tortured either to extract information and ‘confessions’ or as punishment for their alleged offences”. Despite the efforts of human rights organizations to seek an end to such impunity and justice for victims, it is sad to note that none of the culpable officers was prosecuted or penalized. Thus, when the protest finally broke out on 8 October 2020, it brought together Nigerian youths across the 250 ethnic groups and multiple religious affiliations in a collective public disapproval of the continued experience of police brutality.

Clearly, the #EndSARS protest was never a random agitation. It was rather an organized and well-intentioned event that demonstrated a proper understanding of the enormity and complexity of the issues at hand and how to fix them (Okpaleke 2024: 28). In fact, on 11 October 2020, the protesters published five demands that included the release of arrested protesters, justice and compensation for victims of police brutality, an independent oversight body for misconduct investigations, psychological evaluation and retraining of disbanded SARS officers, and a pay increase for police (Sulaimon 2020). In agitating for social justice, the protesters lived out an incarnational moment by putting their words into action. From just being a random list of names in the hands of the police, they formed a “body” (*corpus*) for the sake of both themselves and many others. Without even being fully conscious of the implications of their actions, they challenged not only the state’s colonial use of violence but equally critiqued the silence of Christian communities in Nigeria.

The Logic of Incarnation and Colonial Rationality in the #EndSARS

An incarnational hermeneutic was deployed by the Pentecostal pastor Sam Adeyemi to explain the nature of the #EndSARS protest. Addressing the protesters through his X (formerly Twitter) platform (@sam_adeyemi) on 17 October 2020, Adeyemi stated, “Dear young citizen, it is understandable that you are hearing many voices, like the biblical David, but you’ve been called to be unconventional. Be comfortable with that. Your movement did not start on the streets; it started on your phones.

Your ability to move from being an invisible force to being a visible one is a miracle. 'The word became flesh'." Adeyemi equally recognized the ongoing character of the incarnational framework of the protest, with the skill of being able to move back and forth between word and action. His reference to the incarnation offers us an opportunity for a theological engagement in the Nigerian public sphere characterized by colonial traits that impede human flourishing.

A theologically responsible incarnational approach must deviate from a dualistic and disembodied Christology that has been roundly critiqued by feminist liberation theologians. Elisabeth Johnson (1992: 51) demonstrated how, for example, an androcentric Christology puts the salvation of women and children at risk. Such a Christology, Lisa Isherwood (2004: 142) argued, presents a dualistic *bleached Christ*, "the one who is white and can never be black" and who approves the exploitation and marginalization of others. For Isherwood, "it was this constructed Christ who justified the march into slavery, the abuse and dehumanizing treatment within it and the reluctance to abolish it." A responsible incarnational approach rejects any incomplete Christology or soteriology. It demonstrates, as Mercy Oduyoye (1986: 96) put it, that the Christ-event makes an ethical demand of theology. Belief in the incarnation radicalizes Christian action. Thus, in developing the Christology of "Jesus the Savior", Oduyoye (107) insisted that "the good news to Africa is that people and communities have to be willing to die to all that dehumanizes on both personal and corporate levels." In other words, an incarnational approach provokes a "spirituality of action" that requires the church to move "from words to deeds, from ecclesial claims to ecclesial witnessing" (Ilo 2011: 29). Concretely, this *spirituality of action* "involves performance, praxis, testimony, witnessing, martyrdom, and sacramentalizing what we profess" (Ibid.). While the phenomenal growth of Christianity in Nigeria offers hope for the future of the church (Adogame 2010), the survival and test of Christianity would depend on its ability to be truly incarnational, to witness both internally and externally in words and deeds, and to be truly the salt and light of the world (Mt. 5.13-16).

The #EndSARS protest became a learning moment for an incarnational ecclesiology in which the dualism between what the church *is* (esse) and what it *does* (agere) is given up. Indeed, God's embrace of humanity in the person of Christ carries a profound ecclesiological implication. What this means is the awareness that the church "is truly linked with [hu]mankind and its history by the deepest of bonds" (*Gaudium et Spes* §1). As such, "the joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men [and women] of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, ... are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ" (Ibid.). It is exactly this understanding of the non-contradictory nature of being a Christian and a campaigner for social justice that leads to a *spirituality of the streets* that is well-articulated by the #EndSARS protest. Of course, not all the #EndSARS

protesters were believers or belonged to the same denomination, although the majority of them were either Christians or Muslims who understood their faith as perfectly aligned with their agitation on the streets. And so, it was not surprising that the street became at once a space for the celebration of faith, as well as for the demonstration of the religious dimension of the #EndSARS protest (Jannamike 2020). Indeed, the protest integrated ecumenical and interreligious encounter within the socio-political sphere, which would need to be explored further.¹

