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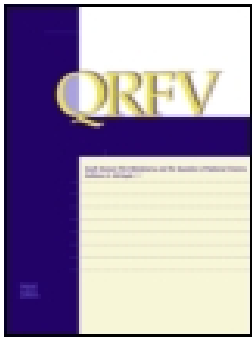
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## Continuity and Discontinuity: Masculinity and Power Blocs in African Cinema

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### Introduction

There are hierarchies and rankings of power relations between different classes of men in each society. Men of varying ranks of masculinity choose diverse grounds on which to compete with one another, using whatever resources they have, for the differential payoffs that patriarchy allows them. In the early times, African men competed using the simple criteria of age, family size and physical strength but such parameters are changing and becoming complex due to the rapid political and economic change that transformed human society from agrarian into industrial, economic base. The beginning of oil explorations in Nigeria in the 1970s, for instance, enplaced hegemony in the economic—not bodily—power of the emerging bourgeoisie<sup>1</sup>. Hence, the idea of hegemonic masculinity as applied in the study illustrates a version of masculinity that privileges men’s ability to utilize words, political control, and economic advantage to create and sustain a position of power in the society. We refer to the point where institutional powers and cultural ideals conjunct to produce a standard definition and ambitious image of being a social male<sup>2</sup>. Such powers are defined not just in terms of physical force and control but more importantly through economic exploitation in an industrial, capitalistic society as well as political hegemony. However, as will be seen in the study, hegemonic masculinity only “gains its symbolic force and familiar status... from a series of hierarchical relations to what it can subordinate”<sup>3</sup>. This implies that alongside hegemonic masculinity, there are variations of masculinity that exist and sometimes challenge it. Hegemonic masculinity, therefore, is constantly

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seeking to subdue threats to the status quo, in order to maintain itself<sup>4</sup>. In this sense, hegemonic masculinity is practically difficult to achieve, especially within the context of politics, where subversions and contestations for power exist. It is against this background that this paper examines the exercise of power between the hegemonic masculine blocs and the subaltern masculine blocs in *Saworoide* (Drum with brass bell). The point is that analyses of the interests of the masculine blocs, particularly the subalterns, are crucial to a broader and more nuanced understanding of the production, re-negotiation and reproduction of hegemonic structures of power and masculinity in African politics. Scholars in Africa have approached masculinity from different perspectives in film studies, such as “Masculinity and North African films”<sup>5</sup>, “Masculinity and myth in African cinema”<sup>6</sup> and “Masculinity, violence and queer identity in South African films”<sup>7</sup>. Africa provides an interesting setting for these kinds of studies as it offers different and complex factors such as race, religion, wealth and politics that both circumscribe the daily lives of African men and define their masculinity. However, existing research on masculinity studies and Nollywood have paid little attention to the fluidity of masculinity in the field of political leadership. Hence, this research examines the tensions and precariousness that characterize the struggle among masculinities of the hegemonic bloc on the one hand, and between subaltern and dominant masculinities on the other.

### **Politics, the Nigerian Context and Nollywood**

The discovery of crude oil in Oloibiri (currently in Bayelsa State, South-South geopolitical zone) in the 1950s and the resulting theft of oil revenues have been responsible for the severe corruption and leadership crisis in Nigeria. This is because oil explorations and the attendant environmental hazards as well as years of mismanagement of proceeds by successive governments led to the under development witnessed in the three decades of military rule (from 1966 to 1979 and 1983 to 1999) and the stunted democracy in place today. At every moment that the military displaced an unpopular civilian government, there were widespread jubilations among Nigerians. However, the ruling soldiers often emphasized combat over dialogue; disregard for court orders; and violation of human rights, leading to widespread criticism and discontent from activists and journalists<sup>8</sup>. Each succeeding military junta was worse in suppressing dissenting voices, forcing filmmakers to divert their creative energies to less contentious subjects, and critically assess their works before mass production to avoid being victimized<sup>9</sup>. The return to democratic governance in 1999, however, facilitated filmmakers’ gradual return to political issues, either directly or indirectly<sup>10</sup>.

Many of the videos produced after 1999 were sparingly masked recounts of the years of military unrest. They include: *Stubborn Grasshopper: Loved Power, Died in Power* (2001), the story of Abacha himself; and *Oil Village* (2001), which recounts the story of Ken Saro-Wiwa, the Ogoni journalist, poet and environmental activist who was murdered during the Abacha regime. These films “reflect a concern with good governance and ethical conduct in civil matters that cuts [sic] across ethnic and other cultural boundaries”<sup>11</sup>. In addition, Adeoti highlights that:

[t]he widening of the democratic space as a result of the imagination of a civilian administration in May 1999 has led to the broadening of thematic possibilities in the reaction of home video [sic]. Events since then, in spite of the widely acknowledged imperfections, have demonstrated the preference of many Nigerians for a non-military, non-authoritarian mode of governance. They recognize the need to prevent a relapse into dictatorship.<sup>12</sup>

This is the period that Kelani also began to exploit traditional motifs located within Yorùbá culture to narrate the story of Nigeria’s political foray and transition from military to democratic governance. As an auteur, he has directed over ten videos, beginning with his debut work, *Ti Oluwani Ile/The Earth is the Lord’s* in 1992. His other films include *Saworoide/drum with brass bell* (1999), *White Handkerchief* (1998), *Thunderbolt* (2001) *Agogo Eewo/Gong of Taboo* (2002) and *Campus Queen* (2003). These movies have earned him honors at African Film Festival of New York at different occasions, and continued to draw attentions to Nollywood. His works focus prominently on Yorùbá societies and cultures, paying tribute to the beauty and ancestral wisdom of a cultural world within which he grew up. In substantiation, Haynes observes that, “the blending and coexistence of past and present, tradition and modernity, is a nearly constant theme in Kelani’s work”<sup>13</sup>. This point is relevant here, since, the film under study, *Saworoide*, also uses the symbolic aspects of the Yorùbá traditional past (oath-taking, incision, and sacred drum) to allegorize the consequences of mismanaging oil revenue in Nigeria and the resultant political disillusionment in the country in the 90 s. Particularly, it narrates Nigeria’s persisting leadership challenges, covering a gamut of maladministration in Nigeria’s First Republic, the military juntas of Ibrahim Babangida, Sani Abacha and Abdusalami Abubakar as well as the civilian interim reign of Shonekan in 1993 prior to Nigeria’s present democratic era.

