


Islam, Muslims and 2020 #EndSARS Protests in Nigeria

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Abstract

The 2020 #EndSARS is a youth-enthusiastic social movement in Nigeria against brutality and inhuman excesses of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad unit of the Nigerian Police Force. The protest movement started on social media and transmitted to spatio-temporal platforms as numerous Nigerian youths were scattered on major streets and landmarks of the country to express their dissatisfaction with the operations and methods of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS). The protest was held by youths across different tribes, races and religions (with Muslims inclusive.) Just as the movement continued to increase, the participation of Nigerian Muslim youths in the protest became entwined in controversies as young Nigerian Muslim intellectuals debated the permissibility and impermissibility of protest for an ideal Muslim regardless of the circumstances. Numerous studies have examined protests, rebellions, uprisings, and coup d'états amongst other political issues affecting democracy, but they hardly study protests in the light of Islam and Muslims. This paper therefore seeks to explore this gap with a qualitative research by revisiting the history of Islamic civilization in the first few decades of Islam, approaching some Shari'ah principles and rereading the sensitive Islamic texts on obedience to authority in the context of contemporary realities surrounding the Nigerian Muslim 'Ummah. The paper concludes that while a protest is typically detestable under Islamic polity, it may rob Islam of its essence if such an opinion is upheld for Nigerian Muslims on 2020 #EndSARS, without considering the social, political, and constitutional factors influencing the movement in Nigeria.

Keywords: 2020 #EndSARS; Muslim; Nigeria; Protest



INTRODUCTION

The Nigerian Police Force was established to ensure the internal security of Nigeria and Nigerians. It is one of the paramilitary forces of the country that ensures the security of the lives and properties of all nationals and residents of Nigeria. However, the force, just like other security forces in the country, has been alleged to violate human rights and extra-judicial killings on many occasions. Of the fourteen (14) units of the force, the most criticized unit is the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS). The unit was specifically established to detain, investigate, and prosecute suspects of crimes, such as armed robbery, kidnapping, and fraudulence. However, the unit is criticized by its officers because of the alleged outrageous violations of human rights and gross practices of brutality on Nigerian youths. Such excesses include illegal 'stop and searches,' illegal arrests and detentions, extra-judicial killings, sexual harassment and infliction of body injuries through physical assault. In particular, Nigerian male youths who seem financially buoyant by their use of iPhones, exotic cars, and laptops or those who dress outside Nigeria's cultural fashion conventions by their preference for body tattoos, nigger wears, and dreadlock hairstyles often fall victims to SARS officers who often times, extort, humiliate, harass, or brutalize them. Because Nigerian youths are most often the victims of such abuses by the security unit, they felt the essence of the unit was already defeated by the realities confronting them and started to clamor and agitate for the complete disbandment of the unit, that SARS should end - 'EndSARS.' The hashtag (#) symbolizes its being a thread on Twitter, the virtual platform where the protest was most amplified and where protesters were most mobilized.

Prior to 2020, the EndSARS agitations surfaced multiple times and were quenched by the promise of the Nigerian Federal Government to reform the security unit. However, some Nigerians

have described the efforts as ‘pouring old wine into new bottles because they felt the federal government had only renamed the unit; that is, the unit was originally Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) before it was renamed the Federal Special Anti-Robbery Squad (F-SARS). The officers of the unit had reportedly continued their onslaught on Nigerian citizens, and it remained the most significant clog in the wheel of the Nigerian Police Force. Therefore, this became fundamental to the fresh vitality the agitation attracted in October 2020, leading to a nationwide protest that overwhelmed Nigeria. While numerous youths across the country actively participated in the protests, there were debates on the propriety of Muslims’ involvement in such protests.

