

REGIONAL HEGEMONIC CONTENTION AND THE ASYMMETRY OF SOFT POWER: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF SOUTH AFRICA AND NIGERIA

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Abstract

Since 1994 when South Africa emerged from the doldrums of *apartheid* isolation, there has been much contention about the hegemonic profile of South Africa as well as its Nigerian counterpart whose continental leadership have reputedly held sway in Africa prior to this time. Clearly, both Nigeria and South Africa have been widely bandied as Africa's hegemonic leaders on the strength of their Afrocentric foreign policy aspirations and material as well as ideational capabilities. Specifically, this article focuses on examining how the soft power attributes of South Africa have helped to advance its hegemonic aspiration on the continent ahead of Nigeria. The article argues that although both Nigeria and South Africa have some degree of soft power attributes, South Africa has nevertheless been able to extract greater benefits from its soft power resources than its Nigerian counterpart. In doing so, it submits that the soft power assets of both countries appear asymmetrically skewed in favour of South Africa and demonstrates why this is responsible for the global preference and increasing regional recognition of South Africa as Africa's hegemonic power.

1. Introduction

In the past couple of years, there have been rigorous attempts by scholars to examine the power architecture within Africa drawing largely

from general international relations theories and frameworks to make inferences about the location and exercise of power and influence (Ogunnubi 2013; Flemes 2009; Habib 2009; Adebajo and Mustapha 2008; Hassan and Omotola 2008; Bach 2007; Mazrui 2006; Alden and Mills 2005; Ahwireng-Obeng and McGowan 1998). Since the celebrated entry of South Africa into the African democratic space, the resultant implication has been a change in the contours of power and leadership equations in Africa. At the recently concluded 80 years celebration of the South African Institute of International Affairs (SAIIA),¹⁾ specific attention was paid to dissecting the increasing role of pivotal states such as South Africa and Nigeria within Africa and the global South. On the other hand, Nigeria has just emerged as Africa's biggest economy — a profile its officials are quick to allude to as qualifying it as Africa's 'Gulliver'. What is evident from the above is that, despite inherent domestic flaws, the influence of both Nigeria and South Africa has been on the ascendancy particularly in the last two decades.

Scholars have remained undecided about the best concept to describe the influence of both Nigeria and South Africa with a number of suggestions ranging from middle power, emerging middle power, pivotal states, regional power, to regional hegemon, secondary power, regional hegemonic power etc (see Sidiropoulos 2014; Ogunnubi 2013; Flemes and Wojczewski 2010; Habib 2009; Flemes 2009, 2007; Van der Westhuizen 2007; Ahwireng-Obeng and McGowan 1998). For the purpose of this article, we identify both countries as regional hegemonic powers defined not only by their superior power advantages, political, economic capabilities and ideational membership within Africa, but also their combined capacity for considerable influence on their regional neighbours. A regional hegemonic power thus enjoys a measure of acceptance of its regional leadership although this is not deemed a prerequisite for the exercise of influence. Operating within a regional hegemonic system, a regional hegemonic power is considered a powerful actor that wields a superior level of influence within a delimited region which it belongs to (Ogunnubi and Uzodike 2015).

However, despite the rich literature on regional studies, there seems to be a dearth of literature on a comparative study of regional leadership, particularly in Africa, resulting in a lack of empirically verifiable conclusions. Relatedly, the theme of soft power in Africa is under-researched both by Western and African scholars. In fact, hardly any study exists that comparatively examines the nexus between soft

power and regional hegemony (especially for Africa). This comparative study of both Nigeria and South Africa therefore affords us the opportunity of offering a more nuanced geo-political assessment of the requirements for regional hegemonic status that fits into an African context. While a comparative analysis of the soft power potentials and capabilities of two of Africa's biggest powers provides some insight into the soft power potentials of the continent given its rich cultural history, it also gives an indication of who between Nigeria and South Africa, is more likely to become Africa's hegemon through an effective use and management of hard and soft power capabilities. Therefore the article contends that soft power presents a reasonable yardstick for a proper estimation of Nigeria and South Africa's legitimate claim and regional acceptance of their continental hegemonic position among other countries within the African region as *primus inter pares*. However, this is not unmindful of the fact that soft power is a partial and qualified barometer of power especially given the problem of measurement and the assortment of soft power elements different countries possess.

Drawing on insights from a comparative foreign policy analysis of Nigeria and South Africa, we examine the role of soft power in deepening the capacities for regional hegemonic leadership of both countries. More importantly, we consider the implication that soft power resources have for the acceptance, legibility and recognition of regional hegemonic leadership in Africa. In this article, we explore the foreign policy trajectories of Nigeria and South Africa within Africa and consider the degree to which both countries have been able to use their soft power profiles to officially or unofficially drum up a hegemonic ambition within the continent.