Expectedly, scholars have mainly interpreted Tunde Kelani’s videos in relation to their political and socio-cultural contexts. Many of the researchers situate their studies in response to the appraisal of Nollywood’s lack of illustration of political themes. Responding to such criticism, Haynes in his study on Nollywood, devotes a whole section on “political films”<sup>14</sup>, where *Saworoide* among other films are analyzed to highlight Nigeria’s persistent leadership

challenges. Similarly, Onikoyi refutes claims that socio-political and economic realities in Nigeria are not illustrated in Nollywood videos, by asking if critics have “adequate knowledge ... about the individual mission of the practitioners of Nollywood, including the number of films that are made every year”<sup>15</sup>. Consequently, he examines various cultural/traditional tropes, and how they are employed to perform subversive functions in three of Kelani’s political films. He contends that Kelani’s ability to deploy “traditional and cultural motifs that are located within Yorùbá cosmology” in addressing political issues justifies him as an auteur director in Africa. Alamu’s essay also focuses on the discourse of Kelani’s films as insights into cultural, social and political behaviors in the Nigerian society<sup>16</sup>. Although the present study also explores political themes in Kelani’s *Saworoide*, it is mainly concerned with the many intrigues and events that play contributory roles to the production of different masculinities; particularly, this research critically examines the exercise of power by the hegemonic masculine bloc (ruler); its impacts on the conditions and struggles of the subaltern masculine bloc (ruled), and the interrelationships between the two divides. Therefore, the study aims to contribute to African film scholarship, politics in Africa, and the interplay of masculinity and film studies in Nigeria.

## **Materials and Methods**

Tunde Kelani’s *Saworoide/Sacred drum* (1999) is purposively selected for this study. The choice of *Saworoide* out of his numerous videos is predicated on the fact that it “reflects a rich blend of the complexities and dynamics of the diverse experiences of cultures, art and politics, religion and development issues that define Nigeria as a nation”<sup>17</sup>. Most importantly, the thematic orientation of the video is directly relevant to the purpose of this study. The film is then critically examined and analyzed paying attention to the male characters, their roles, behaviors as well as characterization in the actualization of various forms of masculinities. In analyzing the data, we categorize the male characters into different masculine blocs, specifically the hegemonic masculine blocs, represented by Lápité, Làgàtà, the loggers and the chiefs, and the subaltern masculine blocs, largely represented by the youth. In addition, we analyze relevant transcribed excerpts from the movie as well as contextualize the socio-political realities and masculine parameters that characterize Nigeria, and in extension African politics.

## **Gramsci’s Theory of Hegemony**

Textual analyses are based on Antonio Gramsci’s theory of hegemony. When one surveys new developments across the world, one is struck by the

rapid emergence of social and democratic movements in numerous societies, which has resulted in people's desire to free themselves from the shackles of orthodox and established practices and government. It is in this context that Gramsci's ideas have gained a wider currency. Antonio Gramsci (1891–1937), a philosopher, a politician, a socialist and a theorist was a founding member and renowned figure in the Italian Communist Party. His life spanned some of the most tumultuous and formative events of the twentieth century: the Russian Revolutions of 1917, the growth and development of Fascism in Italy and its spread to Germany<sup>18</sup>. He was vocal against these political events, especially Fascism. As a result, he spent the last eleven years of his life locked up in Mussolini's prisons. During this time, he wrote a series of notes on literary, political, philosophical and historical subjects. In these notes, he offered fresh perspectives on concepts such as domination, hegemony, civil society among others<sup>19</sup>.

Antonio Gramsci uses the term hegemony to analyze the structure of power of the European bourgeois state of his time. His theory is a modification of the traditional Marxist understanding of cultural dynamics through which the ruling class claims and maintains a leading and dominant position in a social hierarchy over the subordinates. Adapting Marx's idea, Gramsci underlines two basic ways of achieving hegemony. The first is through domination, which is physical and direct in its employment of force. According to Gramsci, domination is supremacy established by force and maintained by the state through military, political, judicial and fiscal systems. In this instance, he argues that domination is the antithesis of hegemony and that the state rests in part on ultimate coercive power, but the currency of force is devalued if it must be constantly applied. Second, hegemony is also achieved through consent. This process is more pervasive and ideological because it elicits the consent of the subordinate groups. Gramsci saw hegemony by consent as an ideal, something to aim at. Whilst the term 'hegemony' may have become synonymous with Gramsci himself, its lineage can be traced through the writings of Vincenzo Gioberti, Georgi Plekhanov, Paul Axelrod and Vladimir Lenin<sup>20</sup>. The term 'hegemony' was derived from the Russian Socialist Movement, in which Plekhanov and Axelrod had used it from the late 1890s to 1917 in reference to the role of the working class as a leading force in the fight for democracy<sup>21</sup>. Vladimir Lenin also employed the term 'hegemony' to discuss how the proletariat can form an alliance with the peasantry and assume a leading or hegemonic role in overcoming Tsarist rule. He believed that in this way the proletariat, which comprised a minority of the population in Russia (the peasantry was in the majority), would be able to gain the support of the majority of the people. To Lenin, hegemony was an invaluable strategy that the working class could use to ascend to power. Gramsci,

however, extended the meaning of hegemony to include the practices of the capitalist class, not only in acquiring state power but also in maintaining that power once it had been achieved. Whilst Lenin and other Marxist's use of the term limited hegemony to economics, Gramsci avers that the dominance of one class over another did not depend entirely on economic strength but rather on persuading the ruled to accept the system of beliefs of the ruling class and to share their moral, social and cultural values. Carl Boggs explains the concept thus:

By hegemony, Gramsci meant the permeation throughout society of an entire system of values, attitudes, beliefs, and morality that has the effect of supporting the status quo in power relations. Hegemony in this sense might be defined as an 'organising principle' that is diffused by the process of socialisation into every area of daily life. To the extent that this prevailing consciousness is internalised by the population it becomes part of what is generally called 'common sense' so that the philosophy, culture, and morality of the ruling elite comes to appear as the natural order of things<sup>22</sup>.

