

**ASUU's Prolonged Strike, a way forward for the Nigeria Academia;  
Strategic non-violent action.**

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**Abstract:**

The Nigerian Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) embarked on prolonged strikes from 1999-2022 demanding that the Federal Government (FG) fund public universities to be competitive and ranked among the world's best universities. The strikes have yielded some infrastructural development, but have not raised Nigerian public universities to world standard. Thus, the continued struggle of ASUU with the FG. However, prolonged strikes contribute to low standards in public universities too: contracted school years, half-baked graduates, and extended course time by two or three years. It denies Nigerian graduates enough skills to make them competitive in the job market. Hence, a question about the justification for the use of prolonged strikes and a way forward for ASUU. This article employs a qualitative content analysis of a strategic nonviolent action case study of students in the Ethnic Albanian civil struggle in 2000 with that of ASUU. The sources are books, journals, newspaper articles, and internet databases. This article finds that ASUU needs to use massive strategic nonviolent actions to succeed. Additionally, it must rely less on traditional, religious, National Assembly of Nigeria members and other elite leaders. Rather, it must partner with students and their parents to succeed with massive actions. Public university students belong to the 133 million Nigerian families living in poverty. The students directly benefit from an international standard of public education in Nigeria. If ASUU adopts this new way, it will gain internal cooperation and solidarity; empower students and ordinary Nigerians with the knowledge of how to wage resistance against counterproductive policies of the Nigerian government.

**Keywords:** ASUU, students, strategic, nonviolent, action, prolonged, strikes

**Introduction**

*The Problem with Prolonged ASUU Strikes*

The Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) embarked on a struggle with the Federal Government (FG) over regular Visitation Panels to universities, staff salary shortfalls, injections of revitalization funds, payment of earned academic allowances, the use of the University Transparency and Accountability Solution (UTAS) as its payment platform, to stop the proliferation of federal and state universities and the renegotiation of conditions of service since 1999 to

date.<sup>1</sup>The National President of ASSU, Prof. Emmanuel Osodeke illustrates the reasons for these demands: laboratories are in shambles, lecture halls for 100-200 students now accommodate 1000 students, and hostel rooms for four or five students take about 16 with all using stoves. ASSU insists that Nigerian universities be made world standard so that other countries will send their students to Nigeria. However, we send our students to the Republic of Benin, Ghana, Malaysia, etc., but nobody wants to come to Nigeria to study or lecture.<sup>2</sup> ASSU has a cause, but its chief method, prolonged strikes, for its struggle appears problematic: five months in 1999, three months in 2001, six months in 2003, three months in 2007, four months in 2009, five months in 2010, about two months in 2011, five months in 2017, nine months in 2020, and eight months in 2022.<sup>3</sup> These prolonged strikes have achieved moderate success in terms of infrastructural development that can be seen in federal and state tertiary institutions. Nonetheless, the strikes also generate unintended consequences: rushed school years leading to half-baked graduates, and course extension time from two or three years. It pushes up the average age of Nigerian graduates, demoralises students; offers an ideal time for students to be involved in crime; and causes high anxiety and fear in students and parents that a university education is worthless. Moreover, it denies the Nigerian graduate vital skills and as such less and less employable in the job market.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, ASUU needs new ways of carrying out its worthy struggle. This article proposes that ASUU adopt full strategic nonviolent actions (SNA) as more effective and do not require long periods of strikes to achieve its aims and objectives.

#### **Research Questions**

What nonviolent methods does ASUU use for its demands?  
What new nonviolent methods can ASUU use for its demands?

#### **Aims of this article**

To discover the nonviolent approaches ASUU uses for its demands.  
To illustrate new nonviolent approaches ASUU should use in pursuance of its demands.

#### **The Significance of this Article**

The Nigerian National Development Plan (NDP) 2021-2025 seeks to lift 35 million Nigerians out of poverty and create 21 million full-time jobs. It wants

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<sup>1</sup>Joseph Olaoluwan, "ASSU Strike and The Realities of a Failed System," *Sahara Reporters*, 14 January 2019, accessed 19 January 2022, ASUU Strike And The Realities Of A Failed System By Joseph Olaoluwa | Sahara Reporters,

<sup>2</sup>Emmanuel Osodeke, "All we are asking for, is to upgrade our universities to world standard," 18 December 2021, accessed 19 February 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YEDuLX0xTlc&t=69s>.

<sup>3</sup>Bayo Wahab, "All the Times ASUU has Gone on Strike Since 1999," 5 November 2018, accessed 9 January 2022, <https://www.pulse.ng/communities/student/all-the-times-asuu-has-gone-on-strike-since-1999/5jtb8cs.cour>.

<sup>4</sup>Olaoluwan, "ASSU Strike."

toraise the revenue-to-GDP ratio by 15 percent as well as improve the health and education of the population.<sup>5</sup> However, the Nigeria Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) 2022 shows that nearly 133 million Nigerians, 63% of Nigerians, entered multi-dimensionally poverty and that one-quarter experience all possible deprivations.<sup>6</sup>The type of education demanded by ASUU is an international standard, where students and lecturers propound theories and apply them to real-life situations that can reverse poverty in Nigeria. The educational system is practiced in Singapore, Malaysia, Hong Kong, and Finland where undergraduate theses form part of research that is used for building an economy, transforming the power sector, and running governments.<sup>7</sup> Additionally, this level of education will reverse the trend reported by the Central Banks of Nigeria that in the past 7 years of President Buhari's regime, Nigerians have paid about 3.5 billion USD to other countries for educational purposes. This is more than three times what Buhari's regime has invested in the Nigerian education sector. If the Nigerian education system worked, we will use this money to develop our educational infrastructure. Moreover, foreign students will come and study here and pay us in dollars like in the past; Nigerian leaders will not run abroad for treatment, they will attend our Teaching Hospitals; no 41-story building will collapse. This is how Nigeria will be a true giant of Africa; Nigerian academics will not migrate to other countries; and the children of the poor too will gain a good education in our universities. They will be some of the best in the world as it was in the '60s, '70s, and '80s.<sup>8</sup> Additionally, if the strategic nonviolent actions (SNA) explored in this article are adopted by ASUU and succeed, ASUU will be empowered and increased in self-respect and confidence in its ability to influence counterproductive policies of the government. ASUU will gain greater unity, internal cooperation, and solidarity. Moreover, it will empower other non-state actors and ordinary Nigerians with the knowledge of how to wage resistance against the counterproductive policies of the Nigerian government.