Interesting also is how the digital activism of #EndSARS produced at once a decolonial turn that calls for a theological reimagination. Protest as a decolonial tool emerges as an embodied resistance to the colonial (postcolonial) hermeneutic of dissent. Colonial hermeneutics instrumentalizes violence or force in place of dialogue. It thrives on a sustained atmosphere of domination and fear, and results in the dehumanization of the other (Dutta and Atallah 2023: 2). In postcolonial Nigeria, coloniality emerges then not simply as “invisible structures that sustains colonial relations of exploitation and domination long after the end of direct colonialism” as posited by Teddy Sakupapa (2018: 407) but equally the “leftover colonial structures” that replicate colonial exploitation and domination. It is a case of a change of guards in the same prison yard. In fact, the colonial product of dehumanization is evident in police brutality that is justified by the state even in its extremist expressions. Invariably, state-sponsored brutality becomes a claim to ownership of the life of any individual, and to the power to dispense with it without being questioned.

Implied here is the complete erasure of the lives and bodies of the non-powerful in the society, producing, as it were, the category of those whose lives are regarded, according to Judith Butler, as “ungrievable” since they are considered as “not quite lives, not quite valuable, recognizable or, indeed, mournable” (Butler 2009: 42–3). According to Butler, “one way of posing the question of who ‘we’ are” when faced with the colonial violence of the state “is by asking whose lives are considered valuable, whose lives are mourned, and whose lives are considered ungrievable” (Ibid. 31). In the colonial calculation, therefore, “an ungrievable life is one that cannot be mourned because it has never lived, that is, it has never counted as a life at all. Indeed, we find ourselves in a world where “the shared condition of precariousness leads not to reciprocal recognition, but to a specific exploitation of targeted populations, of

1 The 19 October 2020 prayer walk that was led by one of the prominent Pentecostal pastors in Nigeria, Dr Paul Enenche of Dunamis International Gospel Center, belongs to this category. It was in itself a deliberate form of protest that came from the religious component. The rally began with a service at the Christian Ecumenical Center Abuja followed the pattern of similar protests by various religious leaders in the past. According to Pastor Enenche, the rally is just a spiritual response to the situation that the country was facing with the goal of trusting God in the search for solution to avoid any disastrous escalation.

lives that are not quite lives, cast as ‘destructible’ and ‘ungrievable’” (Ibid.). When we take all these into account, then a decolonial praxis would entail, in the first instance, “nurturing ways of being, knowing, and relating that do not stem from a tiered structure of humanity” (Dutta and Atallah 3), in which some lives are considered less valuable. The #EndSARS confronts the Nigerian Christian and political leadership with this challenge.

#EndSARS “Provocation” as a Decolonial Theological Project

Beyond the incarnational logic, there is the additional question of whether the protest *provokes* a decolonial theological response. In the first place, the concept of ‘provocation’ resonates in theological and decolonial discourses. Originally credited to the French Catholic scholar Louis Massignon, we also find the idea in the oppositional intellectualism of Edward Said, who has been described as “the *agent provocateur* in postcolonial literary theory and practice” (Eid and Ghazal 2008: 111). Said’s work *Orientalism*, first published in 1978, upturned the predominant narrative of empire and conquest, thus constituting a prominent postcolonial text in the West. The idea of provocation was an ethical necessity for Said as for many postcolonial and decolonial scholars. Said proposed a redistribution of geopolitical awareness into texts that present the aesthetic, scholarly, economic, sociological, historical, and philological interpretations of the world. Equally, he challenged the uneven exercise of “various kinds of power” (Said 1979: 13): political, intellectual, cultural and moral. As such, *Orientalism* inaugurated the postcolonial provocation against orthodoxy and conventionality through a critical analysis of the normativized epistemology of the West. In calling for the widening of the horizons of interest and knowledge, Said, on the one hand, disrupted what he called “imaginative geography” that limited the critical participative agents in the “social world” (Said 1985: 90), and on the other hand, dismissed the claim to “disinterested universality” of European anthropology (Ibid., 94). Similarly, the decolonial insistence on an epistemological pluriverse and the ‘delinking’ (a concept popularized by scholars like Aníbal Quijano, Walter Mignolo, Samir Amin) from the Colonial Matrix of Power (CMP) also provoked a shift in the distribution of power, knowledge, being and imagination (Mignolo 2007: 459).²

