The End SARS Women's Coalition: Exploring the Persistence of Women's Movements through Feminist Generations

Sharon Adetutu Omotoso and Ololade Faniyi

Abstract

This article situates the #EndSARS women's activism within the broader context of Nigeria's transgenerational feminist struggles against State repression. We draw on the actions of the Abeokuta Women's Union (AWU) of 1947, led by Funmilayo Ransome Kuti, to explore continuities evident in the work of feminists in Nigeria's protest against police brutality (and other social vices), popularly known as the *End SARS Movement* in 2020. Using in-depth interviews, a close feminist reading of activists' documentation, and data from Twitter, which was the major site of #EndSARS digital activism, we explore contemporary feminist activists' inadvertent or concerted actions that point to transgenerational continuities in Nigerian feminist activism. In doing so, we transcend studies that have investigated differences through the class/gender/generation divide in feminist movements, particularly as we tease out the points of convergence and tensions that have evolved over time in persistent efforts to break the cycle of similar oppressions.

Keywords: activism; #EndSARS; feminist generations; Nigeria; feminised corruption

Introduction

In this paper, we examine the implications and dynamics of the feminist struggle within Nigeria's End SARS movement, drawing connections to antecedents in the history of Nigerian urban middle-class women's rights activism. Our exploration begins in October 2020, coinciding with the protests against police brutality by the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS), a unit of the Nigeria Police Force established in 1992 to combat rampant robbery activities. With often-covert operations, SARS enjoyed relative autonomy, engaging in extortion, extrajudicial killings, unjust arrests, and harassment. The hashtag #EndSars emerged in late 2017 when Twitter users decried these atrocities. A viral video shared on October 3, 2020, by an eyewitness in Ughelli, Delta State, showing SARS officials shooting a young man dead and driving off with his Lexus vehicle, triggered nationwide protests across various Nigerian cities and states, including Ughelli, Lagos, Abuja, Ilorin, Kaduna, Jos, Calabar, Warri, Benin, Osun, Ibadan, Ogbomosho and Owerri.[1]

We address how young middle-class Nigerian feminists of diverse ethnic descent were prominent organisers during the End SARS protests, who amplified their work in explicitly feminist terms. The Feminist Coalition (FemCo), alongside other women's rights activists, became significant rallying forces within a largely decentralised movement. FemCo, as a collective with legal, technological, journalistic, and activist literacies, capitalised upon social media and Bitcoin technologies for fundraising (Chawaga 2020). The End SARS Response Unit, liaising with FemCo, connected protesters across states, providing resources and information, including helplines and digital radio services.

Despite the criticism of the performative activism and spectacle perpetuated in digital activism (Njoroge 2016; Ofori-Parku and Moscato 2018), the End SARS movement did not simply generate spectacle but served as a unifying platform for collective action, and its impact persist even after the Lekki Toll Gate massacre on October 20, 2020, when the Nigerian Army opened fire on peaceful protesters. Although this incident temporarily halted the protests, the Lagos State Judicial Panel's report on November 15, 2021, affirmed claims made

1 This video by this eyewitness has since been deleted from their Twitter account. We refrain from mentioning this user to protect their privacy, but several copies of this triggering video are still circulating online.

by women such as D. J. Switch and CNN reporter Stephanie Busari, who had been advocating for justice since the massacre. D. J. Switch, present at the Lekki Toll Gate, documented the shooting on Instagram Live. Although the Nigerian presidency dismissed this evidence as fake news, her account, along with the CNN documentary produced by Busari, which drew from geolocation data, on-site protester videos, and eyewitness reports, aimed to establish the truth about the massacre (Busari et al. 2020). In response, the Nigerian Minister of Information and Culture, Lai Mohammed, declared that CNN should be sanctioned, characterising the Lagos State Judicial Panel report as a "triumph of fake news" (Princewill 2021, para. 2).

Here, we examine a movement in Nigeria with distinct feminist agency, which evokes the history of women leading efforts for political and social rights. The involvement of young women, who capitalised on their upwardly mobile statuses and digital visibility, brought attention to this new generation of activists. The concentration of a majority of the key feminist figures in Lagos is noteworthy, given the city's status as Nigeria's economic and cultural hub. We observe that Lagos provides a strategic platform for activists to amplify their messages, underscoring their access to resources, educational opportunities, and networks that contribute to the sophistication of their activism. It is crucial to recognise that despite the concentration of key figures in Lagos, the End SARS movement and the "Feminists Against SARS" response were not confined to a single region. It manifested as a widespread movement across various Nigerian regions, reflecting a united effort to address the common issue of police brutality. However, the trajectory took a significant turn after the massacre at Lekki Toll Gate in Lagos, which marked a turning point and concluded the offline protests on October 20, 2020.