#EndSARS Protests

According to the Cambridge Dictionary (2023), the word protest connotes ‘a strong complaint expressing disagreement, disapproval, or opposition. This is similar to Hornby’s definition which defines it as “the expression of strong disagreement with or opposition to something (Hornby, 2010, p. 1179). It is synonymous to the word ‘demonstration,’ ‘dissent’ ‘resistance’ or ‘social movement.’ In terms of political relevance, a protest is an expression of strong disagreement with the leaders of some government policies or practices. Eesuola (2011) defined it as the expression of dissent, ventilation of anger, or resistance against a particular phenomenon. This may come as argued by Auvinen (1996) in the form of demonstrations, riots, or strikes. Andrain & Apter (1995) describes it as “contentious politics” and Terchek (1974) regards it as an activity that confronts politics to influence public policy. This may include rallies, strikes, lamentation, and airing of grievances (Tarrow, 1996). It is a challenge to those in authority that there are pitfalls in their administration, which must be addressed.

Since time immemorial, obedience to those invested in authority is *sine qua non* and incontrovertible to governance across civilizations. This carved a sort of sacredness for leadership positions, as the masses respect their leaders' actions as ever binding. Even the likes of Aristotle, who is arguably one of the first thinkers who took philosophical interests in protests, uprisings, and coup d'états, condemned the act and argued that protests are dangerous to society because it leads to ochlocracy – the rule of the people, which translates to a state of chaos (Shishkina & Issaev, 2017). With the renaissance of Europe, however, the philosophy and perspective of protests and demonstrations against leaders changed. As worded by Shishkina & Issaev (2017):

“...with the onset of renaissance in Europe, mass protest turned from an illegal and illegitimate action as described by medieval thinkers into a permitted one, and in some cases, even to a desirable tool for regulating public policy”.

A famous lawyer named Jean Barbeyrac was said to have been the first individual to express people's right to protest, and Spinoza and Hobbes were discovered to be the earliest philosophers to recognize the need for people to revolt (Shishkina & Issaev, 2017). This understanding started to spread until the formation of the new Jacobin Constitution, which proclaimed the right of the masses to revolt against oppression (Scott, 1996).

Thus, according to contemporary democratic standards and global practices, one of the legal windows citizens can employ to voice reservations on the policies and practices of their government that are antithetic to the welfare and interest of the public is the freedom to peaceful protests. Jamshidi (2014) calls it 'civic entrepreneurship.' This protest often has a background in the freedom of people to assemble, as they wish. For instance, the right to peaceful assembly is provided in Article 21 of the 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), to which Nigeria is obliged. Article 11 of the 1981

African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights to which the country subscribes also establishes a similar provision. In addition, Sections 39 and 40 of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria that establish every person is entitled to freedom of expression, to hold opinions, to receive and impart ideas and information without interference, and to assemble freely and associate with other persons. This freedom provides Nigerian citizens the opportunity to hold rallies, strikes, and mass demonstrations (Hari, 2014; Kombol, 2014; Dahlum & Wig, 2019).

Since 1960, there have been protests on issues that jeopardize public interest. Such protests may take what Adigun (2018) would refer as 'orthodox'; rallies, strikes, etc and 'unorthodox'; online measures. One such significant protest was the #OccupyNigeria protest that was demonstrated from 2nd to 13th January 2012, culminating from public reaction against the removal of fuel subsidies and the hike in petroleum products (Hari, 2014; Egbunike, 2015; Ibrahim, 2017; Olabode, 2018; Egbunike & Olorunnisola, 2015). Owing to the relatively significant subscription of Nigerians to social media applications at that time, protests were reinforced by the mobilization of citizens via social media applications such as Facebook, Twitter, blogs, and blackberry messenger; hence, it was very challenging for the Nigerian government. And just as argued by Salvatore (2014) "the role of the 'new media' as instruments of democracy is not anything that can be taken for granted.

Similarly, in 2017, the Nigerian masses were agitated to disband SARS due to the continuous violations of human rights from the security unit (Chisom, 2021; Ikalewumi, 2022; Fagbadebo & Oluwalogbon, 2023). The Federal government, however, decided to reform and reorganize the squad instead of complete disbandment, but the reformation and reorganization of the squad seemed to have

little or no efficiency, which led to a revitalization of the demonstration in the year 2020.