2 Walter Mignolo argues that de-linking begins with the acceptance that “nobody has access to an ultimate truth” hence any claim to abstract universals equates to “the same fundamentalist and imperial logic.” In that sense, decoloniality “means working toward a vision of human life that is not dependent upon or structured by the forced imposition of one ideal of society over those that differ, which is what modernity/coloniality does, and, hence where decolonization of mind should begin.”

Besides the postcolonial and decolonial literature, provocation, as already hinted, emerges as a theological concept that is grounded in the Scripture, particularly in the unleashing of divine graciousness as a counternarrative to human rebelliousness (cf. Isa. 65.1-3; Rom. 11.30-36). Within the context of interfaith encounter, provocation is construed as evoking the “sense of stimulation into an appropriate response” (Ipgrave 2015: 493). Provocation thus happens in a situation where the action of a religious other, whether positive or negative, triggers a better understanding of one’s own community. Overall, it refers to an action that “elicits from one’s own community that which is a distinctive expression of its identity and values, which might not have been brought forth at all, or not in the same way, but for the catalytic role of the *provocateur*” (Ibid.: 493). In the case of #EndSARS protests, both Christians and Muslims discovered the relational aspects of their religious identities, and so were able to work together in spite of historical differences and conflicts. Ultimately, Incarnation remains the ultimate provocation in theology because of its reordering of cosmic history (Williams 2018).

Meanwhile, nowhere is the link between incarnation and decolonial theology more present than in the works of the famous Cameroonian theologian, Jean-Marc Ela. For Ela, the incarnation of Christianity in Africa implies an alignment with the African reality. It is an invitation to be different in a way that critiques both the presuppositions of “Africanness” as well as Christianity. Little wonder he raises questions on the participation of lay people in the church, the reconceptualization of Levitical priesthood, the social and critical power of the Eucharist, the over centralization of the church, as well as the critical role of the theologian. And to make the connection, Ela locates the identity of the theologian precisely in the space between incarnation and decolonial performance. For him, the theologian is “a sign-person, a person who has become a word, a person who so faithfully incorporates his meaning that to deny the latter would require abolishing the former” (Ela 1992: 41). For the theologian, theology means speaking of God from the point of view of the poor and the God who liberates. In the context of the #EndSARS, we realize different types of *sign-theologians*, represented not just by the professional theologian but by the pastor who speaks on X (Twitter) for the oppressed, the priest who celebrates the Eucharist with the protesters as a sign of resistance, as well as the activists who exercise their faith in the God who liberates, right there on the protest ground. Being a “sign-theologian” therefore presupposes a “doing God” that emerges from the critical demands and audacity of the African theologian, while at the same time justifying a different way of doing theology. Ela (2003: 81) understood that such a theology poses a challenge to colonial powers and attracts a mortal response.

Ela embodied this mortal response and responsibility throughout his biography, and from that vantage point of “death” he challenged the Christian church to *die* for the liberation of the marginalized. An African theology that emerges from this

challenge goes beyond the cliché of inculturation to a “delatinization” of the African church, not simply from the West (as Ela had originally conceptualized it) but also from the local forces of domination that seek to control her voice. Put simply, the church needs to be liberated to liberate others in the society. Meanwhile, Ela located the essence of liberation in God (cf. the Exodus and Mary’s canticle) and is convinced that the full meaning of God’s revelation in Jesus Christ in Africa depends on the church’s option for the gospel of liberation. The church, he maintains, must become a daily sacrament of justice and liberation. Yet he noted that churches of Africa are in a “neo-colonial” situation that constitutes an obstacle to their own consistency. He therefore called for their liberation from structures presented as unique and irreformable, and which, on analysis, prove to be not only iniquitous and unreformable, but also contingent, contextual, oppressive and sclerotic. What he proposed is that these churches be lifted from trusteeship, to enable them “to make their voices heard in specific matters affecting faith, discipline and the organization of local communities” (Ela 1980: 36).