Our analysis, informed by our perspective as *acada* feminist activists, explores the participation of women in the movement who leveraged radical feminist approaches and decentralised yet coalitional structures online and offline[2]. We highlight connections between earlier feminists and a contemporary wave of activists with high social media visibility. We assert the importance of underscoring these continuities, which align with the approach taken by scholars such as Dieng (2023) in the Senegalese context. This emphasis diverges from

2 The term "acada" is a colloquial Nigerian term derived from the word "academe" to describe someone who is familiar with the academic environment of a university (Omotoso 2020, 156).

a concentration on generational divides in examining new waves of feminism, as discussed by Bawa (2018) in the Ghanaian context.

Mapping Our Approach

This paper investigates the implications and dynamics of the term "Feminists Against SARS", delving into the emergence of this radical feminist response within the End SARS movement that specifically critiqued police brutality using explicitly feminist terms. The genesis of this term is attributed to the initial tweet by FemCo, a group committed to leveraging their social, economic, and technological capital to advocate against police brutality. The phrase not only captures the group's radical feminist identity but also served as a rallying call for feminists both offline and online, who formed decentralised clusters united in their resistance against the State.

Key figures, including Aisha Yesufu, Rinu Oduala, Modupe Odele, and F. K. Abudu (who later formally joined FemCo), emerged alongside FemCo, contributing to the formation and spread of a "Feminists Against SARS" momentum. The research employs interviews with Rinu Oduala and Nkemakonam Cynthia Agunwa. Rinu Oduala is a 24-year-old activist and social media influencer from Lagos who emerged as one of the young women at the forefront of the movement. She is also a community organiser and project director of Connect Hub, a platform dedicated to documenting incidents of police violence and citizen interventions. Nkemakonam, who is 30 years old, is an activist working with Witness.Org. She worked closely with some of the key women of the movement, and her work primarily focuses on the critical significance of visual documentation of social movements like the End SARS protest.

Additionally, we conduct a contextual analysis of the comprehensive statement made by FemCo, as direct interviews with the Coalition were not possible. We acknowledge the tireless work of these activists and the toll it takes on their mental and physical health and respect their abstinence from direct interviews, which we attribute to the accusations of corruption, discrimination, and unwanted attention against them, even two years after the protests (Faniyi and Omotoso 2022). As participant observers of the online digital cluster affiliated with the phrase "Feminists Against SARS", we incorporate

our understanding of this context into our analysis, to develop a contextually specific nuanced examination of the movement. Finally, a close feminist reading of Twitter data is employed, exploring the transgenerational continuity of women's rights activism and contemporary feminist activism. Users online were observed making connections to historical movements, specifically referencing FemCo and Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti's Abeokuta Women's Union (AWU), providing a multifaceted understanding of the movement's broader historical and socio-political context. Through these varied methodologies, this research aims to illuminate the complexities of the "Feminists Against SARS" movement and its connections to broader narratives of women's rights activism in Nigeria.

Theoretically, our paper draws on an intersectional perspective to understand the intertwined dynamics of class, gender, and generation (Dieng 2023). In the context of Senegal, Dieng adopts intersectionality to examine how innovations in protest strategies, including radical politics and new technologies, have allowed activists to overcome generational and ideological divides within feminist movements and resist alliances between patriarchal and political powers. Notably, approximately 40 years after the inception of Yewwu Yewwi, a prominent feminist movement, Senegalese feminists are returning to radical feminist organising. Dieng explores the historical division between women's rights protests and feminist protests, the former having emerged due to a hesitation to embrace the feminist label. Women's movements initially focused on the political, social, and economic empowerment of women within the framework of national liberation, while feminist movements, particularly as exemplified by Yewwu Yewwi, have taken a more radical and intersectional approach.

Collins and Bilge describe intersectionality as an analytical tool that allows us to see that in any time and society, the power relations of these identity categories are not "discreet and mutually exclusive entities but rather build on each other and work together; and that, while often invisible, these intersecting power relations affect all aspects of the social world" (2020, 1). Rooted in the Black feminist, legal and critical race theory of Crenshaw (1989), the analytical lens of intersectionality is globally translatable, evident in the work of people across locations who had been speaking to the intersecting effects of social divisions outside of the Western origins of the term, such as African feminist scholar Molara Ogundipe. Ogundipe (1994) coined Stiwanism (Social Transformation in

Africa Including Women), to offer a contextual specific reading of the intersecting factors affecting African women and the ways they react to these structures, including "oppression from outside; traditional structures; her backwardness; man; her colour and race; and herself" (Ogundipe 1994, 28).

The paper poses critical questions about the significance of young middle-class women emerging as central political figures in defining moments such as the End SARS movement, within the historical context of middle-class women-led anti-colonial actions. It explores the various forms of capital, including social, technical, political, legal, and digital visibility, that amplify the work of feminist activists, as well as the strategies employed to advance their work. The research also investigates the implications when corruption is weaponised against feminist activists. Ultimately, the paper aims to illustrate how Nigerian contemporary feminist activists navigates the intersecting axes of gender, class, and generation as these shape their politics while maintaining autonomy and resisting co-optation by political forces, even in the face of discrimination from State and citizen actors.