We submit the view that while both countries have a credible foreign policy record of being at the forefront of issues affecting Africa as well as substantial material capabilities justifying their regional hegemonic status, the mobilisation of soft power attributes uniquely places South Africa above its Nigerian counterpart as pointedly having the capacity to act the part of Africa's regional hegemonic power. In any case, evidences show that traditional hard power matters little particularly in the face of complex threats like extremist violence. For instance, in the case of Nigeria — the inability to mobilise its hard power resources to deal effectively with Boko Haram, which in any case is not difficult to understand given that violent extremism is a regional and indeed global phenomenon. The other is that of the role of other powers

such as France, in the sub-region, and the concomitant soft power 'competition'. In the same breath, soft power capability is often depreciated by domestic ambivalence which impact of the strength of soft power.

In essence, soft power can indeed become an effective tool for regional influence and the extraction of localised acceptance of hegemony (Cox 1996; e 2009; Ogunnubi 2013). This is particularly instructive, given that both countries have often wrestled with deep seated internal challenges that question the acceptance and legitimacy of their regional power status (Ogunnubi 2013; Smith 2009; Mustapha 2008). Flandes (2009) for instance, while making reference to South Africa's capacity for regional hegemony acknowledges that South Africa is hampered by the unwillingness of some of its neighbours to accept its leadership role induced largely by the former's political and historical legacies. In addition, South Africa's claim to continental leadership is more obvious on the global stage than the African regional level leading to widespread question about its acceptance and recognition. On the other hand, scholars like Mustapha (2008) and Ogunnubi (2013) have emphasised that Nigeria's regional hegemonic prospect is often contradicted and dampened by enormous ambivalence inherent in its internal obstacles, impecunious international image as well as incoherent foreign policy articulation which cascades to impact negatively on its capacity to play a regional hegemonic role. This brings to the fore the role of soft power in mitigating the conundrums of legitimacy, recognition and acceptance of regional hegemonic powers by regional actors. In this paper, we make a case for soft power as a *leit motif* for regional hegemonic status.

Nigeria and South Africa have been carefully selected for comparative analysis on the basis of their evident power status as African leaders and also on the strength of both countries' respective claims to being the *giant of Africa* and *Africa's big brother* (Bach 2007; Adebajo and Mustapha 2008; Saliu and Omotola 2008; Mazrui 2006; Adebajo and Landsberg 1996). More specifically, we focus on both countries for several other reasons. First, both Nigeria and South Africa are the two largest economies in Africa and thus share a huge chunk of the African economic market (Adebajo 2007). Secondly, both countries are perceived internationally as major African leaders with their extensive and robust foreign policy involvement in Africa coupled with their expressed desire towards finding African solutions to African problems (Smith

2012; Schoeman 2007; Adebajo and Landsberg 2003). Thirdly, and perhaps more importantly, both Nigeria and South Africa are considered to be the only two countries in Africa that fit our prescriptions of regional hegemonic power.

To be sure, the population of Nigeria is an equivalent of the entire population of four major European countries including Belgium, France, Portugal and the United Kingdom (UK) while its economy is acknowledged as the biggest in Africa. South Africa on the other hand is undoubtedly the most industrialised and advanced African country. In fact, prior to the end of *apartheid*, South Africa was the only African country with nuclear warheads (Fischer 1994; Mazrui 2006). Similarly, while Nigeria is often referred to as Africa's human resources hub, South Africa on the other hand is reputed as the mineral and material resources repository of chrome, diamonds, gold, iron ore, manganese, platinum, etc in the continent. Again, South Africa profiles the largest concentration of diaspora Whites outside Europe and America (Mazrui 2006). Sparks (2003) cited in Kagwanja (2009: 2), claims that South Africa is "a regional superpower in the world's most marginalized continent, the one country that could perhaps provide the engine to pull Africa out of its mire of poverty and desperation". It is for these reasons that Mazrui (2006) notes that "Nigeria and South Africa are truly exceptional societies of the postcolonial era ... *and* have revealed comparative destinies of the African experience and contrasting visions of the African condition". Overall, the reference to Nigeria and South Africa in the literature as an 'axis of virtue' is no doubt a reflection of their comparative power advantage as well as commitment to playing increasing leadership roles within the African continent (see Adebajo 2007; Landsberg 2008b).

In the past few years, there have been repeated claims in scholarly circles — particularly among the South African intelligentsia — of a reputed South African 'hegemonic' status (comparative to other potential regional power blocs). It therefore becomes questionable to reach such conclusions without drawing from clear substantive evidence where South Africa, for instance, has extended its unrivalled and unchallenged hegemonic influence beyond its Southern African stronghold.

Aside the introduction, this article is divided into five sections. The first section provides a critical analysis of soft power as foreign power leverage and explores the resources mobilised to attract soft power benefits. The second and third parts succinctly trace evidence of

soft power resources and engagement of both countries respectively. In the fourth section, a detailed comparative analysis of the nexus between soft power and regional hegemonic status specifically for Nigeria and South Africa is undertaken with the aim to show how South Africa has used soft power to underscore its regional hegemonic status better than Nigeria. The last section draws a conclusion on the utility of soft power in understanding the conditions and prescriptions for regional hegemonic status particularly for Africa and perhaps across regions.