### **Theoretical Framework: Strategic Nonviolent Action (SNA)**

SNA is about making peace, a struggle for justice and love at personal, communal, national, and international levels. It is not about winning a conflict even in the face of repression. SNA adopts social, psychological, economic, and political approaches to apply pressure on an opponent for its struggles.<sup>9</sup>SNA proves effective when waged against those who hold significant administrative,

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<sup>5</sup>Nigeria's National Development Plan (NDP), 2021-2025, "Forward," accessed 21 November 2022, [https://nationalplanning.gov.ng/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/NDP-2021-2025\\_AA\\_FINAL\\_PRINTING.pdf](https://nationalplanning.gov.ng/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/NDP-2021-2025_AA_FINAL_PRINTING.pdf).

<sup>6</sup>Nigerian National Bureau of Statistics, "National MPI - 0.257," accessed 21 November 2022, <https://www.nigeriapovertymap.com/>.

<sup>7</sup>Olaoluwan, "ASSU Strike."

<sup>8</sup>Channels TV, Obi Replies Saludo, ASUU on Half Salary, accessed 16 November 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oZp7DvQrp2w>.

<sup>9</sup>Gene Sharp, *The Role of Power in Non-violent Struggle, Monograph Series Number 3* (Albert Einstein Institute, 2000), 1, accessed 11 February 2022, <https://www.nonviolent-conflict.org/resource/role-power-nonviolent-struggle/>.

economic, political, and judicial power<sup>10</sup> such as in the case of ASUU and the Federal Government (FG). SNA wages its struggle in three stages using confrontational and constructive actions to succeed.

In the first stage, it brings the issues into the public domain by using nonviolent confrontational actions, protest, and persuasion: demonstrations, petitions, leaflets, vigils, marches, pilgrimages, picketing, “haunting” officials, public meetings, issuing and distributing protest literature, renouncing honours, etc.<sup>11</sup> Additionally, it constructs alternative actions to the issues for correction e.g., teach-in lectures.<sup>12</sup> Stage one publishes and convinces the public of its struggle. There are several ways<sup>13</sup> of communicating with the public: messaging: passing the “key messages”; press releases since it gets noticed; designated media person who engages the press regularly; and meeting journalists and agencies at national and international levels. It uses letters, and a page newsletter for the public; and constructs websites for the struggle. Moreover, in today’s world, it engages with alternative media: Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, etc.; it means planning a comprehensive media campaign. In stage two, SNA deals with legal—social, economic, and political non-cooperation actions about the issues raised. At this stage, its actions are non-cooperation: legal—strikes, go-slows, group disobedience, consumer boycotts, traders boycott, rent refusal, revenue refusal, international embargos, election boycott, etc.<sup>14</sup> Additionally, SNA may take constructive actions: organise fair trade, alternative social and economic activities, ethical investments, and nonviolent interventions.<sup>15</sup> These actions raise the cost of governance and lower benefits for those involved in perpetrating injustice.

In stage three, SNA applies illegal interventions in dealing with its struggle. Thus, its confrontational action consists of civil disobedience: sit-ins, blockades, tax resistance, strikes, war resistance, nonviolent obstruction and invasion, and creating parallel social orders; alternative economic institutions; and parallel governments. Its constructive actions consist of civil usurpation: sanctuary movements, pirate radio, reverse strikes, etc.<sup>16</sup> These actions redirect power away from those committing injustice. SNA practiced at these three levels has proven successful over the centuries.

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<sup>10</sup>Sharp, *The Role of Power*, 2.

<sup>11</sup>Andrew Dey, *Handbook for Non-violent Campaigns* 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, editor, (Published by War Resisters’ International, June 2014), 66, accessed 25 November 2022, [https://www.nonviolent-conflict.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/wri\\_handbook\\_2014\\_inner\\_AMENDED.compressed1.pdf](https://www.nonviolent-conflict.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/wri_handbook_2014_inner_AMENDED.compressed1.pdf). See also, Sharp, *The Role of Power*, 10.

<sup>12</sup>Dey, *Handbook for Non-violent*, 66.

<sup>13</sup>Dey, *Handbook for Non-violent*, 131-135.

<sup>14</sup>Dey, *Handbook for Non-violent*, 66. See also Sharp, *The Role of Power*, 10.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid.

A lesson, former US President Obama learned when asserting that SNA is ineffective in the case of terrorism while receiving his Nobel Peace Prize in 2009. It was pointed out to him that, "Regan did not end the Cold War—Leftist Intellectuals did"<sup>17</sup> through SNA. That it has, "... gained important rights for millions of oppressed people around the world ... successfully brought down, some of the most ruthless regimes of the last 100 years."<sup>18</sup> It, "is effective in deterring and defending against attacks, both external and internal, self-reliant ... does not place one's fate in the hands of powerful friends likely to serve their interest first."<sup>19</sup> One important study that analysed 323 resistance campaigns over the last century found that major nonviolent campaigns achieved 53 success compared to 26 percent from violent resistance campaigns.<sup>20</sup> Given the success rate of full SNA, ASUU should adopt a full SNA approach to its struggle.