Feminists Against SARS

FemCo is a collective of 14 young feminists including Kiki Mordi, Ozzy Etomi, Fakhriyyah Hashim, Ayodeji Osowobi, Odunayo Eweniyi, Laila-Johnson Salami, F. K. Abudu and more. Beyond FemCo, Nigerian Muslim activist Aisha Yesufu, media strategist Rinu Oduala, and lawyer Modupe Odele, also emerged as the key activists in the End SARS movement. Aisha Yesufu became a recognisable figure in women's organising after co-founding the #BringBackOurGirls movement following the kidnapping of over 250 girls by Boko Haram in 2014. This movement established the first wave of transnational feminist connections with hashtags emerging from Nigeria (Faniyi et al. 2023). Yesufu's iconic image, showing her raised fist in protest, gained widespread traction on social media. This veiled Muslim woman boldly stood at the forefront, resisting the State, particularly noteworthy in environments where religious and patriarchal citizens often promote political conservatism. When we spoke to Rinu, she confirmed that each #EndSARS woman activist became a rallying voice through active participation in offline and online spaces, each with self or collective missions to

demand cultural and political change while acknowledging other activists whose work intersected with theirs.

Figure 1: Snapshot capturing Aisha Yesufu onsite during #EndSARS protest actions in Abuja.
Source: Twitter
Note: The identity of the photographer is unknown. This image is publicly available on Twitter.

Several of the founding members of FemCo were already involved in Nigerian feminist activist work prior to the coalition's formation. These include Kiki Mordi, Oluwaseun Ayodeji Osowobi, and Fakhrriyyah Hashim. Osowobi, for example, is known for her work against sexual violence in Nigeria through the "Stand to End Rape" initiative. Mordi led an undercover team of journalists for a documentary on the power of male university lecturers at the University of Lagos and the University of Ghana and the sexual abuse experienced by

female students at their hands; it was aired by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) on November 29, 2019[3]. Meanwhile, Hashim created the hashtag #ArewaMeToo in Northern Nigeria in November 2019, as a variation of the #MeToo movement. This brought attention to gender-based violence and led to a series of offline protests across states in Northern Nigeria, including Kano and Bauchi. These women were not new to activism; they had been resisting State oppression through their work as writers, journalists, and activists.

In this paper, we consider the decentralised yet collaborative involvement of women who collectively stood against police brutality as illustrative of an "End SARS Women's Coalition". Nkem, when asked about the significance of the middle-class status of most of these women, emphasised that their importance lay not solely in their class status but also in their youth, technological proficiency, and social media influence. They were able to engage critically with issues affecting women and to use their resources to support protesters. Even when the Nigerian government blocked their website and channels for donations, FemCo found ways to motivate donors to use VPN and Bitcoin technologies, ultimately raising the equivalent of US$388,000 over a two-week period (Nwankwor and Nkereuwem, 2020).

Nkem further argues that the intention of the women of End SARS was not to speak for others but for themselves. However, their agential capabilities positioned them as inadvertent spokeswomen for the majority. This resonates with Akwugo Emejulu's (2017) concept: feminism of the 99% (F99) - a form of grassroots, down-top structured mobilising that takes into account multiple facets of women's experiences. She particularly argues that feminism of the 99% replicates a feminist vision of politics with continuities of redistribution, intersectionality, collaboration and pro-diversity. Rinu, however, explicitly announced that she was not middle-class but rather a lower-class young woman. Although her digital capital might have made her seem privileged, Rinu detailed her lower-class childhood background and emphasised her use of social media capabilities and offline protest actions to disrupt the typical narrative of an individual saviour or face for a movement that profoundly affected many people on the margins.

3 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=we-F0Gi0Lqs

In a collective statement titled "In Our Own Words", published on Medium, members of FemCo recounted what led to their involvement in the End SARS movement.

> On October 9, going through social media like everyone else we were upset at the violence unarmed citizens were facing at the hands of police, especially as that same day a woman was shot in the face by a police officer — and we believed that without structure, the protests could turn violent and women would be the most affected…The women in the group all agreed and we set a one hour meeting for 9pm WAT/ 8pm GMT on October 9 to strategise and organise…The meeting ended up running for 2 hours and the conclusion at the end was clear. We would help crowdsource donations for the peaceful End SARS protests. Focusing on food, water, medical, legal aid etc. (FemCo 2020)

Although FemCo's involvement in the movement seemed sudden, they had actually formed the coalition in July 2020 with a mission to advance gender equality in Nigeria, focusing on education, financial freedom, and representation in public office. The coalition emerged from their radical care group "Whine and Wine Nigeria" where they publicly shared videos and pictures of themselves dancing and drinking wine, performing acts of joy and relaxation as a form of defiance and agency (Faniyi and Omotoso 2022, 55).

Lawyer Modupe Odele also tweeted that her primary strength was legal reform and offered to assist any groups working towards disbanding SARS: "My main strength is legal reform. If there are any groups working on providing the government with a roadmap to disbanding SARS, please do let me know. #EndSARS #EndSarsProtests" (@Moechievous 9 October 2020). Her tweet positioned her as one of the most prominent lawyers working to aid detained protesters during the peak of offline protest actions between October 9 and October 20, 2020.