2. Unpacking the shifting perception of power: A focus on soft power

Without doubt, there seems to be a conceptual dilemma of what soft power really means, particularly in international politics (Smith 2012). Soft power represents a concept perhaps antonymous in meaning to hard power and hinges on a state's capacity to find subtle and non-violent means — particularly through cultural influence — to promote its national interest within the international arena in ways that concurrently reflect the interests of others. The concept of soft power draws from a number of theoretical insights ranging from realism, idealism, soft balancing to constructivism and neo-liberalism. As Ogunnubi and Isike²⁾ argue, "Soft power presumes that cultural capability and public diplomacy can be strategically calibrated with a state's foreign policy interests to achieve goals that advance the state's preference in the international arena in a non-violent manner". By corollary, states with soft power capacity can become more attractive, persuasive and influential through the mobilisation of their soft power resources without having to force or intimidate other states to accept their own preference. And as Xintian (2007: 116) puts it, "others emulate actively, or have to follow as a matter of course even though this is not their willing choice".

Within scholarly circles, the debate on soft power has increased significantly, particularly in its application to great powers such as the United States (US) and China as well as regional powers like Brazil and India. The increasing attention paid to soft power analysis is evidence of the changing landscape of international relations and international politics with the term subsumed under a variety of theoretical explanations from Constructivism to Neo-liberalism (Gallarotti 2011). Thus, in today's globalised world, events in international politics have combined

to elevate soft power to a position of prominence in international relations. Soft power therefore represents not only an important element in enhancing a state's influence over international outcomes but also increasing its global status in the comity of nations. As Gallarotti (2011: 5) argues, "The world stage has become less amenable to Hobbesian brutes, and more amenable to actors that are sensitized to the soft opportunities and constraints imposed by this new global environment".

No less importantly, soft power has become a legitimising tool for the exercise of hard power and for the reduction in the cost of achieving foreign policy goals (Smith 2012). In essence, while hard power will continue to remain critical to exerting influence in international politics, the remissness of soft power can undermine or limit a state's influence over international outcomes. Smith (2012: 69) already highlights that "while the traditional indicators of power (population, military might, economic strength) remain important elements of a state's power in the international system, most governments now recognize that what has been called 'soft power' can be equally important, especially in promoting recognition by others". And as Sidiropoulos (2014) concedes, "[O]n the continent, setting aside external actors, South Africa is probably the country with the best claim to the exercise of soft power, as defined by Nye: through its culture, its political values, and the legitimacy of its foreign policy".

Heretofore, within Africa, much of the analysis on regional power status has remained focused on a partial assessment of power with an overemphasis on hard power components. However, the traditional understanding of power in international politics has remained insufficient in grasping the modern multi-cultural world (Gallarotti 2011). While the possession of advanced military and economic capabilities has never always automatically guaranteed superior power but merely represent power resources, soft power resources on the other hand presents the opportunity for regional powers to uniquely influence their regional neighbours in ways that are impossible for hard power components. In today's global era, soft power has become an important reality within the international system with the increasing recognition of its potency as an essential component of international power status. It therefore becomes necessary that a meaningful assessment of the power architecture in Africa should take into consideration the soft power resources of both Nigeria and South Africa respectively. Indeed, greater attention needs to be paid to this aspect of power, which is oddly missing in both

countries' foreign policy literature.

Soft power is undoubtedly an important and understudied topic in Africa's foreign policy, even though a few publications have emerged in recent times (Ogunnubi and Uzodike 2015; Sidiropoulos 2014; Smith 2012; Chiroro 2012; Geldenhuys 2010; Ogunnubi and Isike forthcoming). Given this reality, it therefore appears odd that discussions on soft power are missing in Africa's foreign policy literature in general and specifically in South Africa and Nigeria's foreign policy discourse. This is despite their acknowledged status as Africa's regional powers in Africa. We turn briefly to an overview of the soft power resources of Nigeria and South Africa borrowing from Nye's prescription. Geldenhuys (2010) argues that South Africa is not the sole regional power on the continent but rather is accompanied by Nigeria as acknowledged centres of power in the continent. Our contrary argument is that the general description of South Africa as Africa's regional hegemonic power is unmistakably predicated on the merit of its reputed and perhaps superior soft power profiles much more than Nigeria (Sidiropoulos 2014; Ogunnubi and Uzodike 2015).

3. From Nollywood to international mega churches: The potentials of Nigeria's soft power

Nigeria's regional hegemonic status has often been advanced on the basis of its superior economic and comparatively advanced military capabilities within Africa. However, as we argued previously, any meaningful assessment of regional hegemonic power must necessarily include both the hard and soft power competences of a state in what is often referred to as 'smart power' (See Nye 2004). For Nigeria, there has been no serious attempt to capture the soft power nuances of Abuja despite the fact that there are trickles of its potentials littered particularly in official and unofficial exuberance of state and non-state actors. Admittedly, scholars of Nigerian foreign policy analysis are therefore yet to apply their minds significantly to the soft power resources of Nigeria and how these can be adjusted with the country's foreign policy to mitigate the inherent dilemma and constraints of its regional hegemonic prospect. Indeed, by wielding its soft power, a state like Nigeria — with enormous soft power potential — is able to appro-

appropriate legitimacy and recognition as a benign regional hegemon among other possible contenders. In essence, that there is a paucity of literature on the subject matter should not imply that the country's assortment of soft power is non-existent.