Nonetheless, SNA challenges ASUU's prolonged strikes with its unintended consequences: rushed school teaching, half-baked graduates, extended course time of two or three years or more, and pushing up the average age of Nigerian graduates. It tends to demoralise students and create high anxiety and fear in students and parents that university education has lost its worth. It denies Nigerian graduates valuable skills that are needed for the job market.<sup>21</sup> These are immoral and destructive towards the Nigerian student and the people that ASUU seeks to defend in the face of injustice. Thus the challenge, as one of the founders of SNA, Martin Luther King Jr, fundamentally holds, "destructive means cannot bring constructive ends, because the means represent the ideal-in-the-making and the end-in-progress, immoral means cannot bring moral ends, for the ends are pre-existent in the means."<sup>22</sup> Long before King Jr, Gandhi as the leader of the Indian independence movement held the philosophy and strategy of nonviolence that "just means lead to just ends"; that is, it is irrational to try to use violence to achieve a peaceful society. He believed that Indians must not use violence or hatred in their fight for freedom from colonialism.<sup>23</sup> Hence ASUU cannot continue with a nonviolent strategy that is proven destructive to the educational sector of Nigeria. As a labour union, ASUU must act in keeping with A.J. Muste, a long-time leader of labour, and civil rights, famously said: "There is no way to peace — peace is the way."<sup>24</sup> Therefore, this article uses SNA theory to analyse ASUU's struggle in comparison to one

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<sup>17</sup>Eric Stoner, "A Lesson on Non-violent for the President," (Washington, DC: Foreign Policy In Focus, 17 December 2009), accessed 26 November 2022, [https://fpif.org/a\\_lesson\\_on\\_nonviolence\\_for\\_the\\_president/](https://fpif.org/a_lesson_on_nonviolence_for_the_president/).

<sup>18</sup>Stoner, "A Lesson on Non-violent."

<sup>19</sup>Gene Sharp, *Self-Reliant Defense without Bankruptcy or War*, (The Albert Einstein Institution, 1992), p. 7.

<sup>20</sup>Maria J. Stephan and Erica Chenoweth, "Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict," *International Security*, Vol. 33, No. 1, (Summer 2008): 7—44, accessed 15 November 2022, <http://dio.org/10.1162/isec.2008.33.1.7>.

<sup>21</sup>Olaoluwajan, "ASSU Strike."

<sup>22</sup>Martin Luther King Jr, *Strength to Love* (Harper & Row, Publishers, 1963), 101.

<sup>23</sup>United Nations, International Day of Non-Violence, 2 October, accessed 22 November 22, 2022, <https://www.un.org/en/observances/non-violence-day>.

<sup>24</sup>Abraham Johannes (A.J.) Muste cited in Eric Stoner, A Lesson on Nonviolence.

successful case of SNA by students so that it will provide a way forward for ASUU and its struggle with the Nigerian government.

### ***Scope of this Article***

This article covers ASUU's strikes from 1999 to 2022; it explores how it uses nonviolent methods in its struggle with the Federal Government to improve public universities in Nigeria.

### ***Methodology***

This article employs a comparative qualitative content analysis of a strategic nonviolent action (SNA) case study in modern times with that of ASUU. It is a university student SNA; what forms its choice is the fact that students are judged to be the best partners of ASUU in its struggle in this article. The article reviews books, reports, journals and newspaper articles, and internet websites/databases like YouTube for its content analysis. This approach enables the article to discover a new approach in which ASUU can effectively achieve its aims using SNA that avoids destructive means to achieve its end—an international standard of education in Nigeria.

### ***Comparative Strategic Nonviolent Action (SNA), Case Studies***

There are two case studies for this article: The "Otpor," and the ASUU case studies.

**The "Otpor" case study:** This is an Ethnic Albanian civil struggle culminating in the "Otpor," a Serbian word for "resistance" started in Kosovo by a small group of university student activists in their 20s.<sup>25</sup> I have chosen this case because the students' SNA helped resolve this struggle after a failed military campaign. The "Otpor," SNA received help from the U.S.: National Endowment for Democracy (NED) agency.<sup>26</sup> The "Otpor," was a year-long civil disobedience from January 2000 to 6th October 2000; a series of activities culminating with a general strike on 6 October 2000. 70,000 grassroots activists from Belgrade and all the provinces participated in it. Interestingly, they had no national leader or central committee; Belgrade sent out materials, but local activists generated their actions. The non-centralisation of the resistance was a strategic decision so that their leaders could not be arrested at the same time. The "Otpor" goal was to remove Slobodan Milosevic, the President of Serbia from the ballot box and put in place a democratic government that obeys the rule of law and order.

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<sup>25</sup>International Center on Nonviolent Conflict (ICNC), "Bringing Down a Dictator," accessed 20 November 2022, <https://www.nonviolent-conflict.org/bringing-dictator-english/>.

<sup>26</sup>John Feffer, Stephen Zunes, "SERVIA: 10 YEARS LATER, A Decade After the United States Bombed their Country, Serbs are Still Dealing with the After-effects of the War," (Washington, DC: Foreign Policy In Focus, 17 June 2009), accessed 26 November 2022, [https://fpif.org/serbia\\_10\\_years\\_later/](https://fpif.org/serbia_10_years_later/).