During our conversation with Rinu, she expressed how the feeling of togetherness with other women helped alleviate the pain and trauma of their work as activists during the movement. Maintaining that "Nigeria women had been primed for fighting"[1] and resisting the State, Rinu remarked that her involvement in End SARS was motivated by the killing of twelve-year-old Tina Ezekwe by a drunken policeman in June 2020. She described her childhood experiences

in Lagos, where it was commonplace for SARS officials to beat up young men or leave dead bodies on the streets. Nkem's reason for involvement was simple: "It was time to rescue my generation and end police violence on our bodies"[2].

In the following sections, we draw on the points of convergence and divergence to which we became sensitised through participant/observer interactions online during the End SARS movement. We explore the significance of transgenerational continuities in the context of the radical feminist politics of the women of End SARS, as we unpack why users online were making connections to Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti and the AWU, providing a multifaceted understanding of the movement's broader historical and socio-political context.

The End SARS Women's Coalition and Continuities in Nigerian Feminist Movements

We came across a tweet in which the user @julietkego connected the labour and backlash encountered by Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti and her cohorts in 1946 to the experiences of FemCo during the End SARS movement, as both involved women in resistance against the State:[4]

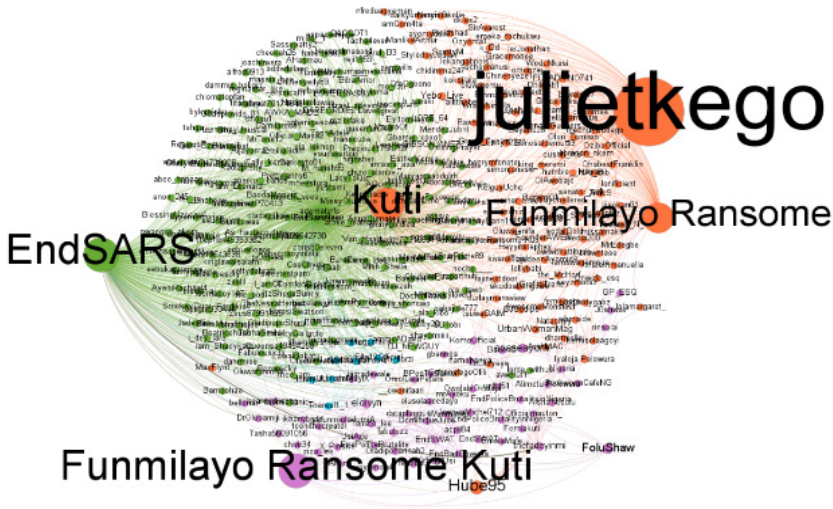
> In mid-October 1946, Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti led nearly 1000 women in a march to the palace to protest tax increase. The response from the colonial authorities was brutal. They deployed tear gas and administered beatings on the women. October 2020, @feminist_co .... #EndSars

@julietkego, who is the co-founder of the social enterprise Whole Woman Network and identifies as a Social Justice Advocate and International Speaker-Poet, demonstrates in this tweet a powerful historical context for the 2020 feminist momentum. [5] The image below depicts a Twitter network graph generated on Gephi, showing the mentions of Ransome-Kuti in the #EndSARS movement. We argue that these connections drawn on this digital platform serve as a bridge between historical struggles and current activism. The retweets illustrate how users recognise the lineage of Nigerian women leading protests, emphasising a shared history of resilience and resistance that not only demonstrates the

4 The context of this work predates the transformation of Twitter to "X", so we retain terms describing Twitter's conversational features.
5 We have mentioned @julietkego here because of the context and intended public audience of her tweet.

awareness of transgenerational continuities between Ransome-Kuti's activism and FemCo's efforts, but also underscores the significance of digital platforms in shaping and disseminating these narratives.

Figure 2: Visualisation of "Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti" and #EndSars mention network between October 10 and October 20, 2020, generated through Gephi. It represents users, hashtags, and keywords, and establishes connections between Ransome-Kuti and #EndSARS. Generated by Ololade Faniyi



In our interviews with Rinu and Nkem, we posed questions about their thoughts on how Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti and her peers would respond to the current extreme policing of Nigerians. Additionally, we asked whether they thought that contemporary women activists draw inspiration and resources from anti-colonial activists such as Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti. Rinu's response highlighted the subversive protest tactics used by Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti during a period when local police harassed women who refused to comply with forced colonial taxation:

> I draw inspiration from Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti and the Aba women fighting against colonial oppression…Nigeria is a country of influential women who have been central to movements for change… FRK was dubbed the lioness of Lisabi, and she and AWU staged long vigils outside the Alake's palace and when they refused them the right to protest, they

> changed to festivals and picnics. She resisted the local police and taught women (how to deal with the police force) when tear gas canisters were thrown at them. They used their money to fund legal representation. They protested, they wrote, their entire lives were dedicated to protesting[3].