One major analytical effort to establish the enormous potential of Nigeria's soft power attributes was done by Ogunnubi (2013). He attempts to locate Nigeria's soft power within the ambits of Nye's three prescriptions of culture, foreign policy and public diplomacy. According to him, Nigeria's soft power assets may be extracted from attributes such as its cultural export (especially Nollywood); its political and iconic personalities (official and unofficial); sporting accomplishment (majorly in soccer); international peacekeeping record and role; international mega churches; delivery of public goods through agencies such as the Technical Aid Corps Scheme (TACS), its Afrocentric foreign policy as well as its policy of good neighbourliness. For brevity, we would highlight two main sources of Nigeria's soft power: 'Nollywood' and international mega churches. Although the remit of Nigeria's potential soft power resources spans beyond its Nollywood industry and international mega churches, we have deliberately focused on these two areas because in our view they appear to represent the most obvious soft power assets for the country. Of course, other areas such as Nigeria's literary contribution might have had a far greater impact than its churches for example, in permeating reading cultures, education systems, theatre and the arts across the globe.

The Nigerian Nollywood industry is today recognised globally as the second largest movie industry in the world in terms of production output and third in terms of value.³⁾ Dubbed after the American 'Hollywood', the general popularity of Nollywood as Nigeria's film industry remains one major fountain of the country's soft power. Nollywood films are perhaps the most potent source of Nigeria's budding soft power through the showcasing of the beautiful varieties of Nigeria's cultural heritage (Sidiropoulos 2014; Isike and Isike 2012). Nollywood actors and actresses like Stephanie Okereke, Genevieve Nnaji, Patience Ozokwor, *Mr Ibu*, Osita Iheme (Aki and Pawpaw), Pete Edoche, Omotola Jalade-Ekeinde,⁴⁾ Mercy Johnson, Richard Mofe Damijo, Ike Owo, Funke Akindele and many others are widely popular and celebrated among the African people for their animating qualities. This can also be complimented with popular Nigeria's soap operas like *Jacobs Cross*, *Tinsel*, etc that are widely admired and watched by millions of viewers within

the African continent courtesy of the Multichoice/Dstv platform. A number of Multichoice/Dstv Africa Magic platforms (AMSho 150, AMEpi 152, AMUrb 153, AMFam 154 and AMWld 155) are dedicated Nollywood channels, which constantly broadcast Nigerian films and programmes, which often present the rich culture and societal landmarks of the Nigerian people. It is thus instructive that the first ever Africa Magic Viewer's Choice Awards (AMVCA) was held in Nigeria in 2013. Together, the entertainment industry of Nigeria, which also includes the music element have served to endear better goodwill towards Nigerians and *ipso facto* Nigeria amongst Africans. For example, in a study by Isike and Isike (2012) which surveyed 92 Africans (composed of Batswana, Congolese, Cameroonians, Mozambicans, South Africans, Zambians and Zimbabweans) across three cities in KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa, findings show 83 per cent of the respondents that from watching Nigerian movies, they now view Nigerians in more positive light because of the similarities in cultures/worldviews, and the fact that they now know more about Nigeria beyond the popular stereotypes and narrow views about Nigeria and Nigerians (Isike and Isike, 2012: 106). Similarly, in a research visit to Tanzania in November 2014, one of the authors surveyed 40 young men and 40 young women in a semi-urban settlement on the outskirts of Dodoma, 91 per cent of who view Nigeria and Nigerians favourably because of positive impressions formed from watching Nigerian movies. To them, the common position was "we see a lot of Nigerian culture, positive attitudes and hard work ethic in ourselves and because Nigeria is a big country we like to see Nigeria as our senior brother"⁵⁾.

Clearly, the Nigerian government can in fact take advantage of the vast and colourful representation of its people through the Nollywood platform to project a cultural acceptance of its people and consequently the continental values it pursues. No doubt, the films, soaps and programmes from Nollywood can be used to paint an admirable image of the Nigerian societal standards, intrigues and moral values, which echoes the nuances of the African people. The global celebrities of its entertainment industry can serve as ambassadors for promoting the 'Naija'⁶⁾ brand and initiative in ways that will project its soft power stake on its hegemonic aspiration in Africa.

On the other hand, as a result of the emergence of elite Nigerian pastors with an international outlook, the country stands out as a unique destination for religious and pilgrim tourism.⁷⁾ Today, there is the

ubiquity of Nigerian international mega churches with branches in virtually every nook and cranny of major African streets and cities in the world. These mega churches are reputed to have membership spreading across every corner of the globe as well as the financial capacity, which sometimes exceed some poor African states.⁸⁾ As Ogunnubi and Isike highlight, countless elite Nigerian pastors and televangelists are today renowned internationally for their miracle and healing working powers thus drawing endearment towards Nigeria. Prominent among these include Prophet T B Joshua of the Synagogue Church of All Nations (SCOAN); Pastor Chris Oyakilome of Believers Love World (aka Christ Embassy); Bishop Dr David Oyedepo's Living Faith Church popularly known as Winners Chapel; KICC owned by renowned Pastor Mathew Ashimolowo and the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG) under the leadership of Pastor Enoch Adeboye amongst many others.⁹⁾