**The ASUU case study:** This is a struggle for the implementation of the 2009 Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN)/ASUU agreement as renegotiated in 2021 based on ILO's collective bargaining principles; of all outstanding provisions in the 7 February 2021 FGN/ASUU Memorandum of Action and the immediate deployment of ASUU's robust human management and compensation pay platform, called UTAS. The payment of Earned Academic Allowance (EAA) and promotion arrears to members of ASUU, and the release of the report of the Presidential Visitation Panels to the Federal Universities 2021 and for the FG to take immediate action on the recommendations of the Committee on State Universities.<sup>27</sup> This struggle aims to stop the FG from sub-standardising public universities in Nigeria as it has done with public primary and secondary education;<sup>28</sup> to stop ASUU members from abandoning their jobs for farming and taxi driving; to upgrade public universities in Nigeria to world standards.<sup>29</sup> This ASUU struggle started in the 70s, but this article covers strikes from 1999 to 2022. It presents and examines the two case studies according to the SNA theory to demonstrate the way forward for ASUU's struggle with the FG.

#### ***Stage One: Bringing Grievances to Public Consciousness***

At this stage, SNA actors publish and convince the public of their grievances to gain followership. Some SNA scholars, Mohandas Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr, and Gene Sharp prescribe this stage based on the fact that the power of political authority is not intrinsic; it depends on those ruled.<sup>30</sup> In a democratic society like that of ASUU and the student in case studies, the political authorities' power depends on the legitimacy accorded by citizens. If individuals, groups, and institutions refuse to cooperate sufficiently, the political authorities cannot maintain their policies.<sup>31</sup> How do the two case studies bring their grievances to the public?

**The student's case study:** In the beginning, the "Otpor simply improvised, using their wits and good instincts to inform the public about their activities."<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>27</sup>Deborah Tolu-Kolawole, "Looming Strike: Tell Govt to Honour Our Demands-ASUU to Stakeholders," *Punch*, 9 December 2021, accessed 19 February 2022, <https://punchng.com/looming-strike-tell-govt-to-honour-our-demands-asuu-to-stakeholders/>.

<sup>28</sup>Peter OkutuAbakaliki, "FG Decimating Lecturers with Forced Hunger-ASUU Cries Out," *Vanguard*, 26 August 2022, accessed 9 December 2022, <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2022/08/fg-decimating-lecturers-with-forced-hunger-asuu-cries-out/>.

<sup>29</sup>Osodeke, "All we are Asking for."

<sup>30</sup>Sharp, *The Role of Power*, 3.

<sup>31</sup>Sharp, *The Role of Power*, 5.

<sup>32</sup>ICNC, "Bringing Down a Dictator."

However, after studying SNA, they adopted its methods in their campaigns. The students created a bilingual website and used irony and sarcasm as part of their strategy; trained 30,000 volunteers to monitor elections, mobilized its national network, and used neighbourhood kids as organisers. The students built an email network, and distributed leaflets and six tons of stickers in seven weeks.<sup>33</sup> These students formed a community with local people as it promoted support for their struggle.

**The ASUU case study:** ASUU uses its National President or local chapter officials as spokespersons. For example, see the press release of the Chairman and Secretary of ASUU, Michael Okpara University of Agriculture.<sup>34</sup> They also use any opportunity to meet with journalists and media houses to call on “well-meaning Nigerians to appeal to the FG to quickly resolve its issues.”<sup>35</sup> This is how ASUU seeks to bring its struggle to the people.

### Sources of the People’s Power

Those who embark on SNA need others to maintain corporate resistance, and so must look to the structural “loci of power”: individuals, social groups, and institutions—families, social classes, religious and traditional groups; smaller governmental bodies; voluntary organisations; and political parties that will support the struggle.<sup>36</sup>

**The student’s case study:** Hence, the university students carried out a socially constructive programme to attract the youth and provincial farmers: On Milosevic’s birthday, the students made a mock cake for him. The “Otpor” staged raucous rock concerts and guerrilla theatre in the streets; constructed a lunar eclipse observation featuring the gradual obliteration of Milosevic’s image. On the Orthodox New Year’s, Eve 13 January 2000, the student party, at midnight showed the names and pictures of those who were killed in Milosevic’s wars; they also demonstrated a public parody of Milosevic’s socialist party congress.<sup>37</sup> These activities attracted people to support the “Otpor” movement. The students also used “the clenched fist” as a symbol; the slogans “Bite the System;” and “Resistance, because I love Serbia” to further strengthen their struggle. They filled the country with stickers and leaflets containing these symbols and slogans. The “Otpor” became a ubiquitous brand name, as familiar as Coca-Cola and Nike.<sup>38</sup> Thus, the students got about 70,000 youth to support their struggle.

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<sup>33</sup>ICNC, “Bringing Down a Dictator.”

<sup>34</sup>Agency Report, “ASUU Strike: Lecturers’ Union Rejects Government’s Salary Increase Offer,” *Premium Times*, accessed 12 December 2022, <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/top-news/551083-asuu-strike-lecturers-union-rejects-governments-salary-increase-offer.html>.

<sup>35</sup>Agency Report, “ASUU Strike.”

<sup>36</sup>Sharp, *The Role of Power*, 7.

<sup>37</sup>ICNC, “Bringing Down a Dictator.”

<sup>38</sup>ICNC, “Bringing Down a Dictator.”

**The ASUU case study:** ASUU has taken time to appeal to some stakeholders to support their struggle. For example, in December 2021, ASUU suspended a strike and argued that there were efforts from patriotic Nigerians both within and outside Nigeria to ensure an amicable resolution of the struggle. These groups were the student union, media houses, traditional rulers, and civil society.<sup>39</sup> Moreover, ASSU called off its 2022, eight-month strike after the intervention of the Speaker of the Nigerian House of Representatives, Femi Gbajabamila; however, he could not convince the FG to reverse its policy of “no work, no pay” to ASUU members.<sup>40</sup> ASUU has also found some support from students at times, e.g., on 16 February 2022, students of the University of Benin threatened to shut down Benin City if the FG failed to resolve ASUU’s issues.<sup>41</sup> It is within this context that ASSU continues with its struggle with some support from the public.