To gain the approval of the subordinate classes, it involves integrating some of their desires and concerns into the dominant interest as a way of preventing rebellion, and for subordinates to accept the hegemonic ideals as being genuinely interested in their welfare. More so, relying on agents of socialization such as the church, schools, the press and other non-governmental institutions, the state foists its own values and beliefs on society, thereby providing a cultural direction. Its hegemony in this sense becomes rule by consent. It parallels the supremacy of force, but diminishes the need for its application. In the process of obtaining the consent of those over whom one exercises leadership, everyone supposedly benefits. Gramsci contends that only weak states need to rely very often on the threat or use of force implied in their domination. Strong states rule almost exclusively through hegemony, in which consent is essential<sup>23</sup>. Hence, while 'domination' is hegemony achieved through the coercive machinery of the state, 'intellectual and moral leadership' is hegemony exercised through consent and ideological leadership. While Gramsci saw rule by consent as an ideal, something to aim at, the video under study demonstrates that politics in Africa is usually inclined toward coercive domination and leaders only rule through hegemony in order to establish more control and become more repressive. This is evidenced in the character of some of the members of the subaltern group in the movie who are recruited by the hegemonic class in order to infiltrate and repress all subversive elements of the subaltern class.

Unlike Lenin, Gramsci also injected a cultural, moral and intellectualist emphasis into the concept of 'hegemony'. Apart from socializing mechanisms such as schools, church and press, Gramsci opines that institutions and intellectuals within the state also have a significant role to play in



maintaining the status quo. Gramsci identifies two categories of intellectuals in the society both of whom are identifiable in the film under study. The first group is made up of the “traditional intellectuals”, who, according to Gramsci,

[a]pppear to be autonomous and independent. They also appear to be stable and eternal even when social upheavals are experienced. This sense of independence from the ruling class is, however, an illusion, because their function assists the ruling class in maintaining power<sup>24</sup> (4).

This is the role Baba Opalaba (the palace griot) plays in the video. The second group is made up of the “organic intellectuals’ who are the result of a socialization process; their function is to sustain the hegemony”<sup>25</sup>. In the video, they include the palace chiefs, particularly Chief Seriki and Chief Balogun, the foreign timber companies, the police and the army. Gramsci refers to them as ‘functionaries’ and hegemony’s deputies exercising the functions of social hegemony and political government<sup>26</sup>.

Despite the dominance of the hegemonic bloc, Gramsci asserts that when the state relies very often on the use of force to establish hegemony, the relationship between the dominant and the subaltern blocs becomes unstable. This is because the subaltern sometimes assumes power by going against the hegemonic class. Although Gramsci’s views about the revolutionary potential of the subaltern/peasantry have gained considerable sympathy among social theorists and historians, the utility of this theory remains unknown in Africa. However, the movie under study demonstrates that whenever the subaltern’s concerns are neglected by government, there can be resistance to hegemony and change in power structure. This is seen in the video in many uprisings staged by the youths, farmers, and hunters while the journalists are always probing the consciousness of the hegemonic conclave. It is what inspires hope in the movie.

This study, therefore, offers a critical assessment of the predominantly masculine parameters that characterize post-colonial Nigerian politics, and by extension, Africa. While Gramsci’s theory has been utilized in various contexts around the world, the paper is also interested in investigating the relevance of the operative assumptions of Gramsci’s theory to Africa. In post-colonial Nigeria where the video is situated, the theory is applied to examine the exercise of power. While the theory of Gramsci was initially designed to suit his own tumultuous Italy, this essay stresses the similarities as well as differences between the histories of Italy and Nigeria to prove that his principle of hegemony can be effectively extended to post-colonial Nigeria. This research uses the film medium to reflect on the past and present Nigerian political and social landscapes, exploring in the process how Gramsci’s thoughts on hegemony by domination and consent can be used to illuminate the issue of power relations in post-colonial Nigeria. By so

doing, the study justifies movies as social documents that reproduce the commonsense realities of a people in a manner that makes a statement about them<sup>27</sup>.

### **Tunde Kelani's *Saworoide*: Analysis and Discussion**

*Saworoide*, one the best films of Tunde Kelani so far, is the focus of the paper. An adaptation of a Yorùbá novel of the same title written by Akinwunmi Isola, the film was produced and directed by Tunde Kelani in 1999. It employs an allegorical use of the Yorùbá traditions in addressing politics and leadership in postcolonial Nigeria<sup>28</sup> by questioning the hegemonic institutions of the country since the discovery of crude oil in Oloibiri. Set in fictional *Jogbo* community, Kelani makes a parody of the disillusioned political situation in the country in the 90s, marred by political racketeering, corruption, and endless military incursions into politics. The movie frames the mismanagement of oil revenue as the source of corruption and leadership crisis in Nigeria. It also captures the hopes of Nigerians as the country ended the military rule and began a new democracy at the end of 20th century.