The emphasis here is that the preaching and ministry of these renowned pastors paint a sense of international acceptance of Nigeria and its people demonstrated in many instances. One of such instances includes the incidences surrounding the recent collapse of a guest-house in Pastor T B Joshua's church, which led to the death of over 100 people including 89 South Africans. Because of the church's popularity especially in Southern Africa and the frequent visits by all kinds of statesmen, celebrities and royalties from the region, it became difficult for South Africa to openly criticise the death of its citizens and the questionable manner in which the SCOAN and the Nigerian government handled the aftermath of the building collapse. In effect, as a result of the reverence for T B Joshua by many South Africans in this context, the Nigerian government was saved a good dose of international embarrassment it would have experienced as a result of the incident.¹⁰⁾

While these two soft power resources highlighted here do not in any way represent an exhaustive list of Nigeria's soft power resources, the attempt was to provide a selective cynosure of the general reference to Nigeria's soft power. Nigeria's soft power resources are also evidently manifest in other areas such as its literary contribution which permeate reading cultures across the world, its education systems which lay the foundation for globally renowned scholars who started their early education in Nigeria which for some perhaps may have a greater impact than its churches. There is possibly also a soft power resource in the huge Nigerian diaspora scattered all over the world as well as in its peacekeeping and development assistance records par-

ticularly through the TACS.

4. South Africa's soft power potentials: Myth or reality?

As in the case of Nigeria and paradoxically so, despite the evident (official and unofficial) mobilisation of its soft power resources by state and non-state actors, very little has been written on South Africa's soft power status. Notwithstanding, for South Africa, over and above its Nigerian counterpart, there are pockets of literature on soft power resources (Ogunnubi and Uzodike 2015); emerging soft power (Sidiropoulos 2014); the essence of soft power (Smith 2013); optimising soft power (Chiroro 2012); soft power and middle power status (Geldenhuis 2010). This paper no doubt adds to the fledging literature on South Africa's soft power by looking at the nexus between its soft power and regional hegemonic prospect in comparative context. What constitutes South Africa's soft power? First, we point to a variety of formal and informal sources including components like media export, political ideals, constitutionally enshrined values of rule of law, the bill of right, its vast array of iconic personalities which garner it political goodwill, multinational companies, prestigious universities, cultural export, sporting attraction, hospitality among many others. All of these characteristics are profoundly important in shaping a positive international image for South Africa as it attempts to set the agenda for international discourse. The institutionalisation of a good number of its soft power capabilities has made South Africa to leverage its soft power potentials and capabilities better than Nigeria has. This has made it to move beyond potential to reality.

It should be borne in mind that, like its other (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) BRICS counterparts, South Africa can clearly be seen as a soft power state having the attributes to avoid the use of coercion and force in ensuring that the attractiveness of its own ideas and preferences is reflected in the choices of other states particularly within Africa. It is thus able to achieve this "by taking cognisance of its racial past; the richness of its diverse culture; the contradictions in socio-economic development; the fight against poverty and inequalities; and adherence to constitutionalism and the rule of law in setting the agenda and ensuring that the multilateral system can implement pol-

icies that are people-centred" (Chiroro 2012). Scholars such as Chiroro (2012) and Sidiropoulos (2014) agree that South Africa can confidently exercise increasing levels of geopolitical influence by carefully attracting other nations to want what it desires through extension of its values, culture, policies and institutions. In this way, South Africa stands to gain acceptance and voluntary compliance where force is not needed. For instance, South Africa has literally been able to transform itself from a hitherto pariah state under the *apartheid* rule underlined by racial discrimination to being a state widely accepted as Africa's regional power on the strength of the soft power modelled foreign policy (Smith 2012, 2009).

As we shall later show, a number of factors have added to improve South Africa's soft power status in the last couple of decades. These can be attributed to those deliberately generated by state as well non-state actors through cultural agents, civil societies, non-governmental agencies and corporate business.

5. Regional hegemony in Africa and the substance of soft power

As mentioned earlier, both Nigeria and South Africa can be said to be aspiring to regional hegemonic roles on the strength of their comparative material capabilities as well as robust foreign policy postures towards Africa which are largely perceived to be representing the continental interests. However, as Smith (2012) predicted, South Africa has since relinquished its position as Africa's largest economy; its only comparative advantage is in its soft power, which it is able to use to attract positive international perception towards it. For a number of reasons, more than its Nigerian counterpart, we demonstrate how South Africa (even though sometimes not deliberately) has evidently been able to maximise the vast potential that its soft power assortment offers in a way that unarguably qualifies it as Africa's regional hegemon. Specifically, to support this argument, we examine four areas that comparatively evince South Africa's superior soft power capabilities much more than Nigeria — credentials that presents to South Africa the status of Africa's regional hegemonic power.