#### ***Stage Two: Legal SNA Concerning Demands***

At this stage, SNA raises the cost of governance and lowers benefits for the political authority involved in perpetrating injustice. Nevertheless, SNA actors have to contend with repression by using corporate resistance that helps to limit the enforcement of repressive instruments. It often happens that political authorities who face serious strategic non-cooperation and disobedience resort to repression to enforce and maintain their policies. Enforcement is possible because while some people refuse to cooperate with the authorities, others remain loyal to them.<sup>42</sup> Usually, the instruments of repression are censorship, confiscation of funds, and property, severance of communications, economic pressures, arrests, imprisonments, use of agents provocateurs, threats of future punishments, etc. However, SNA scholars argue that repression and even brutality should not be a reason to stop strategic nonviolent action as it can withstand repression following nonviolent discipline. Activists should learn to maintain discipline in the face of suffrage and persist with SNA, and given time, the end of the policy will be in sight.<sup>43</sup> How have the two case studies treated their issues in stage two?

**The student’s case study:** The student’s actions withstood the oppressive machinery of Milosevic even with the in-fighting and rivalry between opposition political parties that strengthened Milosevic. The students applied intense pressure on the political parties to form a unified front. As Milosevic’s popularity slipped downward, he called for elections ten months ahead of

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<sup>39</sup>Ezigbo and Sowule, “ASUU Shelves Proposed Strikes.”

<sup>40</sup>Francis Ugwu, “Fresh Strike Looms in University as ASUU Holds NEC Meeting,” *Daily Post*, 4 December 2022, accessed 9 December 2022, <https://dailypost.ng/2022/12/04/fresh-strike-looms-in-universities-as-asuu-holds-nec-meeting/>.

<sup>41</sup>UNIBEN Students Protest, Promise to Shutdown Activities in Benin City, 16 February 2022, accessed 10 December 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vmey9NT0HOU>.

<sup>42</sup>Sharp, *The Role of Power*, 5.

<sup>43</sup>Sharp, *The Role of Power*, 6 & 12.

schedule. The opposition parties took the opportunity and formed a coalition of 18 parties, "Democratic Opposition of Serbia (DOS)," behind a single candidate, a law professor, and the leader of a small party, Vojislav Kostunica. DOS campaigned at the grassroots mainly in the provinces, a one-on-one, house-to-house campaign, gaining what they would have missed if they had stayed only in Belgrade like Milosevic. At the same time, the students took to SNA: Otpor's marketing department invented the slogan - "Gotov Je" or "He's finished!" -it took off wildly. The students printed stickers, "He's Finished" that were attached to cars, walls, traffic signs, and even faces. They distributed six tons of the stickers in seven weeks.<sup>44</sup> Indeed, the cost of staying in power was raised for Milosevic.

**The ASUU case study:** From 1999 to 2022, ASSU has carried out prolonged strikes: five months in 1999, three months in 2001, six months in 2003, three months in 2007, four months in 2009, five months in 2010, about two months in 2011, five months in 2017, nine months in 2020, eight months in 2022.<sup>45</sup> ASUU argues that the prolonged strikes are necessary to compel the FG to upgrade public universities in Nigeria to world standards. The strikes have saved Nigerian public tertiary institutions from collapse, but they are not world standards. There is an improved infrastructure that can be seen in the 49 Federal Universities and 59 State Universities. The schools take in more than 90% of university candidates as against 111 private universities in Nigeria. ASSU has also stopped the FG from increasing tuition fees in public universities; has produced a constructive programme UTAS. However, the FG does not fund public education adequately, rather it has turned up its oppressive instrument against ASUU as a result of its demands.

The FG has commenced a "no work, no pay" policy for ASUU members while at the same time striking Nigeria's Research Institute and the Joint Health Sector Union (JOHESU) to receive their full pay. ASUU calls this a policy of decimating public university lecturers with forced hunger as it was practiced during the Nigeria-Biafra civil war; the FG wants to annihilate its members and their dependents.<sup>46</sup> ASUU President, Prof. Emmanuel Osodeke accused the FG of using hunger as a tool to force its members to return to the classroom.<sup>47</sup> Osodeke insisted that the FG thought holding ASUU members' salaries for two or three months would mean that they will come begging to go back to work. Nonetheless, he argues that ASUU members are intellectuals and can withstand suffrage.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>44</sup>CNC, "Bringing Down a Dictator."

<sup>45</sup>Wahab, "All the Times ASUU."

<sup>46</sup>Abakaliki, "FG Decimating Lecturers."

<sup>47</sup>Don Silas, "Strike: FG Using Hunger Against Us, Held Our Salaries Since February-ASUU," *Daily Post*, 3 August 2022, accessed 9 December 2022, <https://dailypost.ng/2022/08/03/strike-fg-using-hunger-against-us-held-our-salaries-since-february-asuu/>.

<sup>48</sup>Silas, "Strike: FG Using Hunger Against Us."

ASUU's repression also comes from those who should be stakeholders in their struggle, the National Association of Nigerian Students (NANS). Even when students go out to protest against the FG, they turn their anger against ASUU. For example, on 16 February 2022, the students threatened to shut down government operations, but the NANS President then, Mujahid Shaibu said that students are at the receiving end of ASUU strikes and that it has become its tradition to go on strike every year without consideration to students concerns.<sup>49</sup>The students went out on 28 February 2022 to protest against the then-four weeks of warning strikes.<sup>50</sup>Its current President, Sunday Asefon claimed that ASUU was selfish, insensitive, and wicked; ASUU pursued a narrow interest of its members if it was demanding six months' salary arrears for work not done. Lecturers have forgotten that they use university authorities to expel, suspend and rusticate students for merely protesting for improved welfare such as water, power, habitable hostels, etc. Moreover, lecturers fail students for asking questions or taking a position on university matters. Hence, ASUU masquerades as struggling for the improvement of tertiary education and the student; it struggles for its narrow interest.<sup>51</sup>Students have failed to support ASUU massively and thus, the impasse with the FG, it seems. How can things change?