Featuring such prominent Yorùbá and Nollywood actors as Kola Oyewo (Lápité, *Jogbo's* king), Bukky Wright (Tinuola and Lápité's new wife), Lere Paimo (Balogun, a palace chief), Akinwunmi Isola (Chief Priest), Adebayo Faleti (Baba Opalaba, the palace griot), Ayantuji Amoo (Ayangalu, the official drummer), Kunle Bamtefa (Làgàta, the military officer) and the prominent Nigerian film maker, Kunle Afolayan (Adebola/Aresejabata), the film opens with a revelation made by a dying king on the pact that exists between kings and the people of *Jogbo* town, a fictitious Yorùbá community. He informs the chief priest to take a seed out of a ritual pot, split the seed into two and place one half inside the brass crown (*adeide*) and the other half inside the drum with Brass Bells (*saworoide*). He also informs the chief priest that all successive kings and official drummers of *Jogbo* must take incisions and oaths. This is a way of preserving sanity in *Jogbo*, as any king who illegitimately ascends the throne or wants undue riches at the expense of the people would die of a splitting headache if he wears the crown, and the official drummer beats the drum with Brass Bells. This is the tradition in place when Lápité, an unexpected and self-centered candidate, ascends the throne without passing through the required ritual rites. When Lápité discovers the consequence of bypassing the rituals, he consolidates his hegemony by killing Adedigba, a prince with a rival claim to the throne. He also sends assassins to murder Ayangalu, the official drummer who narrowly escapes with Adebola, the son of Adedigba. With Ayangalu at large, Lápité becomes incurably corrupt, merciless and

dictatorial, killing and imprisoning oppositions in order to maintain his hegemony. He connives with foreign timber companies to embezzle money meant for the people. The restive youths, in protest, steal the brass crown. As custom dictates, the brass crown must not leave the palace for fifteen days; the reigning king is expected to abdicate the throne or commit suicide if it is not found within the stipulated time. In a desperate move to secure the brass crown, Lápité invites Làgàta, a military officer in charge of the safety of the foreign timber company to help find it, promising to reward the latter with anything that he wants. Làgàta finds the crown in time; however, like the usual military incursion tactics in Nigeria, he exploits Jogbo's predicament under the leadership of Lápité to seize power. He kills Lápité and ascends the throne abruptly. Lápité's death brings an end to civilian rule and ushers in a reign of military terror in Jogbo. Under the strict leadership of Làgàta, a new hegemony is formed once again on the bases of deceit and self-enrichment. As Làgàta enacts his own control, he disregards the feelings and yearnings of the masses. In fact, the common people become a threat to the new hegemony to the extent that Làgàta starts arresting journalists and closing press houses. In an attempt to end Làgàta's reign of terror, the youth approach Ayangalu to beat the drum, since Làgàta is not incised. Their efforts yield a positive result as Làgàta dies of splitting headache as soon as he wears the brass crown and Ayangalu's son beats the brass drum during his coronation. As the logic of folktale would have it, Adebola, the heir to the throne is installed and the proper inheritance of legitimate traditional norm is assumed.

### ***Lápité and Conclave of Hegemony***

Examining in the film the relevance of Gramsci's thoughts on hegemony, we begin from the point when Lápité takes the reins of power. As King, he is required to pass through a ritual that binds *Onijogbo* (paramount ruler of Jogbo) with the positive growth and development of the community throughout his reign and lifetime. Non-fictional democratic practices do not require leaders to undergo such ritual but the pact could be likened to the oaths administered on elected officials to protect the constitution of the land. Lápité, however, threatens his way out of the ritual with a gun and dismisses the process as relics of a fading tradition in contemporary times:

I said I am not going to do it! I will not swear any oath, and I am not ready for any incision! Do not tie me to any backward culture. I am not ready for that!

Comparing Lápité's conduct to real politics during pre-Abacha's regime might be somewhat unrelated. This is more so because all elected democratic presidents were made to pass through a compulsory oath-taking

procedure before assuming office. However, since Lápité's rejection of the practice is premised on his motive to exploit monarchical powers for personal enrichment, it stands to reason that pervasive corruption precipitated military incursion in Nigerian politics<sup>29</sup>. Lapite, without a doubt, embodies Nigeria's First Republic leaders whose personal greed and ambitions derailed the country's nascent democracy and dragged her into the age of military dictatorship. Like the political scenario of Nigeria in the 1960s, Lapite's reign is also marred by corruption, tyranny, mass murder and civil unrest.

The palace griot, Baba Opalaba becomes a mischievous character in the film whose role is significant to Lápité's illegal ascendance to the throne. Baba Opalaba belongs to traditional intellectuals who appear to be autonomous and independent in the conclave of hegemony. As a palace griot, he wields special traditional powers as a mediator of the fundamental traditions of Jogbo and the royal stool. When Chief Balogun, one of Lápité's friends visits him to seek information concerning Jogbo's kingship system, he is the one who reveals, in embellished language, the secrets that would ensure that Lápité ascends the throne without the required ritual. He explains that *Onijogbo* is meant to live a selfless life while serving the people; in order to become wealthy, he advises that Lápité should reject incision and oath-taking. This information and Lápité's subsequent refusal to adhere to Jogbo's tradition relegate the legitimacy of his hegemony and reign to absolute domination. Accordingly, he becomes coercive, corrupt and daunting. For instance, once his kingship is confirmed, Lápité acquires another wife. He believes that his present wife is not well-suited for his new status as a king because she is sloppy, haggard, and unfit. In fact, the manner in which Lápité snatches Tinuola, his new wife from her former husband reinforces one of the traits of hegemonic masculinity: it emphasizes the "superiority of 'manly' men over the 'not-so-manly' men"<sup>30</sup>. The new economic and political status of Lápité is highlighted by Balogun, a go-between man, as a compelling justification for Tinuola to give in to Lápité's advances. Tinuola earlier rejects Lápité's advances but succumbs eventually as her view is of no significance to the king, for this is masculine hegemony. At the same time, Tinuola's former husband is relegated to the background, even when it is confirmed that she is pregnant for him. Both of them are positioned in this power politics on the lowest ranks of the subaltern group, blurring the line between women and marginal men in the face of hegemonic masculinity.