5.1 Official recognition

More than its Nigerian counterpart, for South Africa, there is apparently a deeper sense of government's awareness and acknowledgment of the potency of soft power. The *National Development Plan 2030* (NDP) represents an official recognition of the role of soft power in achieving South Africa's foreign policy projections in the next couple of decades. Specifically, Chapter 7 of the NDP echoes the country's anticipated position in the world by 2030 from a soft power perspective:

In areas such as science, culture, higher education, sport and environmental protection, there is a need to showcase South Africa and promote its presence and leadership on strategic issues as part of its *soft power* in international relations... (NDP 2012: 241).

and

Public diplomacy is fundamental to South Africa's projection of *soft power* (NDP 2012: 255).

What is clear from the above quotes is that the post-*apartheid* South African government has recognised that its rising international profile can only be reinforced through the increased, calculated and coordinated use of its soft power attributes to achieve specific foreign policy outcomes. It further highlights the pivotal role of public diplomacy (a critical aspect of soft power) for the advancement of South Africa's global status.

Aside from this, there have also been subtle references to soft power by government officials in speeches and rhetoric. For instance, the then Minister of Foreign Affairs, Dr Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma affirmed in 2007 that: "International perceptions play a critical role in all areas of international relations, from investment and tourism and sport. As such our missions and our diplomats play a major role in branding South Africa" (cited in Smith 2012: 80). Similarly, while commenting on the utility of sports as a soft power resource, South Africa's iconic president, Nelson Mandela, once noted that sports "has the power to change the world. It has the power to inspire. It has the power to unite people in a way that little else can. Sport can awaken hope where there was previously only despair". His statement reinforces South Africa's acknowledgment of the changing reality of the international system where states are beginning to realise and take advantage of their soft

power potential as an alternative for gaining political advantage in the international system. This also lends credence to the argument that politics permeates all elements of social existence including sports. On the shift from hard to soft power strategies, Smith (2009) makes the point that since the post-*apartheid* era, soft power has remained the essence of South Africa's foreign policy although the country is yet to appreciate the enormous potential of its ideational power for its international reputation. This according to her demonstrates the increasing willingness of South Africa to use the instruments of soft power.

Nigeria in contrast, is yet to formally appreciate the essence of soft power in an increasingly complex international system evidenced in barely any literature or rhetoric from both its scholars and policy practitioners on the subject matter.¹¹⁾ There exist several inherent contradictions that challenge the hegemonic prospect of a country like Nigeria and continue to dent the possibility of any soft power influence. Since 1999 when the country returned to civilian rule, its international image has continued to take a further nosedive with a floodgate of high level corruption, poor infrastructures, increasing crime rates, internet fraud, poor human rights record, the Boko Haram insurgency etc. Due largely to its dysfunctional state system, Nigeria continues to lose international credibility and recognition and much of its international reputation notwithstanding its status as an African economic giant.

5.2 Deliberate use of soft power resources

Clearly and contrary to its Nigerian counterpart, the international acceptance that South Africa enjoys flows from an appreciable level of willingness to use the instrumentality of soft power as foreign policy leverage in the increasingly shifting trends of international politics. To be sure, South Africa since the post-*apartheid* era has been very aggressive in pursuing a benevolent public image through both state and non-state sources. This is exemplified in many instances like through its successful hosting of major sporting events such as the FIFA World Cup in 2010.¹²⁾ As Grix and Lee (2013) points out, the hosting of sports mega-events can be seen as the practice of public diplomacy by South Africa to demonstrate its soft power capability as well as pursue its global interests. Clearly, developing states like South Africa are beginning to recognise the potency of soft power in transforming their image and enhancing their international positioning through the hosting of

major sporting events (Grix and Lee 2013).

Another example to draw from is the relaxation of immigration conditions for foreign immigrants especially from Africa. The ease of traveling to South Africa is a direct reflection of the government's willingness and commitment to the human resources development of the continent in a bid to drag back the crippling tides of palpable continental underdevelopment (See Ogunnubi and Uzodike 2015; South African Year Book, 2004/5). This is beside the huge injection of diplomatic capital into finding peaceful resolution of conflicts as well as post conflict and reconstruction efforts in many parts of Africa. Likewise, a number of top rated universities in South Africa, including the University of KwaZulu-Natal offer tuition free postgraduate study for many African students. In essence, there are official policies that are consistent with the country's soft power prospect particularly in Africa. Many of these actions have no doubt expanded South Africa's political impact within the African region.

Secondly, beyond its acknowledgment of the role of soft power, South Africa has been able to deliberately mould its foreign policy on the leverage that its ideational resources offers (Smith 2009) — something it has been able to do much more than Nigeria. Undoubtedly, the action of the government of South Africa has helped to cement the popular sources of South Africa's soft power (See Smith 2009). Since the end of *apartheid* therefore, South Africa has been able to transform its public image from a hitherto pariah state to one that is internationally recognised and accepted. This has been made possible by the government's formulation of specific policies and programmes aimed at maximising its soft power potential which collectively have helped to reshape people's perception about South Africa as a benevolent hegemon; one that is not particularly keen on bullying the rest of the continent despite its evident capacity to do so.