### SNA Change Mechanism

Gene Sharp argues that there are three ways SNA can bring about change: **First**, when a political authority faces SNA, it may be converted to the cause: it may agree that the SNA actors have a superior argument, reason, or emotional and moral high grounds. Nonetheless, conversions occur occasionally.<sup>52</sup>

**The student's case study:** Milosevic was not converted as his regime tried frantically to choke off free expression: he took over Belgrade's largest TV station, two independent radio stations, and a newspaper, but Serbia's independent news media, especially in the provinces, refused to be intimidated.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>49</sup>ASUU Strike, University Students to Shut Down Government Operations Nationwide, 16 February 2022, accessed 10 December 2022, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XCcQqwCC\\_nE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XCcQqwCC_nE).

<sup>50</sup>Recap: Students Protest ASUU Strike as Minister Walks out, 28 February 2022, accessed 10 December 2022, Recap: Students Protest ASUU Strike As Minister Walks Out - YouTube.

<sup>51</sup>Josiah Oluwole, "Strikes: NANS Backs FG's No Work No Pay Stance Against ASUU," *Premium Times*, 25 August, accessed 9 December 2022, <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/top-news/550581-strike-nans-backs-fgs-no-work-no-pay-stance-against-asuu.html>.

<sup>52</sup>Sharp, *The Role of Power*, 15.

<sup>53</sup>ICNC, "Bringing Down a Dictator."

**The ASUU case study:** ASUU has not been able to convince the Federal Government (FG) to fund sufficiently tertiary education; has not converted the FG.

**Second,** a political authority may not be converted, but may come to accommodate the demands of those using SNA: It may decide to give in to some of the SNA actor's demands because it is not worth the trouble to continue with the struggle, or that it anticipates defeat and so wishes to concede gracefully. In this sense, the political authority wants to undercut internal dissension, minimise losses, avoid a greater disaster, or save face and this is often the most common result of SNA.<sup>54</sup> This has been the case for both case studies.

**The student case study:** Milosevic accommodated the struggle because of the pressure put on him. On 27 July 2000, Milosevic called for an election ten months ahead of schedule, but to steal the election and claim the legitimacy of his regime; he knew that the opposition was unprepared for the election.

**The ASUU case study:** The FG accommodates the demands by offering to increase the salaries of ASUU members by 35% for professors and 25% for lecturers; an offer that was decided upon by the National Salaries, Income and Wages Commission and presented to the Prof. Nimi-Briggs-led FG/ASUU Renegotiation Committee. ASUU has refused this offer and argues that this is against the spirit of collective bargaining as agreed with FG.<sup>55</sup> The FG has also agreed to pay ASUU members' Earned Academic Allowances and some revitalisation funds but pays intermittently such that it distorts and devalues each payment.<sup>56</sup> Nonetheless, there is a set of third-stage SNA that can compel political authorities to submit to the struggle of SNA actors.

### ***Stage Three: Illegal SNA Concerning Demands***

In this stage, SNA redirects power away from those in authority that are committing injustice. The SNA is confrontational and primarily civil disobedience. The political authority's repressions generate fear and anxiety in SNA actors, but rather than cave in, actors increase their SNA to improve their chances of success. SNA actors apply creative and extensive actions in a skilful way such that they neutralise the political authorities' repressive instruments. SNA actors, in the face of repression, must persist and refuse to submit or retreat as compromising nonviolent discipline might lead to defeat.<sup>57</sup> How have the two case studies fared in this regard?

**The student case study:** Indeed, this was the case with the students, the Minister of Information declared on national television that "Otpor" was a terrorist organization, but the students sent out young men in their thousands;

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<sup>54</sup>Sharp, *The Role of Power*, 15.

<sup>55</sup>Agency Report, "ASUU Strike: Lecturers'.

<sup>56</sup>Ezigbo and Sowule, "ASUU Shelves Proposed Strikes."

<sup>57</sup>Sharp, *The Role of Power*, 12-13.

young men well known in their communities wearing T-shirts saying, "Otpor Terrorist." They organized concerts and town hall meetings showing the young people called terrorists by the Minister of information; this provoked laughter and anger in people such that the group gained sympathizers.

**The ASUU case study:** Similarly, ASUU has mandated its members to protest once a month or for a while over the withheld salaries. Universities of Lagos (UNILAG), Nsukka (UNN), Ibadan (UI), and Jos (UJ) have carried out these one-day strikes to continue the struggle over their demands.<sup>58</sup> Moreover, ASUU, Abuja Zone, has called on critical stakeholders in the education sector to encourage the FG to fulfil its agreement with ASUU to avert another round of strikes.<sup>59</sup> Nonetheless, SNA can still raise its bar to achieve its struggle such defiance as the FG.

SNA scholars argue that massive and widespread illegal defiance can overcome the repression of political authority. Massive illegal SNA paralyses the political authority's ability to apply repression and implement its policies; the failure of workers on a large scale to refuse assistance to the bureaucracy can suppress dictatorial authority. However, the political authority may retain some power and continue to exist as a body, able to capitulate or survive the imposed changes if there is no massive action taken.<sup>60</sup> How did the case studies carry out their massive campaigns?