Lápité also becomes more oppressive and deadly. He eliminates Adedigba, the head of the next royal family and attempts to steal the drum when he realizes that they are threats to his hegemony. Lápité remains distant from the yearnings of ordinary Jogbo citizens and receives information

through a strict police network. His actions again are reminiscent of Nigeria's First Republic leaders whose personal greed and sentiments resulted into power tussle and conflicts. According to Seng and Hunt "the period of this First Republic was marked by considerable tension between the various regions and ethnic groups who were jockeying for power"<sup>31</sup>. This behaviour still exemplifies present-day African politics where politicians believe that the logical step to maintain their hegemonic position is "to crush the opposition and restrict the environment in which they operate"<sup>32</sup>. Gramsci critiques this direction, contending that rather than achieve hegemony through force, it is essential for the dominant group to have a national-popular quality. Whilst Gramsci acknowledges that the equilibrium between the dominant class and the subaltern groups constantly fluctuate, it is important that the dominant group always acts in the interests of the subaltern group. This in fact applies to the Moderate Party in Italy who put themselves forth as a progressive class by introducing genuinely progressive agrarian reforms<sup>33</sup>. To Gramsci, this was significant because the Moderate Party paid attention to the peasantry which comprised the largest social group in Italy, thereby giving the impression that they represented the interests of all groups. In this way, the dominant power is able to expand its hegemony. This is certainly not the case with Lápité's rule in particular or African politics in general. In the film, he consolidates his hegemony by neglecting and disregarding the farmers, hunters, youth and journalists, who comprise the largest percentage of the total population, and focuses on promoting his interests and those of the dominant group. To strengthen his regime, Lápité secures the help of institutional functionaries that make him almost invisible, yet omnipresent. This hegemonic conclave is made up of only men, reflecting the predominance of men in the exercise of political power in African societies. He enters into corrupt relations with foreign timber companies, which control the local industry, at the expense of farmers, the environment, and even the sacred forest, and offers parts of the proceeds of logging to his chiefs. In connivance with the foreign timber company, he alters the laws that regulate deforestation and afforestation. The expatriates, just like Lápité, do not care about the welfare of the town; they focus only on their profit margins rather than the welfare of the commons of Jogbo. The foreign timber merchants allegorize multinational companies and their expatriate workers who dominate the exploration of crude oil in Nigeria. Like oil in Nigeria, timber export is the major source of revenue in Jogbo. By allegorizing oil with timber, the auteur director, Tunde Kelani underscores the reality of neocolonial interferences in the Nigerian economy and the politicization of oil exploration. Earlier in the film, the problems faced by the communities are lodged with the king. The youth's complaint on environmental degradation

is a metaphor on the political imbroglio of the Niger Delta region caused by multi-national oil companies and the Nigerian government. These grievances expressed by the young natives of Jogbo are a clear intention of the auteur director to draw a parallel between timber logging and oil business in Nigeria. Ogundiya argues that the multi-national oil companies are responsible corporate citizens in other parts of the world, but not in Nigeria<sup>34</sup>. According to him, the “widespread underdevelopment in the Niger Delta is a consequence and a symptom of a fundamental structural contradiction traceable to colonialism, and reinforced by the nature and character of the contemporary Nigerian state”<sup>35</sup>. Like the proceeds of oil in Nigeria, the wealth generated from the timber business is also mismanaged. Instead of pursuing policies that would improve the wellbeing of the people, Lápité and his chiefs begin to amass wealth at the expense of the masses by instructing the timber merchants to stack away the money sourced from exports in foreign bank accounts. Just as the early years of oil boom in Nigeria were characterized by a lack of integrity epitomized in mismanagement of public funds<sup>36</sup>, so do the traditional chiefs in the film spend public funds on cars and houses in flagrant disregard for public trust. When a journalist interrogates their source of wealth, the arrogant, intolerant and corrupt chiefs angrily molest him. Baba Opalaba, who witnesses the sorry sight, is captured through a high camera angle at the entrance of the palace, singing:

These chiefs are reckless. They promised to serve the people. Once in power, they steal and steal. They take bribes while the people suffer. There will be repercussion.

Simultaneously, in another location, a high camera angle and a cross-cutting shot juxtapose Baba Opalaba’s song with a real-life location of legislators fighting and throwing chairs at one another. Kelani uses this scene to show the regular display of shame that has become a hallmark of lawmakers and by extension all political leaders since the advent of democracy in Nigeria. Whenever they address issues affecting their selfish interests, not necessarily subjects that concern the generality of the people they purportedly represent, they engage in fights and other forms of violence, reinforcing Ijewereme’s assertion that “legislature both at the state and federal levels in Nigeria has been enmeshed in corruption”<sup>37</sup>. Using Seriki and Balogun as archetypes, Kelani invites the audience to reflect on the role of the chiefs in the context of contemporary Nigerian politics. A progressive king does not need an echo or a shadow of himself, but an intelligent person as an adviser. Unfortunately however, Lápité surrounds himself with chiefs who are more of praise singers to power and royalty than veteran administrators. Their opinions are not expected to differ from the dictates of King Lápité, who selected them based on nepotism.

The king believes that he is consolidating his power by protecting the interests of the chiefs and the timber merchants. But unknown to him, he only succeeds in restricting his hegemony to a very small group in the film. By protecting and furthering the interests of one group, he causes widespread opposition from the subaltern group. Gramsci is of the opinion in his *Prison Notebooks* that a ruling power that does not enjoy widespread hegemony will resort to coercive measures to maintain its power<sup>38</sup>. This is evident in the movie as Lápité quells oppositions through a reckless deployment of law enforcement agents and the security apparatus of the state. He instructs police officers and soldiers to repress all elements who attempt to subvert his dictates. An instance is seen when the Fadiya-led youth come to convey the concerns of the hunters and farmers; Lápité reacts in anger and rather applies Chief Balogun's earlier advice to, "put them (youth) in their places". Dominant masculinity in this scene involves Lápité sacrificing his own sensitivity (i.e. humanity) in order to be a supreme leader. Being the masculine par excellence, he is not really intent on negotiation; he is inflexible and sees bargaining with the youth as loss of face and a sign of weakness. This is the dominant masculine stance. When the youths' antics become a threat to the hegemonic power of the ruling class, Lápité sends the police to arrest Fadiya and other prominent leaders. Their arrest is in consonance with the ideology and psychology of hegemony in the Nigerian society. The king's well-orchestrated aggression on ordinary citizens of Jogbo rests in part on ultimate coercive power, but Gramsci is of the opinion that the currency of force is devalued if it must be constantly applied. Instead, Gramsci believes that a state could not sustain its power over a long period of time by coercion alone; it has to achieve widespread hegemony.