On the 3rd of October 2020, a SARS officer was reported to have shot a young Nigerian in Delta State of Nigeria and drove his car away. This was covered in a short video that went viral on the Internet and caused a public outcry and stirred uproar (A. George, 2020; Odunsi, 2020; Human Rights Watch, 2021). A few days earlier, police officers were said to have extrajudicially shot a 20-year old Daniel Chibuikwe, popularly known as Sleek (Godwin, 2020; Naku, 2020; The International Centre for Investigative Reporting, 2021). These reports and other videos and pictures of SARS's brutality and misconduct that started to trend on social media further enraged the masses and led to a revitalized demonstration of previous EndSARS protests. Gradually, social media was heated, and by October 8, 2020, there were nationwide protests led by young Nigerians across some Nigerian cities. Those who could not participate in the protest supported the movement virtually, and as a result, the hash-tag (#EndSARS) was the most trending thread on Twitter for a couple of days (Ekwunife et al., 2023; L. George & Akwagyiram, 2020; Iwuoha & Aniche, 2022).

The protest was conceived by the youth to voice their grievances to the government on the gross misconduct of SARS and was peaceful for the first number of days. Other dynamics, however, set in to influence the course of the peaceful protests, and the social movement was hijacked by hoodlums in later days. By and large, our scope of discussion on the social movement shall focus on peaceful protests as conceived by the vanguards of the movement, regardless of other dynamics that set later.

Scholarly Opinions on Protests in Islam

Absolute obedience to authority is fundamental to Islamic political systems. This is enshrined in Quran 4:59, where Allah commands Muslims to obey Him, His messenger, and people of

authority (Peters, 1980; Iqbal, 1984). With this verse and other prophetic traditions that highlight exclusive obedience and support to leaders as a premise, Islamic scholars believe that every individual must give their oath of allegiance and loyalty to the leaders and must not rebel against them. On the other hand, protest is a later development that is not directly discussed in the Quran and hadith. This makes a scholarly understanding of the concept of protest vary from one scholar to another. By and large, Muslim scholars could be categorically divided into two groups on the subject matter: anti-protest and protest scholars.

Anti-protest scholars oppose the idea of protest because they contradict puritanical Islam. They believe that the idea of protests contradicts Islamic doctrines hinging on Islamic polity for various reasons:

- a. interpretation that protest is a sort of *khurūj 'alā-l-hākim* (rebellion against the leader), which is utterly condemnable under the Islamic political system (Celso, 2015; Alkhawaja, 2021);
- b. claim that it also contradicts the essence of Quran 4:59, which commands Muslims to exclusively obey their leaders; thus, protest is a disobedience to authority (Gürbüz & Bernstein, 2012; Al-Atawneh, 2016);
- c. priority given to Islamic doctrine of *sadd ad-dhari'ah* which prioritizes avoidance of harm rather than attraction of benefits (Abdulaziz, 2010; Salleh et al., 2019). In other words, if a two-way endeavor may lead to a probable acquisition of benefits or avoidance of harm, a Muslim should opt for one leading to avoidance of harm. Since protesters are not always sure how a protest may end and often hurt innocent civilians with mass demonstrations that obstruct businesses and provide avenues for public disorder, a Muslim is not expected to join any protest.
- d. protests often provide avenues to engage in detestable actions that undermine some religious fundamentals, such as delaying the *Salāt* and the intermingling of opposite genders; and

- e. protests create room for divisions within the *Ummah*, and this defeats the Islamic doctrine of unity as directed in Quran 3:103.

Some of these anti-protest scholars are said to be Sheikh Ibn Baz (the Grand Mufti of Saudi Arabia), Sheikh Fawzan, and others under the umbrella of the Council of Senior Scholars (CSS). Sheikh Ibn Baz is quoted to have said full obedience must be given to people of authorities and these are constituted by the political and religious leaders (Al-Atawneh, 2016). Sheikh Fawzan is also quoted to have declared Muslims should avoid protest as it yields negative results. This is why the Council of Senior Scholars (CSS) in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia issued a *fatwah* (verdict) to warn against mass demonstrations, explaining why mass demonstrations from places such as Egypt, Yemen, and Tunisia were condemned by scholars (Al-Atawneh, 2016).