Necessarily, an ecclesial “de-linking” or mortality, as the Christian church *dies* for the liberation of the marginalized, leads to a rediscovery of ecclesial creativity that responds to the problems posed by the “shock” of the gospel in the African environment. To sufficiently address the historical suffering of African people, it is thus important to “rethink the essentials of the Christian message” (Ibid.: 431). This requires us to “overcome the dogmatic fences that enclose the church in Africa within the boundaries of a structure constituted once and for all” (Ela and Luneau 1981: 236), which invariably contribute to perpetuating the colonial rationality both within the church and the society. Christianity in Africa remains an unfinished project and a provocative decolonial, theological approach is critical in realizing this task. The vision is the emergence of a church that is sufficiently liberated to *speak* and to *act* prophetically, on behalf of the oppressed.

On the Two Forms of Theological Provocation

Returning to the #EndSARS protest as a particular context for the exercise of incarnational and decolonial theology, there are two signs of theological provocation that emerged from the actions and determination of the protesters. Both signs point to a decolonial turn in the theological resistance to violence and domination: The first level is a provocation to speak, either through communique, official statements or confessions that contain theological positions on the protest. The second level is a provocation to action through religious ‘resistive performances’ such as public celebration of the Eucharist, prayer walk, ecumenical prayers or actions within the protest ground. I shall elaborate further on these.

When the Church is 'Forced' to Speak

Provocation leads to the rediscovery of the prophetic voice of the church in the public space. The #EndSARS protesters provoked Christian leaders and churches to add their voices in support of the protest, and broadly, for social justice. It was a legitimate demand not only because the young protesters constitute the “life-blood of most religious bodies” in Nigeria (Alabi 2020), but also because it belongs to the prophetic mission of the church to speak against all forms of injustice. The Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria were among the first to declare complete support for the protest. In an official statement, the President of the Conference, Archbishop Augustine Akubueze, acknowledged that the “#EndSARS goes beyond the SARS, and it is morally justified. We support the youths who have taken this step, and we caution that they are allowed without any intimidation to exercise their right to peaceful demonstration and should not be provoked or incited to violence” (Samasumo 2020). Another vocal cleric, Pastor Paul Enenche of Dunamis International Gospel Center, would in a broadcast titled “The Way of Peace” state: “There is no peace where there is massive injustice, unfairness and lack of equity. There can be no peace in the face of oppression, suppression and subjugation of one people by another”. Other influential Pentecostal church leaders like Pastor Enoch Adeboye of Redeemed Christian Church of God, Pastor Paul Adefarasin of House on the Rock, and Bishop David Oyedepo of Living Faith Church would later add their voices in the quest for justice (Ezeobi 2020).

Indeed, the protest awakened the consciousness of the prophetic character of the church to always speak – to speak to, to speak for, and to speak against – and against all realities that stand in the space between the people and the realization of the will of God for them, namely abundant life for all. This prophetic speech serves as a theological hermeneutical tool to critique and deconstruct colonial paradigms that produce regimes of violence and dehumanization. Keith Clements (1995: 217), in his work *Learning to Speak*, outlined three manners in which the church is prophetically called to speak in the public. The first is the *indicative manner* of prophetic speech that articulates “the principles by which people should live and by which societies should order themselves.” This implies a prioritization of “the classical virtues of goodness, truth and beauty” (Ibid.). Upholding these values (as present in Phil. 4.8; Col. 3.12; Gal. 5.22-23; 2 Pet. 1.5) is critical for social transformation. The second is the *imperative manner* of prophetic speech in which the church utters a very concrete way of approaching issues of public concern, indicating specific moral choice(s) to be made.³ Imperative speech must be programmatic and practical, offering, as it

3 Biblical examples would include the instructions in Isaiah 1.16-17 and Psalm 82.3-4 on actions for social justice. Church examples that fall within this category of prophetic speech include the South

were, a clearly thought-out and theologically founded framework of action for the common good. The third is *the interrogative manner* of prophetic speech that uses questions to propose an “alternative imagination”. Interrogation as prophetic speech is a sophisticated and provocative manner of speaking. It challenges “a perceived oddity or incompleteness of the world as one experiences it, [and] as against what one imagines it could or ought to be” (Ibid.: 225). We find sufficient examples in the Scriptures (Ps. 82.2; Jer. 2.14; 22.15; Lk. 15.4, 8) that evoke a decolonial resistance to violence while insisting on equal dignity and justice for all. In responding to the #EndSARS protest, Christian leaders mostly deployed the indicative and imperative manners of prophetic speech, insisting on the moral choices that the Nigerian government must make to address the problem of police brutality. The interrogative prophetic speech can also be deduced from the first two since moral choices open the space for an alternative imagination of a Nigeria where young people feel safe in the hands of people who are meant to protect them in the first place.