In the film, Lápité is unable to sustain his coercive measures as his hegemony begins to crumble as a result of resistance from the youth. This is exemplified in the youths' disenchantment-induced protest—an opportunity which they exploit to steal the royal crown during Lápité's birthday party. Since the crown must not leave the palace for fifteen days, Lápité becomes extremely desperate and pathetic. It is at this point that Làgàta, a military officer is proposed by the timber merchants to help the king recover the crown. Lápité's desperation to recoup the crown and sustain his grip on power is reflected in his willingness to adopt any strategy and give up every wealth under his control, including Jogbo's only resources. At this point, Lápité's characterization is relatable to the desperation of many Nigerian politicians to hold onto positions of power and authority. Politicians in Nigeria do all sorts of unthinkable things to consolidate their hegemony; like Lápité, they alter the laws of the land, refuse to leave office at the expiration of their tenure, and even connive with foreign investors to

rob the country of its resources. Accordingly, Lápité demonstrates the attributes of successive leaders in postcolonial Nigerian political history.

Counter-hegemony ensues when Làgàtà recovers the crown, but instead of handing it to Lápité; the former announces his interest in becoming king. Like many military coup leaders in Nigeria who adopt a messianic disposition, Làgàtà takes advantage of the civil unrest in Jogbo to take over power:

Fellow countrymen, just look at the deplorable state of the nation. I don't blame the youths who seized the crown. They are hungry for change. Let me congratulate you all, for that change has now come. We, the soldiers, have now taken over the government.

To achieve his aim, Làgàtà kills Lápité in a coup that suggests that, apart from resistance from the subaltern bloc against the power of the hegemony, counter-hegemonic groups or alliances may also form to challenge the dominant hegemony. This way, continuity and discontinuity occur hand in hand in the play of hegemonic power. The overthrow of King Lápité by Làgàtà is a familiar experience in the checkered history of military coups in Nigeria. Làgàtà provides a cinematic metaphor for General Sani Abacha who toppled the same interim government of Chief Ernest Sonekan that he was instructed to secure. In the same vein, Làgàtà abdicates his primary responsibility of providing adequate security for the timber merchants who are the economic emissaries of King Lápité. Like Abacha's, the regime of Làgàtà brings more hardship. During his life time, Abacha employed pseudo-deliberation in his speeches. This enabled him to employ forceful means to stay in power and rule with a brutish feast and enact stringent decrees in order to subdue oppositions. As evidenced in the video, Làgàtà's takeover speech is a reminiscence of Abacha's many pseudo-deliberation speeches and decrees. He complements his takeover with the arrests of youth leaders and journalists, a move that is reminiscent of the arrests and judicial executions of many opposition figures during Abacha's regime, with the murder of Ken Saro Wiwa at the top. Làgàtà also embraces corrupt practices like Abacha. In the following scenes, when Balogun and Seriki pay him an unsolicited courtesy visit, he makes known his innate intention: "In that case, let me tell you straight that I'm in this to make money." This is typical of Abacha's regime where "corruption became widespread and there was extravagant spending on a level never witnessed before not only in Nigeria but also in other parts of the world"<sup>39</sup>.

Hence, in Làgàtà, nothing has fundamentally changed: hegemonic masculinity has only recycled itself and its dominant features remain unchanged as root paradigms. When Làgàtà is told that the brass drum (*Saworoide*) is also a threat to his power, he seeks the whereabouts of Ayangalu. It is the complicity of Kangidi, a member of the subalterns that is required,



negotiated and rewarded for handing over Ayangalu to Làgàta. As earlier stated, hegemony sustains itself through the consent and complicity of the subordinate groups. According to Gramsci, this is a “process in which the exercise of power by the dominant bloc over other blocs is maintained not only by force or coercion but also by consent”<sup>40</sup>. Gramsci argues that hegemony through consent involves integrating some of the desires and concerns of the subaltern group into the dominant interest as a way of preventing rebellion, and for subordinates to align with the hegemonic ideals as being genuinely interested in their welfare. However, as exemplified in the film, the actions of Kangidi and the eventual arrest of Ayangalu suggest that African politicians sometimes seek the complicity of subordinate groups and make them see their interests as tied to those of the hegemonic group in order to establish more control and become more coercive.

### ***The Dynamics of Power and Resistance of the Subalterns***

Despite the dominance of the hegemonic bloc, Gramsci is of the opinion that the relationship between the dominant and the subaltern groups keeps shifting. This is because the subaltern sometimes assumes power by going against the hegemony. Gramsci’s views about the revolutionary potential of the subaltern/peasantry are not really applicable in many African societies, especially within the context of military severity of the film. However, the video inspires hope and demonstrates that the subaltern can also assume power by going against the hegemony whenever there is a neglect of the subaltern’s concerns in government. This is seen through various forms of resistance by the youth, ranging from abusive statements, songs, press releases, sacred drum and secret schemes to an outright arms struggle.