In the specific context of the AWU, we note how this anti-colonial women's activism was sustained by the collective power of women working together through decided coalitions. In 1947, Eniola Soyinka, Funmilayo Ransome Kuti, Amelia Osimosu and several other women who were part of the Abeokuta Ladies Club, formed a coalition with Abeokuta market women's association to resist the unfair treatment of women in Egbaland. Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti, dubbed the "lioness of Lisabi", presided over the outcome of this alliance known as Abeokuta Women's Union (AWU). The more upwardly mobile women had planned to leverage their education and middle-class privileges to provide literacy classes for the mostly unlettered market women. However, Ransome-Kuti became aware of the harassment market women faced from tax officials and local police, including the confiscation of their goods. When the colonisers imposed the poll taxes, sanitation fines, market, and trade-related taxes, including indirect taxes such as market fees and market-shed fees in 1918, all remitted to the colonial treasury, Egba women were accessed and taxed differently because the officials perceived them as wealthy women, highlighting what Byfield refers to as "gendered inconsistencies in colonial policies" (2016, 108). In response to this unfair taxation, they began organising a series of protests, culminating in their victory in December 1948, including the temporary abolition of taxes on women and the exile of the complicit ruler, Alake Ademóla (Byfield 2016).

The victory of the AWU led to the publication of a small pamphlet titled "The Fall of a Ruler or The Freedom of Egbaland." In this pamphlet, they connected their words with famous quotes from Thomas Jefferson, Lord Acton, and Charles James Fox that defined the Declaration of American Independence. The women were aware that these American forefathers did not necessarily include women in their constitution of democracy. Still, by appropriating their words in the context of the oppression of market women in Egbaland, the women of AWU insisted that women be treated as full and legitimate political subjects, for whom "nationalism and gender equality in the political arena were inseparable" (Byfield 2016, 120). The alliance between the Abeokuta Ladies

Club and the market women's association blurred the barriers of difference: "The fight of Egba women knew no religious barriers. Christians, Moslems, (Yoruba Indigenous Traditionalists) had joined hands to put an end to long-standing wrongs" (Byfield 2016, 55).

The successes of the AWU led to the beginning of a broader movement, with the founding of the National Women's Union (NWU) in 1949 (Mba 1982; Johnson-Odim and Mba 1997). Through NWU's widespread branches across Nigeria, Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti aimed to unite women's organisations and present a unified set of issues to the newly formed political parties. Ransome-Kuti and the NWU organised a parliament of the women of Nigeria (Johnson-Odim and Mba 1997; Byfield 2012) in August 1953, leading to the establishment of the Federation of Nigerian Women's Societies (FNWS). These collectives situated gender critique within both local and national issues, challenging poll taxes and advocating for a reduction in bride prices. Ransome-Kuti was also involved in national politics, being a founding member of the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC), the only woman in a group of seven. As NCNC transformed into a political party and as political parties gained prominence in the 1950s, there was pressure on civic organisations, including the NWU, to align themselves with such parties. However, Ransome-Kuti resisted this pressure, attempting to maintain the independence of women's organisations as spaces where women from all political affiliations could gather and learn from each other while disavowing the singular attention to women for their sheer voting power as opposed to their political subjectivity. This stance faced challenges, with Margaret Ekpo resigning from NWU and FNWS in 1954, citing that these organisations were at odds with the politics of the NCNC (Byfield 2012). However, Ransome-Kuti's insistence on the independence of women's organisations reflected her disidentification with the evolution of nationalist politics in Nigeria, which delegitimised women candidates and reinforced the notion that women are mere political cheerleaders whose votes will ascend men into power. Her dissatisfaction eventually caused her to leave the NCNC in 1959, prompting her to form her own political party, the Commoner People's Party.

Although these anti-colonial women's rights activists did not have digital media to produce visibility for their actions in the way contemporary feminist activists do, the politics of self-representation was still crucial to them. For

Ransome-Kuti, these politics enabled her to leverage her middle-class privileges to aid lesser privileged market women through literacy classes, as well as organise to protect them from unjust taxation and local police harassment. In addition, this manifested in her efforts to unite women and present their consolidated issues to political parties, from a truly independent organisation composed of women across political affiliations. In the following sections, we delve into a thematic analysis of the nuances that emerged in this transgenerational continuity from AWU to FemCo.

The Politics of Terminology and Ideological Independence

"Feminists Against SARS" was the phrase with which FemCo announced their struggle against police brutality on October 9, 2020. This phrase served as more than a simple declaration of intent; it became a potent catalyst for a broader discourse on feminist resistance against police brutality. By capturing a radical feminist identity, it not only defined FemCo's stance but also inspired a rallying call for feminists both offline and online. The significance of this phrase was in its ability to influence the articulation of grievances related to police brutality in explicitly feminist terms, elevating the discourse beyond general opposition to feminists' relation to police violence.