The other end of the table is the argument that the protest is not detested in Islam. Numerous factors have been identified by scholars who share this opinion:

- a. Islamic doctrine of the presumption of permission, that is, affairs are deemed permissible except for a declaration of its prohibition in the books of Allah. Therefore, it is believed that protest is not declared a haram by Allah, so it is a permissible action. Al-Qaradāwi typifies this when he says "...rule is not established except by the injunction of Allah, and secular affairs are not rejected except by the prohibition of Allah" (Shishkina & Issaev, 2017);
- b. Islamic doctrine of choosing the lesser of the two evils. It is argued that even if protest is taken to be evil, what is protested against is often more evil and as such *Shari'ah* advocates that Muslims opt for the lesser evil (i.e. protest in this instance) against the bigger one (Nakissa, 2015). This argument also posits that while protest may attract private harm, what is being protested against often attracts common harm and causing private harm for the sake of preventing common harm

- is desirable as could be generally observed from the principles of *Shari'ah*;
- c. Islamic doctrine of *Al-'amru bil ma'rūf* (being advocate of righteousness) that Islam enjoins Muslims as provided in Quran 3:104. According to Muslim scholars like Al-Juwayjin, advocating and commanding acts of righteousness is *fard 'ayn* (individual obligation) on the Muslim *Ummah* and this implies it is the duty of the Muslims to find means of guiding a derailed leader to the path of righteousness ([Zawati, 2015](#)), hence, the need for protest;
 - d. Islamic approach to engaging reprehensible acts in society, as reported directly from the Prophet. The Prophet (saw) said that whoever sees something reprehensible should correct it by his hand, tongue, or heart, although correcting by the heart is the weakest form of faith. This means that an ideal Muslim should actively participate in issues of concern and importance in his/her immediate society. The comments of An-Nawāwi on this hadith seem very appealing, where he says "whoever is killed while attempting to actively make a change is a *shāhid* (martyr) ([Al-Atawneh, 2016](#)); and
 - e. exclusive obedience is only due to people of authority as much as they remain on the right course, and they may cease to enjoy such privilege if they derail from the right course.

Such Muslim scholars who subscribe to this include Sheikh Qaradāwi, Sheikh 'Aid al-Qarnī, Salman al-'Udah, al-Juwayjin amongst other scholars. For instance, according to Yusuf al-Qaradāwi ([Al-Atawneh, 2016](#)): "it is the right of Muslims like all other nations of the world to hold marches and rallies...". Similarly, Sheikh Aid al-Qarnī replied in support of Syrian protesters to the Grand Mufti of Syria Ahmad Badr Din Hassim, who declared a religious obligation for Muslims to support King Asad against Syrian protesters. Sheikh al-Qarnī was quoted to have denounced the Mufti and even called on other institutions to denounce him ([Al-Atawneh, 2016](#)). Salman al-Udah also questions the legitimacy of regimes in countries like Egypt,

Libya, Syria and Yemen in his 'Questions on Revolution (*'As'ilatu-th-thaurah*) and submits 'it is a right of every nation to protest and oppose its rulers' (Al-Atawneh, 2016).

In summary, it can be seen from the two perspectives that there is no consensus of opinions on protests and their relative concepts. This is due to the unavailability of "a direct and unequivocal answer to the question of how to treat the attempts of the masses to oppose an unwanted ruler" in Islamic polity making each side of the opinions to 'be supported by an appropriate set of *Shari'ah* arguments (Shishkina & Issaev, 2017). Roose (2013) distinguishes between these two groups by tagging one as literalists/orthodox/fundamentalists (i.e., those who believe Quran and Sunnah must be applied in the present world as they were in the seventh century) and the other as progressive/neo-modernists/*itjihadis* (i.e., those who believe in considering local contexts in interpreting Quran and Sunnah).