When the youths are introduced in the beginning, they are immediately seen as people whose values challenge those of the hegemonic bloc. Represented by Fadiya, who is the leader of farmers and hunters, they reflect one of the extreme peripheries of subaltern communities, and symbolize the bulk of artists and visionaries who can dare to lift their voices and say what others cannot. The first time they appear in Làpité’s palace, they are framed in a low camera angle that gives them power and dynamism in relation to the chiefs and the angry Làpité, as they venomously voice their concerns. They are brisk and bold as they address the excesses of the timber merchants who continue to make life unbearable for the farmers and hunters. In a very forceful tone, they complain that the:

Loggers are ruining the farms ... all our crops have been crushed by their vehicles. They cut trees indiscriminately without planting replacements; they have destroyed our honey business. Now they move into the sacred forest and if challenged, they threaten us with guns.

As the youths express their concerns, a close-up shot captures Lápité making a grimace, indicating provocation and disgust. Irritated by their audacity, he exits without uttering a word. Instead of addressing the needs of the youths, he turns deaf ears and continues to rule with an iron fist, leaving the prosperity of Jogbo in jeopardy. When the youths notice that their condition has turned from bad to worse, they visit the palace once again, singing:

Who will save us from the logger's war?

No more trees in the forest, no more animals

No cocoa, no walnuts

Who will save us from the logger's war?

Lápité remember your promises before

You became king

Here, the song becomes an instrument of protest against Lápité's regime. In a livid gesture, Fadiya orders the king to step out but Lápité refuses to budge from his royal stool. Angered by the king's insensitivity, Fadiya mounts the stage beside the palace and addresses the youth. His words and attitude oscillate between sarcasm, ridicule and outright condemnation of Lápité's regime. The camera frames Fadiya with other youths, holding leaves in protest, listening attentively to him. As he speaks, the camera zooms on him, pointing toward Lápité's palace as he calls King Lápité "stubborn, bastard and traitor". He describes the king's regime as a corrupt administration marked by successful betrayals of ordinary Jogbo citizens and residents in the hands of foreign timber companies. Defying the police, Fadiya boldly charges the youth to take up cutlass, guns, and charms to wage a war against the loggers.

In a sharp cut, the camera takes the action to the forest where the loggers are working. A gunshot is suddenly heard off camera and what follows is an erratic movement of the youth from different directions in the bush. The workers, fearing for their lives, run away. After the youth commandeers a truck belonging to the loggers, Kelani uses cross-cutting shots to contrast the youth's sarcastic, subversive songs about the king with Lápité's bitter message to his sector heads to appear before him. The announcement is suddenly juxtaposed by the sound of a gunshot and victorious faces of the youths singing another protest song: "If Lápité is captured, he should be lynched!!!" The camera pans the happy faces of the youths as the song is sung. This song attests to the fearlessness of the youth against Lápité's regime. In more resilient moves, the youths begin to obliterate the equipment of the foreign timber companies and chase away their workers. The king and his conclave are not only baffled and enraged by the youth, but

are also too powerless to stop them. As the youths' resistance continues to grow and disturb the hegemony, the timber merchants no longer look as confident as before. In fact, they threaten to go back to their country if Lápité cannot ensure their safety. All Lápité can do is arrest farmers, hunters, and pressmen, measures similar to what many First Republic Nigerian leaders used whenever any individual or group of dissidents challenged the position of government. A highlight of the period was the passing of laws banning designated newspapers because of their criticism of government between the period of the general election of 1964 and the military coup in January 1966<sup>41</sup>. Indeed, most autocratic governments in contemporary Africa and beyond still employ brute force which manifests as mass arrests, shootings, killings and political trials of targets in court as a response to all stripes of mass mobilizations that threaten their regime's hegemony (Lichbach<sup>42</sup>; Davenport<sup>43</sup>; Davenport<sup>44</sup> 2007). Lápité's adoption of coercion is therefore in conformity with a trending but negative strategy. To further compound his woes, the youths drive around the town distributing pamphlets that describe the king in demeaning ways:

Our king is useless, he steals from the treasury. He is in alliance with the loggers to defraud the nation. The chiefs too are rogues. Where did they get the funds for their new cars? Lápité has brought no progress to Jogbo.

The pamphlets, a form of press release used during the First Republic of Nigeria to condemn oppressive politicians, represent a perfect example of the democratization of information to reflect similar political situation in Jogbo. The youths leave no stone unturned, as they condemn the insensitivity and tactless behaviors of their leaders. In a final blow to Lápité's hegemony, the youths storm the venue of the ceremony of the 15-year anniversary of Lápité's reign, and cart away the brass crown which, according to the tradition of Jogbo, must not leave the palace for fifteen days, or else the king will either be exiled or commit suicide. It is after the youths' excruciating attack that Lápité realizes that he is surrounded by spineless chiefs and police officers. Like many African politicians, he distances himself from any responsibility and shifts the blame to his chiefs instead, strengthening the view that African leaders do not seem to be responsible to anyone, not even themselves or their actions<sup>45</sup>. The irony of Lápité's desire to have absolute control is seen as the youths' subversive actions take place during his anniversary. Failure to quell the youths' mass actions against the corrupt royalty, in spite of the heavy presence of police and other security agents during the ceremony, shows that hegemony continuously aspires to attain permanence and absolute control but never does, especially when it is coercive. This suggests that African hegemonic political system is always in a state of inherent uncertainty; a flux. In the theory of Hegemony, Ratale opines that "the dominant bloc expects the masses to

be marginally available to serve them”<sup>46</sup>, a discursive compulsion that suggests that elements of anxiety underline the discourse of hegemony itself when it is achieved predominantly through force. Hence, when Lápité seeks the help of Lågàta to find the crown and suppress his oppositions, it becomes clear that African political hegemony lacks fixity due to the need to constantly defend it through continuous suppression of every rebellion.