Figure 3: Screenshot of initial tweet by FemCo, announcing their End SARS activism.
Source: @feminist_co, October 9, 2020, https://x.com/feminist_co/status/1314693500013862912

This emphasis on feminist terminology addresses a concern raised by Faniyi et al (2023), who explored the implications of an uncritical approach and affective opposition to women's experiences of police violence. This not only overgeneralises men's experiences but also contributes to societal apathy towards police violence specifically targeting women in gendered ways. This gendered police violence is evident in events such as #JusticeforTina and #AbujaPoliceRaidonWomen (also referred to as #SayHerNameNigeria). #JusticeforTina emerged after a trigger-happy drunk policeman shot and killed a twelve-year-old playing in her backyard while #AbujaPoliceRaidonWomen responded to the arrest and in-custody sexual assault of up to 70 women unjustly apprehended in an Abuja nightclub and paraded as prostitutes (Faniyi et al. 2023). These, alongside other individualised events, underscore the urgency of framing discussions on police

violence in explicitly feminist terms, avoiding the oversimplification that could undermine the gendered aspects of such incidents.

Therefore, the rallying call "Feminists Against SARS" extended its influence beyond the core members of FemCo. Feminists online and allies, who identified with the struggles against police brutality, adopted the phrase and FemCo's logo as symbols of their commitment to feminist ideals. In their statement, FemCo shared that this logo, created by Google Developer Expert, while FemCo founding member, Ire Aderinokun incorporated the feminist fist, historically used to represent struggles for gender equality, as a way to "symbolise the fact that [they were] a women's rights organisation" (para 33). FemCo also asserts that the unexpected widespread adoption of the logo, not only by men but also by women who may have been hesitant to openly identify with feminism, marks a significant and transformative moment for the collective.

This adoption not only demonstrated a widespread resonance but also showcased the power of the politics of naming in shaping a collective identity. The movement's decentralised nature did not diminish its impact; instead, it enabled the wilful unity of voices under a shared banner, emphasising the intersectionality of feminist activism within the broader context of anti-police brutality protests in Nigeria. Moreover, the utilisation of social media, particularly Twitter, played a pivotal role in amplifying the reach of "Feminists Against SARS", fostering a virtual community of feminists committed to the cause. As this phrase echoed across digital spaces, it not only symbolised resistance but also sparked conversations on the interconnectedness of feminist struggles with broader societal and nationalist issues.

Figure 4: Images publicly available on Twitter, showing unidentified Nigerian protesters in London holding placards displaying the logo of FemCo.
Source: Twitter. Note: The identity of the photographer is unknown.

FemCo's commitment to using explicit feminist terminology, we argue, echoes the legacy of ideological independence reminiscent of figures like Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti. Much like Ransome-Kuti, who resisted aligning women's organisations with political parties during the anti-colonial struggle, FemCo maintains an ideological independence by framing their activism against police brutality in clear feminist terms. These parallel approaches underscore a continuity in the pursuit of autonomy and the assertion of a distinct feminist perspective in addressing systemic issues, drawing a vital connection between the historical roots of anti-colonial feminism and contemporary feminist movements.

Ethics of Vigour Born Out of Radical Care

We identified ethics of radical care in the transgenerational continuity of women's rights and feminist movements in Nigeria. This form of care, as defined by Faniyi and Omotoso (2022), is radically attentive to self and the collective, "especially in contexts where activists face violent backlash, harassment, criminal, and other state penalties for their work" (51). We characterise the actions of Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti as radical care – an embodiment of the several aspects of her

activism, including the expansion of the Abeokuta Women's Union (AWU) to include market women, the transformation of protests into picnics, and the protective measures taken to shield women from the impact of tear gas. By expanding the AWU to include women from different backgrounds, Ransome-Kuti demonstrated a caring ethos by fostering solidarity among women of various social classes. This underscored a concern for the well-being and safety of the women involved in this resistance to the State. Ransome-Kuti's approach of "radical care" thus signalled a nuanced and effective strategy in the face of challenging circumstances.

In the contemporary context, FemCo similarly engages in subversive actions rooted in radical care. FemCo's advocacy was demonstrated through funding support, feeding and watering protesters, covering medical and legal expenses, and providing mental health support. This, we argue, aligns with the broader strategies of radical care in the face of threats and State penalties for their activist work. Nkem suggests that during the initial stages of the protests, participants from diverse socioeconomic classes joined the movement. Notably, lower-income individuals were drawn in, in part, by the provision of food and entertainment, highlighting the significance of these elements in attracting a broader audience. While some might have only turned up for the entertainment and spectacle the protests provided, this did not undermine the substantive impact of the movement. The class realities of those attending offers us profound insights into Nigeria's systemic oppressions. Although food initially motivated attendees, their sustained engagement reflected a growing awareness and solidarity with other protesters. It emphasised their commitment to the transformative objectives of the movement and recognition of systemic challenges in Nigeria.

In the following excerpt extracted from their collective statement, FemCo explicitly addresses the significant reliance placed on them by End SARS protesters, highlighting how this widespread dependence influenced their approach to radical care. Rooted in what Omotoso (2017, 2023) describes as an ethics of vigour, their care praxis encompasses equal consideration of community management, justice, risk, and control. This commitment is exemplified through their active involvement in crowdfunding for essential provisions such as food, water, medical and legal aid. Facing restrictions on their funding channels imposed by the government, FemCo demonstrated resilience by turning to unconventional

methods such as Bitcoin, showcasing their strength by "entrenching justice in care processes" (Omotoso 2017, 70).