**The student's case study:** Otpor trained 30,000 volunteers to carry out its massive campaign of monitoring the elections in over 70 cities in Serbia. On 24 September 2000, Election Day, they assigned election monitors to 10,000 polling stations to prevent fraud. At the end of voting, the independent tabulations showed at midnight that Vojislav Kostunica won the presidential election. However, Milosevic refused to accept the result and called for a runoff vote. The opposition parties, through Kostunica and Otpor, called for a general strike. A 17,000-member union of coal miners who produced 70% of Serbia's electricity started the strike; thousands of ordinary people supported and protected the miners from the police and army. In cities, taxi drivers formed slow-moving rolling blockades; public transport drivers park their buses at major intersections. Moreover, the students blockade roads, and men and women from all walks of life converged angrily on the capital, in convoys; they clogged the highways in every direction.<sup>61</sup> It is reported: "the police and army commanders never ordered their troops to fire because they knew that their kids were in that crowd and in some cases the police refused to obey ... their commanders"<sup>62</sup>—they had been working with Otpor on the ground secretly.

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<sup>58</sup>Ugwu, "Fresh Strike Looms in University."

<sup>59</sup>Tolu-Kolawole, "Looming Strike."

<sup>60</sup>Sharp, *The Role of Power*, 16.

<sup>61</sup>ICNC, "Bringing Down a Dictator."

<sup>62</sup>ICNC, "Bringing Down a Dictator."

At this point, SNA scholars argue that disintegration is possible: when the sources of power to the political authority are completely severed or dissolved. The authority cannot remain as a coherent body, it has to accept defeat—its power has been dissolved.<sup>63</sup> This was the case with the students.

**The student's case study:** Slobodan Milosevic conceded defeat and gave up power on 6 October 2000. Milosevic was indeed “finished” at last; his political career ended. He was arrested and sent for trial by the International Criminal Tribunal for Former Yugoslavia at The Hague on 1 April 2001.

**The ASUU case study:** ASUU has no massive planned action known to this research work.

### ***Comparative SNA Case Studies Analysis/Findings***

The students and ASUU have clear objectives in their struggles. The students wanted to replace Slobodan Milosevic at the poll, and ASUU seeks to upgrade the Nigerian public universities to a world standard.

### **Stage One: Bringing Grievances to Public Consciousness**

On the one hand, the students who used their creativity in interacting with the people changed their methods to strategic nonviolent action (SNA) approaches once they studied SNA. The “Otpor” set up a bilingual website, and use fun—irony, and sarcasm to communicate with people; they form a kid network in the neighbourhood to conduct their affairs; they set up an email network and produced tons of leaflets and stickers distributed to inform people of their struggle. Given this Otpor media campaign approach, it became a household name, and about 70,000 youth joined the struggle.

On the other hand, ASUU uses spokespersons, usually the national or local chapter leaders to communicate with journalists and the mass media with the hope of informing the people of its struggle. ASUU has also met with religious and traditional rulers and the National Assembly of Nigeria (NASS) leadership to mediate in its struggle with the FG. How can ASUU expect sincere support from NASS when ASUU President berated NASS for taking “jumbo” pay at the detriment of lecturers; insists that the cost of governance in this country is too high, but that to increase the salaries of lecturers seems to be a big problem for the FG.<sup>64</sup> ASUU places its faith in these elite plays in the hands of powerful friends likely to serve their interests first, SNA theorists would argue.<sup>65</sup> Hence, ASUU uses less of SNA approaches in communicating its key messages with the people. ASUU presents its key message in an elite language; its message may not attract ordinary people's attention like that of the students because of the

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<sup>63</sup>Sharp, *The Role of Power*, 16.

<sup>64</sup>Ezigbo and Sowule, “ASUU Shelves Proposed Strikes.”

<sup>65</sup>Sharp, *Self-Reliant Defense without Bankruptcy or War*, p. 7.

presentation mode. Perhaps the reason why ASUU is a household name, but for the wrong reason, it keeps out students from public universities.

It seems that ASUU has not targeted students and parents in their struggle as serious stakeholders. However, students and parents are the direct beneficiaries of ASUU's demands, as such, they must be part of the struggle. ASUU must remember that students and parents are a formidable force given their numbers and they are potentially the vehicle for carrying out massive and wild-spread SNA: these are professors, lecturers, wives, sons and daughters of ASUU members; these are policymakers, security operatives, the police and army officers who are students. ASUU ignores these stakeholders to its detriment. There are problems with the leadership of NANS. It is not like the NANS that fought for the right of the students; today it is bought over by the political class.<sup>66</sup> This problem ASUU can overcome even if it means setting up a parallel student union body for SNA in stage three of its struggle.

### **Stage Two: Legal SNA Concerning Demands**

**The student case study:** The students pressured the divided political parties to unite their front thus, they formed the Democratic Opposition of Serbia (DOS). They staged rock concerts, showed images of those killed in the Milosevic war, and acted in a mock Milosevic socialist party congress. The students also had a symbol for their struggle: "clenched fist" and a slogan, "bite the system." Otpor's marketing department invented the slogan - "Gotov Je" or "He's Finished!" – it took off wildly. The students printed stickers, "He's Finished" that were attached to cars, walls, traffic signs, and even faces; they distributed six tons of their stickers in seven weeks. They trained over 30,000 individuals to help monitor elections in 10,000 polling stations. Thus, the students raised the cost of governance and lowered Milosevic's political authority.