When Lågàta seizes power from Lápité, the youths continue to disturb the prevailing political order of the dominant bloc, showing the principle of continuity in resisting coercive hegemony. Unlike Lápité’s government, toppling Lågàta’s regime through violent confrontations becomes difficult, as he fortifies military protection and raises the bar of iron rulership. When the youths recognize that they cannot withstand the soldierly strength of Lågàta’s army, they execute another level of resistance through the power of *Saworoide*. They seek the assistance of Baba Amawo to have *Saworoide* drummed during Lågàta’s coronation. However, Ayangalu, who is already in Lågàta’s custody, sends an implicit message to Ayanniyi, his son, who also has an incision that binds him with the drum and crown, to be present to beat the drum. Since Lågàta is not incised; the sound of the drum, as he places the crown on his head, puts an end to his regime. He falls down and dies of a chronic headache, succumbing once again to the subaltern political will. In the end, the heir prince is enthroned. While political normalcy is restored to Jogbo, Haynes avers that victory, in the end, does not belong to the heir prince, but the youth league and the young drummer who has just inherited his sacred role<sup>47</sup>.

## Conclusion

Tunde Kelani’s film, *Saworoide*, portrays masculine blocs and power structures. The movie depicts hegemony, achieved through force as repugnant and collapsing. Hegemonic masculinity makes the very men who uphold it the victims; however, it is a strong value which is difficult to change, particularly within the realm of politics. In the film, Lápité is an unrepentant hegemonic figure whose obsession with power costs him his life. Lågàta, who also hijacks power through a blend of treachery and violence proves to be quicker to use the sword than reason, and begins his reign on the same foundation of corruption, highhandedness and disregard for the people of Jogbo. Like his predecessor, he also loses his life in the process. Despite their deaths, what remains implicit in the video is the hegemonic ideology of people around them—including the chiefs, the foreign timber companies and the police whose masculine ideology is in part constituted by its antagonism to the masses who are considered insignificant. However, Kelani, through the film under study, presents a narrative that challenges

these predominantly masculine parameters that characterize African politics. As shown in the analyses above, the quest to resist an overbearing status quo, however dominant a regime may be, cannot be totally silenced; change sometimes has to come by revolution and not through minor subversive actions. This is what inspires hope in the movie, alongside the predominantly energetic youths who are always fanning the flames of resistance. Indeed, it is refreshing to note that the youths' unending schemes and mobilisations against unbearable hegemonies signpost a deterrence to the heir prince and his would-be hegemonic bloc. Kelani indicates, through *Saworoide*, that the hegemonic bloc's neglect of the subaltern's concern in governance together with the rabid desire to subjugate them in perpetuity does not only breed intense suffering to the marginal population but additionally forces them to rebel against the prevailing order. To this end, the video projects the different subversive strategies of the youth as a method of checking and questioning the hegemonic institutions of the postcolonial African society. He makes it clear that the docility of the marginal group is the requisite enabler of enduring hegemonic blocs. Therefore, power and hope lie with the subaltern once they begin to speak and wake up to the challenge of the hegemony.

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### Notes

1. Pinto, "The Relevance of Antonio Gramsci's Concept of Hegemony," 8678–8692.
2. Ratele "Hegemonic African Masculinities and Men's Heterosexual Lives," 115–130.
3. Segal, "Changing Men: Masculinities in Context," 625–41.
4. Dipio, "Faces of Masculinity in African Cinema," 2010.
5. Downing, "Masculinity in Selected North African Films," 2010.
6. See note 4 above.
7. Pieterse, "Film Notes: Masculinity, Violence, and Queer Identity in Recent South African Films," 375–381.
8. Etim & Ukpere, "The Impact of Military Rule on Democracy," 288.
9. Omoera & Anyanwu, "Politics of Succession in Nollywood Films," 187.
10. Ibid, 188.
11. Adesokan, "Practising 'democracy' in Nigerian Films," 601.
12. Adeoti, "Home Video Films and the Democratic Imperative in Nigeria," 35–56.
13. Haynes, "Nollywood: The Creation of Nigerian Film Genres," 134.
14. Ibid, 192.
15. Onikoyi, "Irreducible Africanness and Autuer Theory," 241.
16. Alamu, "Sociopolitical Anatomy of the Nigerian (Yorùbá) Society," 2016.
17. Olayiwola, "Between Culture and Politics in Nigeria," 60.
18. Pillay, "The Relevance of Antonio Gramsci's Concept of Hegemony," 8678–8692.

19. Ibid.
20. Ibid.
21. Anderson, "The Antinomies of Antonio Gramsci," 5–78.
22. Boggs, *Gramsci's Marxism*, 12.
23. Gramsci, "Selections from the Prison Notebooks," 57.
24. Gramsci, "Hegemony," 44.
25. Ibid, 44.
26. Ibid, 45.
27. Amaefula, "Ritual and Identity Construction in Nigerian Igbo Video Films," 147.
28. Ayodabo, "The Exploration of Proverb as a Crucial Device in Tunde Kelani's *Saworoide*," 253.
29. Olaiya, "Narrative of Governance Crisis in Nigeria," 17.
30. Kareithi, "Hegemonic Masculinity in Media," 26.
31. Seng and Gary, "The Press and Politics in Nigeria," 85.
32. Chiroro, "The Dilemmas of Opposition Political Parties in Southern Africa," 103.
33. See note 4 above, 60.
34. Ogundiya, "Beyond the "Geography of Terrorism and Terror of Geography," 65.
35. Ibid, 65.
36. Furniss, "Poetry, Prose and Popular Culture in Hausa," 1996.
37. See note 13 above, 13.
38. See note 4 above, 263.
39. Cole, "Trauma and the Spectacle of the Other," 105.
40. See note 24 above, 10.
41. See note 31 above, 89.
42. Lichbach, "Deterrence or Escalation?" 266–97.
43. Davenport, "Multi-Dimensional Threat Perception and State Repression," 683–713.
44. Davenport, "State Repression and Political Order," 1–23.
45. Kagema, "Responsible Leadership and Sustainable Development in Post-independent Africa," 1–14.
46. See note 2 above.
47. Haynes, "TK in NYC: An Interview with TundeKelani." 2007.

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