Contesting Complexities in Understanding Protests: *Fitnah*, *Thaurah*, or *Khurūj*?

One of the challenges in understanding the concept of protests in Islam is the foreign nature of the concept and practice of Islamic polity. The Islamic political system is a distinct framework on its own that has unique essentials and systems. It combines elements of spiritual and political leadership and invests both in the leader, and this is why protests in the modern language are somewhat alien to Islamic polity. Due to this alien nature, some Muslim scholars really have an inadequate understanding of the concept of protest, hence its silent confusion with some relative concepts in Muslim civilization such as *fitnah*, *thaurah*, and *khurūj*.

The word *fitnah* is the noun form of the Arabic verb *fatana*, meaning to seduce, enchant, captivate, and so on (Amiot-Cadey & Merriam-Webster Inc, 2010). The word appears about thirty (30) times in the Quran but with negative connotations (Shishkina & Issaev,

2017). This may explain why the terminology was employed to describe rebellions that occurred in the political affairs of the *Ummah* after the demise of the Prophet. In some Islamic literature, the unrest that occurred during the times of the righteous caliphs, the Umayyad caliphate, and the Abbasid caliphate is described as *fitnah*. For instance, At-Tabari used the term *fitnah* to describe the apostasy war and the rebellion of some Arab tribes when Abu Bakr (the first caliph) assumed office (Shishkina & Issaev, 2017). The scholars further submit that the conflicts of Ali and Muawiyah, the Abbasid revolution against the Umayyad, and the power tussle between the sons of Harun Rashid al-Amin and Mamun are also referred to as *fitnah*. *Fitnah* is therefore not an adequate equivalent of protest.

The word *thaurah* is a derivative from the verb *thawwara*, meaning to revolutionize, to revolt, to rebel, to agitate, to erupt amongst other meanings (Amiot-Cadey & Merriam-Webster Inc, 2010). It gained popularity after the Arabian exposition to rebellion, and the word gradually replaced the word *fitnah* in Arabian political discourse. The words *khurūj 'alā-l hākim* is a noun phrase from *kharaja-'alā* (Amiot-Cadey & Merriam-Webster Inc, 2010), meaning 'to revolt against' or 'to rise against' and *hakim*, meaning 'commander, superior, chief, head leader, ruler or governor' (Amiot-Cadey & Merriam-Webster Inc, 2010). *Khurūj 'alā-l hākim* therefore means a revolt against the ruler.

From these linguistic analyses, there is no equivalent of the word protest in Islamic sources and even early Muslim civilization, as always conceived in modern democratic political discourse. Govrin (Govrin, 2014, p. 42) asserts this when he says "the Islamic sources, the Quran and the hadith did not set specific pattern for a state or a government, and on the whole referred very little to issues of governance and state..." As a result, modern Muslim thinkers suggest the word *mazāharah* for protest. If a protest is an attempt to manifest

grievances, then this term may be an adequate equivalent of the concept in Arabic. The conceptual complexities surrounding protests due to their foreignness to Muslim civilization is not, however, the only variable to be considered in assessing the status of the #EndSARS protests in relation to Muslims. There are other variables relevant to the discourse to properly situate it in the context of the Nigerian Muslim *Ummah*. These include the following.

Constitutional and Democratic Background of the Protest

One of the factors responsible for the protest in Nigeria is the fact that it is backed up by the Nigerian constitution, and it is a legal process of contemporary democracy that is practiced in Nigeria. As mentioned earlier, the Nigerian constitution provides an avenue for the peaceful assembly of citizens, according to Section 40 of the Constitution. Protest, as conceived under such a political framework, cannot be rendered illegal within Islam because provisions for it are not made in Shariah. Clearly, rebelling against a leader under an Islamic polity is detested in Islam, but protesting over the issues of public interest is constitutionally allowed and in fact desirable in a sincerely democratic society when the need arises. Abu-Rish (2014) shares this sentiment when he says that there are three factors that are important in understanding protest dynamics: one is the state-building legacies of each country and the institutional configurations it produces, two are regime-society relations, and three are the strategic importance of a regime to both regional and international power relations. Thus, the institutional configurations that Nigerian governance has produced are undoubtedly one that enables and validates protests.

