

Jumoke Verissimo and James Yékú (eds), *Sòròsókè: An #EndSARS Anthology*. Ibadan: Noirledge (pb US\$9.99 – 978 9 7858 7469 3). 2022, 110 pp.

Sometime in October 2020, a young man was shot in Ughelli, a town in Delta State, by police officers attached to Nigeria's Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS). Horrified Nigerian youths, who tagged themselves the *Soro Soke* (Yoruba for 'Speak Up') generation, protested against this brutality in Lagos and other cities. Within days, the #EndSARS hashtag had become both 'a movement that gave voice to Nigerians fed up with the violence, extortion, and impunity of the police unit' and a rhetoric condemning overall government failure to deliver social goods.¹ The result was a crackdown on 20 October at Lekki, an upmarket business district in Nigeria's commercial capital, Lagos, the protest's epicentre. Fifteen needless deaths were recorded, marking a significant watershed event that inspired the poems in the *Sòròsókè* collection. The poems are Nigerian youths' songs of sorrow for the departed. The collection covers the shades of cruelty that the Nigerian government meted out to the most vibrant and productive segment of its citizenry. Some recurring words include martyrs, dirges, slaves, innocence, death, booths, guns, darkness, foot soldiers, massacre – all invoking the grim fate that befell the protesters.

The sixty poems written by forty-six poets cover many themes and time periods, ranging from the years of brutality before the protest, the protest and the massacre itself, including the heartless soldiers' shooting, to the post-EndSARS posture (or denial) by government and the post-protest introspection by participants and observers. Below, I review some of the major poems in the book, tracing a possible sequence of events.

A history of brutalization preceded the protest. In Ademola Adesola's 'Hurray to Impunity', readers are led through the different strata of impunity enabled and enhanced by forgiving attitudes, approbation, complicit silence and 'feeble outrage' (p. 44). No wonder the nation's evils are never abated. Although the poem does not directly deal with the EndSARS protest, it lays bare the reasons why the protest took place and why the government reacted brutally.

Several other pieces engage in word play. Biodun Bello plays on the words 'End SARS' in 'End Sirs!', referring to youth's rejection of slavish submission to uncaring leaders who have espoused 'tyrant vices' (p. 89). Soji Cole's 'An Elegy for Endsars' and James Yékú's 'End Czars' describe the insensitive leaders of the nation. Playing on the word for Nigeria's seat of power, Aso Rock, written as '*arse-hole-rock*', Cole elaborates on how the thieving elite wreak havoc on the people's commonwealth. Cole also alludes to Chief Bola Tinubu (a former Lagos State governor and the rumoured owner of the company that collected tolls on the highway where the protest was staged) as the '*Jack-a-barn*'. (By referring to him as a 'Jack' who tends a barn of yams, Cole strips the Chief of any vestiges of prestige.) Such vicious leaders are also found in Ojo Adeshina's 'Lekki Dirge', where wolves are perceived killing lambs with the 'rods of death' (p. 55). The elite are again viewed as cheerless lords in Yékú's 'End

¹ '#EndSARS demands Nigerian police reform', Africa Center for Strategic Studies, 10 November 2020 <<https://africacenter.org/spotlight/endsars-demands-nigerian-police-reform>>.

Czars', which transposes 'czars' for 'SARS', painting the dreaded SARS police unit as the image of erstwhile brutal Russian kings.

When the protest proper begins in Mary Ann Olaoye's 'The Beads to this Prayer', protesters are envisioned as lambs, as the number of deaths becomes memorable and traumatizing. In 'Elegy for 20-10-2020 Meteors', Tayo Aluko could hear '[t]he sordid outcry' by many youths from varied backgrounds, protesting against the brutality of the police with 'a mounting roar' (p. 66), but the 'Dracula Lords' (p. 67) were on hand to derail the movement. Samuel Ogunkoya's 'Redeeming Home' narrates how, at the point of being killed, protesters' songs became screams, while the word 'amen' could be heard from the bodies of shot youth, signifying how their country had let them down. In 'Arise O Compatriots, Nigeria's Call, Obey', Chinonyelum Anyichie chooses the first line of Nigeria's national anthem to espouse the unity and comradeship that existed among the protesters until the bullets rained down on them. Tayo Aluko's 'Looters on High (#EndSARS)' describes a rain of bullets that felled young protesters sitting on the tarmac. However, Aluko is convinced that the bloodshed was not in vain. Ibiene Bidiaque's 'Bullets' mourns the dead who were killed by 'blood-thirsty soldiers' guns cocked to battle against unarmed singing flag-waving civilians' (p. 54).

Many of the poems also tackle the mourning of lost lives and the aftermath of the protests. Gbenga Adeoba's 'Retrospection' recounts the missing names of people killed by agents of the state. In 'Fevered Children', Oladimeji Ogunoye relives the inescapably poignant scenes, describing Nigeria as a nation that 'feeds on her inhabitants' (p. 40), with no one inquiring why these deaths took place in the first instance.

In a lucid, fevered language that aches over the events of that fateful October day, *Sọròsókè* reflects on the consequence of negligence of care. I recommend it not just to literary scholars, but also to Africanists and anyone desiring to know what the heart felt going through that dark period.

Ignatius Chukwumah

Federal University, Wukari, Nigeria

Email: ignatiusc@fuwukari.edu.ng

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Joris Schapendonk, *Finding Ways Through Eurospace: West African Movers Re-viewing Europe from the Inside*. New York NY and Oxford: Berghahn Books (hb US\$135/£99 – 978 1 78920 680 7). 2020, 221 pp.

Postcolonial Africans are creating an inescapable creole future in Europe. Their intra-EU movements may contest the very idea of Europe from within. Boatloads of vulnerable African migrants arriving at the EU's southern flanks have aroused sympathy and solidarities. At the same time, border control, violent racism and neo-fascist policies and bureaucracies have pegged Africans as not only 'alien' but also 'invasive' others. From these two discrepant realities of sympathy and antipathy, Africans emerge as agents of geopolitical change. Joris Schapendonk's book *Finding Ways Through Eurospace* is a gripping, well-wrought account about the lifeworlds of African people in Europe.