> We had started, and people were counting on us. Over the week of October 11, 2020, we dedicated all our days to various aspects of FemCo — managing our social media, verifying protests through direct messages, handling financial responsibilities, and establishing connections with legal networks. Collaborating with other organizations like End SARS Response, Legal Aid Network, and Food Coven, we diligently worked toward our shared objectives.
>
> Since our October 22 statement, we have remained true to our commitments: contributing funds for medical support to End SARS Response (₦20,114,087.25), mental health assistance to #EndSARSMentalHealthSupport (₦6,121,678.73), and allocating funds to the Legal Aid Network (₦15,741,459.59). Following months of research, we have successfully donated ₦500,000 each to approximately 70 victims of police brutality and the families of the deceased, amounting to almost ₦35 million (Feminist Coalition 2020 para 25).

Identity Disinformation

The End SARS movement represented a watershed moment for contemporary feminist activism in Nigeria, where feminists emerged as the faces of one of the country's largest collective actions. While the movement aimed to end police brutality and systemic corruption, it also exposed the complex challenges and risks that feminist activists face in Nigeria. Notably, these activists had public feminist identities, which made them vulnerable to disinformation and accusations of corruption. On October 31, 2020, FemCo activist Kiki Mordi tweeted, "2020 was the year the word feminist was on the front pages of mainstream Nigerian newspapers, and it wasn't an insult", showing a moment of reflexivity 11 days after the Lekki Massacre. However, the popularity of the word "feminist" at that time, largely due to the work of FemCo, did not prevent the vitriol that often accompanies radical politics of naming and self-representation for feminist activists in Nigeria. Nkem describes this gender disinformation as reflecting the rage of men who felt threatened that the seeming collective acceptance of feminism would disrupt the existing power system: "They demonised feminists

by claiming they were hijacking the movement to enrich themselves" (Nkem 31 May 2022). Nkem also maintained that digital media amplified women's stories and labour, but it also exposed them to trolls and mobs who wanted to undermine their work. She further suggested that the government made a coordinated effort to disrupt the movement.

In their statement, FemCo assert how their work was particularly met with vitriol from certain individuals on Twitter who sought to spread disinformation about their objectives and identity:

> While the support from global figures was encouraging, we had our fair share of trolls on Twitter — men determined to spread misinformation about who we are and what we stand for. You know who they are, you saw their vitriol. We strongly believe being called cultists, witches, insurgents, lipstick terrorists and being blamed for sponsored violence (when ALL our efforts were focused on the peace and safety of all Nigerians) was not only damaging, but dangerous. This put our safety at risk and encouraged the intimidation and bullying we endured for weeks from various authorities (para 28).

They explained that in the events after the Lekki Massacre, organisations that were formerly supportive of their work severed ties with them: "Ayodeji described it as feeling as though fighting injustice was a crime in itself. She experienced being bullied by organisations she was affiliated with, with demands that she desist [from] any engagement with FemCo (Feminist Coalition 2020 para 29)."

Rinu asserted that what she was most afraid of during that period was not the consequences of the State or the vitriol but the threat of erasure, as she recalled how Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti is often reductively presented as the first woman to drive a car in Nigeria, with little to no mention of her crucial work for Nigeria's independence alongside celebrated male heroes of the past. This motivated her to establish the Connect Hub collective to continue advancing police reform, which she describes as a digital referral platform for cases of "police brutality, extortion, extrajudicial killings and harassment issues in Lagos" (Rinu 7 October 2022).

Furthermore, in Nigeria, engaging in feminist work that challenges the interests of the State comes with tensions and risks. Women who do such work often experience double attacks from security agencies and online male mobs

who are apathetic to gendered experiences of police brutality faced by women. Rinu attested to her traumatic experiences during the movement, the threats targeted at her family, the seizure of her accounts by the government and the ceaseless online trolling that continues to date. FemCo also revealed the paranoia of being targeted by security agencies:

> For Dami, seeing her close family members panic every time she picked up her phone or relayed a new update to them was extremely heartbreaking. Jola had to fight off feelings of crippling paranoia and anxiety, so as not to panic her parents. Ozzy recalls times when she thought in horror she may never see her son again (para 24).

We have refrained from detailing the extent of vitriol in this article in an attempt to avoid fuelling concerted, purposeful and harmful tactics that undermine women's labour and agency.

The Threat of Feminised Corruption

Omotoso (2023) introduced the concept of "feminised corruption" among female political office holders in a paper that explored trends in the representation of women political subjects, which typify them as corrupt. This portrayal, according to Omotoso, makes more women visible among the corrupt in political spaces and "turns back to weaponise corruption against women" (10). FemCo activists including Kiki, Ayodele, Ozzy and F. K. Abudu emerged as political subjects through the transnational media space, despite not holding any political office. They gained visibility through social media before national traditional media began to spotlight them. However, they were drawn into a cycle that further expanded the utility of digital networks to feminise corruption, especially the misogynistic use of media to discourage women from venturing into politics and social movement organising. They were accused of lacking accountability and using the protest to amass wealth and embezzle funds, even after audit statements were released to the public (Feminist Coalition 2021).