Protest as a Publicized 'Amru bi-l-Ma'rūf

One of the fundamentals of Islamic polity is that the correction done for a leader must be done in a private way and not publicized;

that is, it must be in the form of a *nasīha* (admonition). However, protest is seen as a correction done for the leader on a public platform, leading to a somewhat humiliation of the leader. When assessing protests in this light, people must be cognizant of the Nigerian political framework, which is clearly dissimilar to the Islamic political framework. The status of leadership in Islam is such that it enables masses to gain access to the leaders without hindrances, and the leaders believe sovereignty belongs to Allah, so they must be accountable to Him. Under the present political system in Nigeria, however, there is a large gap between the masses and the government, so the masses could only result in any constitutionally endorsed window to interact with the leaders. One major window is protest, and an enhancement of it is social media. Reporters Without Borders made an inference to this when it submits; “In authoritarian countries in which traditional media are state-controlled, the internet offers a unique space for discussion and information-sharing, and has become an ever more important engine for protest and mobilization” (Tang & Sampson, 2012; Ruijgrok, 2017; Sinpeng, 2020).

Multi-Religious Nature of Nigeria

Another variable that reengages those who believe the EndSARS protest contradicts Islam is the reality of Nigerians’ multi-religiosity. Nigerians are mostly Muslim, Christian, and African Traditionalists. The #EndSARS protest was organized by adherents of different religions. Excluding Muslims from protests based on mere jurisprudential assumptions may be a disservice to the Nigerian Muslim *Ummah*. If the protests should be accorded the expected commitment under a democratic society by the Nigerian government, and protesters were engaged, this may result in the non-consideration of Muslim interests, as the two parties navigate a course of panacea out of the challenges.

The #EndSARS Cause and the *Maqāsidu sh-Sharī'ah*

The #EndSARS protests started in response to police brutality and gross violations of human rights. Many lives were unduly lost and many youths were extorted of their wealth. This sharply contradicts the *Maqāsidu sh-Sharī'ah* which seeks to ultimately protect five things; one's life, wealth, faith, sanity and honor. These five are primarily protected under *Sharī'ah* and Islam attaches great importance to anything that would safeguard these. Through the practices of SARS officers, lives are endangered and wealth is not protected. Victims are also psychologically harassed and traumatized, lending credence to the non-protection of honor and sanity. The #EndSARS movement, therefore, became a social movement that sought to guarantee these basics to Nigerian citizens. Therefore, to regard this movement as detestable under the tenets of Islam, there should be clear-cut unequivocal evidence to render it so. Interestingly, there was no.

Re-Engaging the Anti-protest Muslim Scholars

From earlier discussions, it was discovered that some Muslim scholars, particularly the Council of Senior Scholars in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, opine protests are not allowed, and some Nigerian Muslim intellectuals use this to dissuade people from participating in the #EndSARS protest. However, this is an oversimplification of the stance of such scholars on the subject matter. The same set of scholars who criticized the protests in Egypt, Yemen, and Tunisia kept silent on protests in Libya and Syria. These protests in Libya and Syria even extended beyond the nomenclatures of protests under democratic societies as it was more or less revolts and rebellions against the leadership. This gesture towards these two countries has been interpreted as silent approval from the Council for Syrian and Libyan protests. This gesture was perhaps borne out of the fact that even classical law agrees with the deposition of a ruler that committed *kufru*

bawāh (blatant blasphemy); Al-Gadhafi (Libya's leader) and Al-Asad (Syria's leader) are known as oppressors by some Muslims, and protesting against them was silently deemed legal by even the supposed Anti-protest Muslim scholars.