When the Church is Compelled to Act

The protest initiated a religious turn to action. Toyin Samuel Ajose locates an instance of this religious turn to action at the introduction of the Prayer Walk across major cities. Popularized by Pentecostals, a prayer walk involves long walks by Christian groups, marked by prayers and songs, often used as a form of public display of faith or a means to register displeasure against any societal ill. For Ajose (2024: 553), “The prayer walk offered a new framework for protesters who felt the need to seek divine intervention during the protest. Just like the #EndSARS protesters, different groups and influential Christian leaders and musicians started organizing and mobilising people to use the agency of prayer as an alternative to advocate for social change. The hashtag #prayerwalk trended on social media to create awareness about the prayer walk across the country.” Another location of the religious turn to action is the Holy Eucharist that was celebrated in solidarity with the protesters at Lekki Tollgate, the epicentre of the protest, on 18 October 2020. Led by Msgr Paschal Nwaezeapu of the Catholic Church of Divine Mercy Lekki and other priests, this action aligned with historical instances where the Eucharist was used as a form of resistance to oppressive regimes, particularly in Latin America (Cavanaugh 1998). Prayer services were also organized by Christians of other denominational backgrounds, Catholics, Protestants and Pentecostals alike. Even the Muslim faithful did their Jumat prayer on the protest ground on 16 October while being shielded by other non-Muslim protesters (Ezeobi 2020). These actions were unprecedented in the history of Nigeria.

African ecumenical Kairos Document (1985) that challenged the apartheid regime and Pope Francis’ *Laudato Si’* (2015) that called for global action on ecology.

By mobilizing with churches to respond with concrete actions, the protesters made the demand of a theology that serves the public in concrete acts of defiance to structures of violence, of a Gospel that seeks the flourishing of life, and of a Christian community that is in tune with “the deepest concerns of men and women about the meaning of their lives, and their ultimate destiny” (Ilo 2011: 7). The theological provocation further highlights that the excuse of a church-state dichotomy is not a justifiable rationale for the de-politicization of theology. The gospel is not neutral, nor is theology apolitical. In fact, Ela, whose work is intently decolonial, would go beyond academic discourse disconnected from reality to take a practical stand in view of a theological response to coloniality. For Ela (2003: 87), “the problem of African theology is no longer one of discourse, but rather one of concrete commitment, where men and women take on tasks through which the Church decides to reach out to men mired in history.” Consequently, Ela denounced “state theologies that make pacts with regimes that strip and massacre people” (Ibid.). Theology ought to become, therefore, a discourse of dissidence, resistance and insubordination, opening the way to concrete commitments with liberation as the horizon. Theology in Africa, Ela insists, should be situated in “the dynamic of the witness of men and women who risk their lives to defend human rights in the name of the Gospel” (Ibid.).

Digital activism steps into this dynamic of witnessing through an incarnational logic that brings visibility to the silent, and often suppressed, cries and sufferings of the oppressed and marginalized. Theologically, this implies a Christology of liberation that recognizes how the invisible and visible human sufferings are embodied in Christ, the Word. This Word, who dwells within and with humanity, becomes at once the prophetic words that challenge all colonial structures of oppression and bondage. And so, when there is a Christological participation where digital activism takes on the task of inviting Christians to a prophetic witnessing against evil, as in the case of the #EndSARS protest.

Ignoring such a compelling invitation to identify with the struggles of the protesters would amount to a contradiction of what the church stands for (both in terms of its identity and mission) as well as a rejection of the paradoxicality of the cross of Christ as the space of exchange of life and death for the salvation of all. A decolonial theology is not a convenient exercise since it must incorporate resistive performances that must challenge any “death-dealing” power structure. In that way, it critiques a version of Christian praxis that neutralizes the radicality of the cross for a feel-good spirituality under a colonial space.