**The ASUU case study:** ASUU has carried out short and prolonged strikes mainly from 1999 to 2022. It produced a constructive project, UTAS. ASUU's demands are in an elite language: on TV and Radio shows soliciting support from the public or, stakeholders. ASUU also holds town hall meetings for their members to understand and discourse the way forward. However, the unintended consequences of these prolonged strikes have turned the students against ASUU and its struggle as we have seen in the section above. In short, ASUU has not raised the cost of governance and lowered benefits for the Nigerian political authority in its actions; thus, it has an impasse with the FG.

**Conversion:** on the possibility that SNA causes conversion, both the students and ASUU did not succeed in converting their political authority. However, both secured accommodation from the political authority:

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<sup>66</sup>Olaoluwan, "ASSU Strike."

**The student case study:** Milosevic called for early elections, 10 months ahead to return political power.

**The ASUU case study:** The Federal Government (FG) proposes to increase the salaries of ASUU members by 35% for professors and 25% for lecturers; It agrees to pay ASUU members its Earned Academic Allowances and revitalisation funds but it pays intermittently such that it devalues each payment. ASUU has succeeded in deterring the FG from increasing tuition fees in public universities. This particular fit is of great benefit to 133 million Nigerians, 63% of Nigerians, in multidimensional poverty and one-quarter in all possible deprivations.<sup>67</sup> These families cannot afford to pay higher tuition fees at public universities. Hence, ASUU needs to communicate clearly to students and parents that it is struggling for them as this will provoke more sympathy or support from students and parents to its struggle. This is how ASUU can raise the cost of poor governance and lower benefits for the Federal Government's political authority such as funding inadequate tertiary education in Nigeria. If this fails, there is the third stage of SNA to turn to.

### **Stage Three: Illegal SNA Concerning Demands**

**The student case study: First**, the student, when they were declared terrorists, went from province to province and in Belgrade showing their members who were sons and daughters, kids of households in the neighbourhood such that they ridiculed the declaration.

**Second**, once Milosevic lost at the polls and refused to accept, and when DOS declared a strike the students joined in and mobilised their 70,000 members into the massive action. Moreover, a 17,000-member union of coal miners, farmers, and taxi and bus drivers joined the strikes. Indeed, thousands of people from the provinces descended on Belgrade causing road blockades in the inner city and highways. When the police and the army saw these massive actions, they were left with no choice but to leave the protesters alone. Some of the forces had their sons and daughters in the protest; how could they arrest or kill them? Therefore, Slobodan Milosevic was obliged to accept defeat and gave up power. He was indeed "finished."

**The ASUU case study:** ASUU has mandated its members to protest once a month or for a while over the withheld salaries. ASUU, Abuja Zone, calls on critical stakeholders in the education sector to encourage the FG to fulfil its agreement with ASUU to avert another strike action. However, ASUU has no massive planned action known to this research work and therefore, it cannot bite hard the FG. Therefore, ASUU must implement the following recommendations.

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<sup>67</sup>Bureau of Statistics, "National MPI – 0.257."

### **Recommendations**

1. ASUU must set up committees at local chapters and national levels to train and adopt full strategic nonviolent actions(SNA) for its struggle.
2. ASUU must make its key demands more accessible to students, parents, and the common person in Nigeria. In a class of 104 Master's students after presenting this paper, I asked, how many of them knew clearly what ASUU's struggle was about before the seminar. Only five students raised their hands; the rest of the students agreed that they did not understand ASUU. They thought ASUU was struggling for the welfare of its members.
3. ASUU needs now to adopt a mass media campaign to inform clearly how it is struggling for students, parents, and the common person so that they can enjoy a world-standard education; so that these foci of power will join the struggle and carry out legal and illegal SNA actions. If ASUU has issues of non-cooperation from the official NANS body, it can set up a parallel student union as part of its stage three, illegal SNA. In the meantime,
4. ASUU needs to set up a constructive programme for teaching university students: use Google Class Room or Microsoft Teams, which are available for free as teaching platforms to demonstrate best practices in scholarship. They could use this platform for half of the semesters and then leave out the other half so that the students can appreciate the difference between best practice and the present style and so be convinced that ASUU's struggle is theirs too.
5. ASUU must communicate clearly to students and parents that it is the one stopping the FG from increasing tuition fees in public universities.
6. ASUU needs to plan for massive SNAs with the support of students and their parents so that the FG will be compelled to adequately fund public university education.
7. ASUU should engage the political parties right now like the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), AREWA Consultative Forum, Afenifere, and Indigbo groups to present its concerns about public universities in Nigeria.

### **Conclusion**

ASUU is either naïve or just playing safe with its present approach; it will not bring success to its struggle. To seek partnership in its struggle with traditional and religious rulers, members of the National Assemblies of Nigeria, and other elite groups whose pay-master is the Federal Government will not bring it the desired result. Rather, ASUU should seek partnership with students and parents who constitute the 133 million Nigerians in poverty and suffering from substandard public tertiary education. A mother-student told me at end of my seminar on this paper that she, the wife of an ASUU member, suffered so much during strikes because her children could not feed adequately; it made family life miserable. Moreover, a professor-student said at the seminar that ASUU forgets that it has student-policy makers and people of all works of life in its classrooms. It should enlist them as its "foot soldiers" in the struggle. I cannot

agree more with these students. Finally, ASUU must raise its level of struggle to stage three of illegal strategic nonviolent action if it wants to succeed. For now, ASUU is the last hope of poor Nigeria concerning public tertiary education. The poor students and their parents look up to ASUU for empowerment, but it does not wish to be disempowered by it. Prolong strikes have proven to be evil rather than good; the end does not justify this means. However, I want to say that this article is limited because it does not interview ASUU members and seeks a large number of students reactions to this approach. Therefore, further studies on the use of strategic nonviolent actions by ASUU in conjunction with students and their parents are needed to ascertain the full viability of this option in the struggle for upgrading university education in Nigeria to world standards.

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