5.3 Economic capability as soft power resource

While it is generally recognised that economic capability is mainly a hard power component, this material resource can also be transformed as a soft power instrument in subtle ways to attract dividends for a state. Specifically, this is possible through the extension of economic incentives or the ability to create economic opportunities and immigration opportunities for other nations in a way that ultimately spreads a coun-

try's influence within its immediate region (Bharati 2006; Smith 2009). In this regard, South Africa has also been able to mobilise particularly its economic capability as a soft power resource to attract attraction and influence. Smith (2009) demonstrates this point clearly by asserting that the international acceptance of South Africa is evidenced in its recognition as an economic gateway to the rest of Africa given its status as African lone voice at multilateral fora of advanced, industrialised countries (such as the G8, G20, its inclusion into BRICS in 2011 and the World Economic Forum) where it is somewhat regarded as spokesperson not only for itself but also for the region and the developing world that it represents. Smith makes the pertinent point that "[T]he influence of South African products through the expansion of South African companies like Shoprite (a supermarket chain) or MTN (a cell phone provider) has also contributed to South Africa's image in the region". We argue here that for South Africa, economic and commercial diplomacy have yielded enormous benefits of soft power that underlines South Africa's credibility as African regional powerhouse.

For Nigeria, many are still unsure about the formula of the economic calculations that gave Nigeria the status of Africa's largest economy despite widespread poverty and poor record in all development indicators relative to South Africa (See Enweremadu 2013). Indeed, Nigeria's status as Africa's biggest economy does not correlate with the poor living standards of its people; a factor that no doubt brings to question its status as Africa's economic powerhouse (Ogunnubi and Uzodike forthcoming). South Africa's economic success has thus engendered positive admiration particularly within the developing world which aspires to emulate its economic advancement.¹³⁾

In essence, there is remarkable evidence of how South Africa has been able to use its vast material wealth and human resources to subtly extend its influence further north in ways that reinforce its position as Africa's preferred regional hegemon. This self-styled economic and commercial diplomacy has led to the incursion of South African businesses into many parts of Africa in a clear demonstration of how economic capability can be recalibrated into specific soft power results (Vickers 2014). The recipe for business successes of many South African multi-nationals as well as their contribution to the development of the African economy is notable in this regard. While Nigeria may have been overtaken by South Africa as Africa's biggest economy, the latter remains the most advanced and industrialised economy within

the continent. South Africa's economic diplomacy has thus deepened its commercial connectivity with Africa through ties to the economies of these countries. It is for these reasons that South Africa has been able to use its economic advancement to affirm its regional leadership status within the international community that desperately needs development.

South Africa's soft power status over and above Nigeria is also highlighted by the perception of its capacity to provide opportunities of a better life especially for African immigrants (Smith 2009). While this perception may not be founded on credible information given rising unemployment rates in South Africa, the reality is that many African nationals opt to travel to South Africa on the assumption that there is a much better life in the latter than there is in the former. For instance, many South African universities are reputed to offer free tuition, bursary as well as accommodation for postgraduate students as well as opportunities for postdoctoral fellowship after completion of PhD degree. This is an apparent reflection of the acceptance and recognition of the African citizens of South Africa's leadership position in investing the human capital development of the continent. Since citizens are also the recipients of soft power, the positive impression that ordinary African citizens have of South Africa can play significant roles in lessening the cost of South Africa's international relations between other African states as is the case in its recent peaceful intervention in Lesotho (2014).

5.4 Moral authority and international good citizenship

A fourth major endorsement of the asymmetry of South Africa's soft power which uplifts South Africa to the status of Africa's regional hegemonic power is resident in its exceptionalism as a norm entrepreneur and international good citizen from which its moral authority flows (Geldenhuys 2010). Among other regional hegemonic contenders, South Africa has been able stand shoulders high in terms of representing the broader international sentiments ranging from respect to the minorities such as homosexuals, women, disabled persons etc. Over and above Nigeria, an endorsement of South Africa's soft power status in this area is perhaps evidenced in the election of South Africa's Mrs Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma as African Union (AU) Commission's Chairperson in 2012.

As a direct corollary, through the instrument of its ideational resources, South Africa has been able to attract a greater degree of legit-

imacy, recognition and acceptance from its regional neighbours than Nigeria. Often perceived as 'a new kid on the block', South Africa since 1994 has come into its own as a benign regional hegemonic power on the strength of its willingness to cooperate with other regional actors in forging solutions both for Africa and the global South. Even though historically, acceptance and legitimacy of a hegemon has never always mattered in the exercise of hegemonic influence, in the case of regional hegemonic powers like South Africa and Nigeria, these become critical in a bid to minimise foreign policy cost and attract localised acceptance of hegemony. For instance, South Africa did not require the permission of Nigeria — whose influence in West Africa was evident — to intervene in Cote d'Ivoire and Central African Republic (CAR), nor did it request Zimbabwe's consent to wade into the conflicts in Lesotho on both occasions that it did so. Soft power therefore presents such platform for South Africa to co-opt other similarly important regional and secondary powers into a regional cooperative arrangement.