Furthermore, a similar gesture was displayed by the Council of Senior Scholars in the coup against President Mohammed Morsi of Egypt by the Egyptian Army as the Council kept silent despite the demand of Egyptian Prince Khalid bn Talāl for the Council to clarify its position regarding the coup. There were even submissions in which the Saudi government supported and funded the military coup. Various events characterizing The Arab Spring may give more insight on this reality as may be inferred from Rutherford (2013a, 2013b), Deeb (2013), Lesch (2013), Ryan (2013), Haas (2013), Gelvin (2013), and Ulrichsen (2014).

Regarding the argument that protests give credence to engagement in unIslamic practices, such as intermingling of opposite genders and delaying *Salāt*, it is a question of the individual. Any Muslim protester that fails to observe *Salāt* at the appropriate time or freely intermingles with strange opposite genders does so because he is not committed to religious fundamentals, not because he is participating in protest.

Revisiting Firdaus Amasa's Protest on Hijab

On December 13, 2017, Firdaus Amasa denied access to the 2017 Call to Bar exercise in Nigeria because she was putting on a hijab (which was even a small cape that was tuck into her robe by the collar). This 'Call to Bar' is the last ceremonial rite for Nigerian law students towards becoming barristers and solicitors of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Without legal backing, it had become a tradition of the ceremony for participants regardless of their faith to participate with just the professional outfit (i.e., robe and wig); as such, female Muslim law students would drop their hijab during the ceremony to be called

to Bar. Considering section 38 of the Nigerian Constitution, which provides freedom to practice and manifest one's faith either in public or private and the mandate for Muslim women to use veils in Islam, Firdaus Amasa decided to participate in the ceremony without dropping her hijab ([Al-Jazeera News, 2017](#); [BBC News, 2017](#); [Olawoyin, 2017](#)).

Unfortunately, she denied participation, which led to agitation and protests against the contempt for hijabs in some public spaces in Nigeria. After contentions and contestations on the case, Firdaus was called to bar the following year (precisely on 10th July 2018) still with her hijab, which was how the no-hijab tradition at all ceremonies was abolished ([Idowu, 2018](#)).

From the beginning of her protests, Firdaus affirmed in an interview with me that she was not only criticized by adherents of other faiths for throwing her six years of law studies into the bin, but even by some Muslim intellectuals who claim that an ideal Muslim must not protest against a constituted authority. In such Muslim opinions, Muslim law students could only be prayerful that the constituted authority would spontaneously decide one day to allow participants of the exercise to add hijab to their professional outfit. Despite this criticism, Firdaus insisted on her demand and eventually broke the unconstitutional practice of the Call to Bar exercise by the successful outcome of her protest.

CONCLUSION

Some Nigerian Muslim intellectuals have problems contextualizing the *Sharī'ah* principles that overlap some national discourses in the Nigerian context. It is true that Nigeria practices a democratic system of government that has its fundamentals and principles, and it is also true that Nigerian Muslims who find themselves in such a political landscape must try to uphold the tenets

of their faith on a personal note. However, such must be upheld with the due knowledge of *Shari'ah*. If not, one may innocently damage part of the Islamic essence, which is justice for humanity.

The #EndSARS protest was a social movement which sought to eradicate brutality and extra-judicial killings of innocent Nigerians from a unit of the Nigerian Police Force which is called SARS and this does not contradict any Islamic fundamental, but in fact, fulfil some *maqāsidi sh-Shari'ah* (Islamic objectives); i.e. protection of life, wealth, honor and sanity. Some Muslim intellectuals have criticized the movement because they equated it with a rebellion against leadership under Islamic polity. This is incorrect because the concept of protest as formulated under democratic governance does not fit into Islamic polity. Although the #EndSars protest was unfortunately hijacked by some political and tribal opportunists, it still does not absolutely invalidate the permissibility of protests for Muslims living under democratic systems.

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Data Availability Statement

The data presented in this study are available upon request from the corresponding authors.

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