Conclusion

The #EndSARS protest of 2020 represented a critical moment in Nigeria’s socio-political landscape and offered a significant theological provocation that demanded

sustained reflection on the nature of public theology in postcolonial contexts. This movement, which began as digital activism and materialized into embodied resistance on the streets, demonstrates the profound theological implications of grassroots organizing for social justice. The protesters, predominantly young Nigerians who had experienced or witnessed the brutality of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad, did not merely seek policy reform; they engaged in an incarnational act that challenged the very foundations of colonial rationality still operative in contemporary Nigeria.

The incarnational dimension of the protest reveals a theology that emerges from the concrete realities of suffering and resistance rather than from predetermined doctrinal frameworks. Of course, there are similar paradigms in other contexts (like in Latin America) that reveal a kairotic prophetic moment for the church, and theology as such. This methodology, theology from below, prioritizes contextual engagement and lived experience as primary sources for theological reflection. In their bodies, the protesters lived a spirituality of action that transcended the dualism between faith and social engagement, the false distinction between the digital *as not real* and the physical *as real*, thus demonstrating that the quest for justice is inseparable from authentic Christian witness (Oduyoye 1986: 96). Their willingness to risk their lives and livelihoods for the sake of dignity and human flourishing exemplifies the radical demands of discipleship that the church has often domesticated or ignored. And this is despite the violent manner through which the Nigerian state brought the protest to an end, leaving deep-seated scars and distrust among its citizens (Okpaleke 2024: 31).

The fact that young people had to compel churches to join their cause reveals a troubling disconnect between ecclesial rhetoric and ecclesial practice. Churches that should have been leading the charge for justice were instead caught up in a posture of silence or cautious equivocation, thereby normalizing the state's systematic dehumanization of vulnerable populations, a perpetuation of the colonial tool of violence. This silence reflects what Ela critiqued as the neo-colonial situation of African churches and their captivity to structures that appear irreformable but are, in fact, contingent, oppressive and antithetical to the gospel of liberation. Moreso, the decolonial theological framework employed in this article illuminates how state-sponsored brutality functions as a continuation of colonial logics that divide humanity into "grievable and ungrievable lives" (Butler 2009: 38), and which must be rejected. This rejection constitutes a fundamental decolonial move, made concrete in the rejection of epistemic, ontological, and political hierarchies that justify violence against the marginalized.

Meanwhile, the two forms of theological provocation identified in this article, namely, the demand for prophetic speech and the call for resistive action, point toward a reimagined ecclesiology for the Nigerian context and, by extension, for

postcolonial Christianity more broadly. Each of these modes of speech serves to deconstruct the normalized violence of the colonial matrix of power and to articulate a vision of society grounded in the principles of justice, dignity, and human flourishing founded on Sacred Scripture. Beyond speech, however, the protest revealed the necessity of ecclesial action. The celebration of the Eucharist at protest sites, the ecumenical and interreligious solidarity displayed by protesters, and the eventual participation of church leaders in the movement all represent concrete enactments of a theology that denounces the false dichotomy between the sacred and the secular, reminiscent of Said's critique of "imaginative geography" as well as the feminist rejection of disembodied Christology (Johnson 1992; Isherwood 2004). These actions demonstrate that Christianity, when authentically practised, cannot remain neutral in the face of injustice. The gospel is inherently political insofar as it concerns the ordering of human community and the conditions necessary for abundant life.

The #EndSARS protest thus functions as an ongoing provocation for African (Nigerian) church and theology. It challenges theologians and church communities to recognize that Christianity in Africa remains an unfinished project requiring continuous critical engagement with the realities of suffering, violence and resistance. Ultimately, it reminds us that the incarnation, which represents God's embodiment in human history through Jesus Christ, establishes a pattern for Christian existence that cannot be reduced to spiritual abstractions. If the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, then the church's words must likewise become flesh through concrete acts of solidarity, resistance and advocacy for the marginalized. The young protesters of Nigeria, many of whom were members of Christian communities, lived out this incarnational logic in a radical way. Their courage, creativity and commitment to justice constitute a prophetic witness that deserves theological recognition and sustained reflection. As Nigerian Christianity continues to grapple with its identity and mission in a postcolonial context, the #EndSARS protest stands as both a judgment and an invitation. It remains till date a call to authentic discipleship that embraces the radical, life-giving, and often dangerous demands of the gospel.

About the Author

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