As our interviewees affirmed, organisers of FemCo are indeed upwardly mobile women making strategic decisions, but there were also young women who had family members who depended on them at the same time that the Nigerian protesting collective counted on them. On the one hand, Patricia McFadden

had over two decades ago cautioned feminists about taking up responsibilities of self and State, as the lines between "responsibilities which men must assume, and especially men who traffic in the state" (McFadden 1997, 25) are subsumed under female nurturing tasks. On the other hand, Byfield (2012) underscores the strategic use of motherhood as a political platform by Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti, in the context of a cable to HRM Queen Elizabeth II on "behalf of millions of Nigerian mothers and children (who) protest vehemently against French Government's decision to test atomic bombs in [the] Sahara" (4). Ransome-Kuti emphasised the belief that women, specifically mothers, are well-prepared for political engagement due to their roles in nurturing citizens with values such as kindness, selflessness, and a commitment to progress. Asserting that managing a home effectively is synonymous with leading a full-fledged life as a citizen in one's country, she argued that the qualities instilled in women through motherhood made them ideal politicians. She defined citizenship not only as being born in a certain location but also as contributing positively to one's community enabled by qualities of patience, love, and sagacity which she argued that women possess. While a surface interpretation might suggest Ransome-Kuti's conservative view of women's societal roles, she subverted this logic (Byfield 2012). Instead of using this rhetoric as a delimiting biological determinist force to confine women to domestic spaces, she argued that these particular values that women possess were necessary for Nigerian politics. She further critiqued male leaders in Nigeria, accusing them of distorting the true meaning of politics through imprudence and dishonourable dealings.

Drawing from this backdrop, we interpret the maternal and larger familial ties of End SARS Women's Coalition as further underscoring the multifaceted nature of their engagement, as they carried the weight of familial and national dependence. This duality mirrors the intricate balance that mothers, as articulated by Ransome-Kuti, navigate between personal responsibilities and societal contributions. While Ransome-Kuti argued that it was this specific experience and values that made women honorary political subjects, the people who weaponised corruption at the expense of the coalition seemed oblivious to this fact. Therefore, we interpret FemCo's final definitive statement, *In Our Own Words : The Feminist Coalition*, as one final act of labour for the movement and a radical act of life writing against claims of feminised corruption. They

addressed the matter by themselves, after several instances of being spoken for by detractors, including the press. As Omotoso (2023) suggests that women use tools necessary to survive and thrive within mediated spaces, we spotlight the tech-savviness of the FemCo activists that enables their critical survival and resistance to the scourge of feminised corruption:

> We realised restrictions had been placed on the Nigerian bank accounts we were using and our payment link with Flutterwave was deactivated… People often ask us, why Bitcoin? As a group of tech-savvy women, some who work in the crypto industry, across fintech and also invest in crypto assets, Bitcoin was a no-brainer. It came naturally to us because of the many use cases and advantages: remittance, cross-border payments, privacy and transparency to name a few (Feminist Coalition 2020 para 25).

Despite the challenges and consequences faced by women activists during the movement, through their actions, many women who were previously hesitant to associate themselves with feminism felt empowered to do so. According to FemCo, that was a pivotal moment for them. In the words of Buky Williams (Mohammed et al. 2022), "it just showed what feminist organising looked like in ways that Nigerians had not respected or seen as beneficial to them". Rinu also emphasised that this period showed that the phenomenon of women fighting against State oppression and police brutality was not occurring in a vacuum. Rather, it was indicative of a broader continuity in which women's organising and mobilising have been recurring features of numerous struggles against various forms of oppression.

Conclusion

In this article, we have explored the transgenerational characteristics of Nigerian feminist activism. We engaged with Dieng's intersectional perspective to understand the intertwined dynamics of class, gender, and generation. By doing so, we identified points of convergence and similar patterns of organising which have become more pronounced over time, despite evident tensions and risks in Nigeria's feminist social movements. These include a persistent pursuit of specified goals, conscious networking across classes, and a desire for a strong feminist identity. These findings were substantiated within concepts of radical care, ethics of vigour and feminised corruption. The centrality of communication is also evident transgenerationally, with feminisms both old and new enacting a genealogy of activist resistance hinged on intentional documentation in their own words, through pamphlets and digital media, to challenge misrepresentation and disinformation. Overall, our analysis demonstrates how the work of #EndSARS feminist activists, although now carried out with digital tools, reveals a continuum of women resisting oppressive structures similar to those experienced by feminist activists of the colonial past.

Notes

1. Oduala, Rinu. Zoom interview. 7 October 2022.
2. Agunwa, Nkemakonam Cynthia. Zoom interview. 31 May 2022
3. Oduala, Rinu. Zoom interview. 7 October 2022.

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