6. Conclusion: Does soft power matter?

Having critically examined the increasing importance of soft power in assessing the hegemonic profile of regional actors with specific reference to Nigeria and South Africa, it is important to note that this assessment does not deflate the continued role that hard power capabilities continue to play in international power politics. Without doubt, the material capabilities of Nigeria and South Africa (powerful and large military forces, sizeable populations and impressive economic indicators) contribute significantly to their standing in the hierarchy of international politics. However, we argue that while there is very little difference in hard power competencies of both countries (Adebajo and Mustapha 2008), there is an evident gap between their soft power assets — which in our assessment is a major determining factor of regional hegemonic power status (Ogunnubi 2013). Definitely, South Africa has been able to find creative means to calibrate its hard power capabilities with its soft power assortments in a way that blurs a clear distinction between both sources of power. Besides, South Africa has also been able to demonstrate that economic strength which is mostly regarded as hard power can be tuned to achieve soft power results as has been witnessed through its economic diplomacy and corporate expansion into Africa.

In essence, by understanding the political dynamics at the re-

gional level of analysis, soft power can indeed provide the substance for any hegemonic contention and the exercise of a regional hegemonic role hinged not only on material capabilities but more importantly on the parading of an assortment of soft power resources. Hence, we argue that any substantial claim to regional hegemonic status would depend largely on the careful demonstration of a wide range of soft power credentials — along with the traditional (hard) power components — which exude credentials of regional acceptance, international legitimacy, and ultimately global recognition. Clearly, these are criteria that are fundamental to regional hegemonic status.

Therefore, we contend that South Africa has done better as a regional hegemonic power in Africa compared to Nigeria and this is premised on the substance of the former's soft power attributes (Ogunnubi 2014; Femes and Wojczewski 2010; Smith 2009) which it has turned from potential to reality better than Nigeria has done. As we explained earlier, the rapidly changing global system and world politics reflected in greater attention being paid to soft power relative to hard power clearly raises South Africa to the position to be better regarded and appreciated as Africa's regional hegemon through its awareness and effective use of soft power strategies in its foreign policies to a substantial degree. To a large extent, since the post-*apartheid* era, soft power has remained the fulcrum of South Africa foreign policy (Smith 2012; Sidiropoulos 2014; Ogunnubi and Uzodike 2015).

Particularly for Africa, what makes for a clearer distinction of regional hegemonic status transcend mere articulation of material capabilities but perhaps more importantly, the calibration of these hard power resources along with a state's ideational (soft) power. This explains why many international powers like the European Union (EU), US, China, Brazil, India etc are too quick to accept South Africa as the main regional (hegemonic) power in Africa on the strength of its ideational leadership.

In conclusion, a clearer definition of regional hegemonic status must be underscored by the following prerequisites: the *willingness* of a regional power to play a hegemonic role within the region it belongs to; *ability* to wield sufficient levels of material capabilities on other regional actors; and more importantly the *possession of superior soft power* capabilities to attract international acceptance as well as regional legitimacy as a credible regional leader. Clearly, South Africa has worked much harder than Nigeria in all of these areas especially in the latter.

How Nigeria can instrumentalise its soft power potentials and turn them to reality is a subject of further research but we dare say that it needs to have its own Convention for a Democratic South Africa (CODESA) talks to address its national question and nation-building issues which belie bad governance, corruption and economic inequality. These are strong impediments to leveraging its soft power potentials, which can be instrumental to realising its regional hegemonic aspirations in Africa.

Endnotes

1. The conference had as its theme: "Global changes, 'Rising' and Agenda 2063: Implications for the foreign policies of South Africa and other African driver states" indicating the increasing role South Africa is playing in Africa and at the world stage.
2. Ogunnubi, O and C Isike. "An analysis of Nigeria's soft power potential for realizing its hegemonic aspirations in Africa". Submitted manuscript (Africa Today).
3. "Nigeria surpasses Hollywood as world's second largest film producer – UN". United Nations. 2009-05-05. Retrieved 2015-03-13; "Nigeria's Nollywood eclipsing Hollywood in Africa". *The Independent* (London). May 15, 2010. Retrieved 2015-03-13.
4. Besides being the first African celebrity to receive over one million likes on her Facebook page, 'Omo Sexy' as she is fondly called is listed as one of *Time Magazine* top 100 most influential people in the world alongside Barak and Michelle Obama, Beyonce and Pope Benedict (*All Africa*, 16 February 2013; *TIME 100*, London; 2013).
5. Survey by Isike Christopher conducted in Dodoma on 19 November 2014. For the men, apart from movies, Nigerian soccer was something they looked up to which has positively endeared them to Nigeria. This was palpable in the general despondency amongst male youths in the streets of Dar es Salaam on 22 November 2014 when Nigeria got eliminated from qualifying for the 2015 Africa Cup of Nations by South Africa.
6. This is a slang name for Nigeria and it is increasingly becoming popular not only in Africa but beyond in informal discussion cycles on Nigeria amongst Nigerians and non-Nigerians alike.
7. A term used to denote the visitation of other countries purely for spiritual upliftment. It is defined as travel with the core motive of experiencing religious forms, or the products they induce, like art, culture, traditions and architecture.
8. The church premise of the Winners Chapel based in Otta, is reputed to have the largest church premises in the world.
9. Based on Celebrity Net Worth and Forbes assessment for 2014, five

- Nigerian pastors are listed among the top ten richest pastors in the world with David Oyedepo — net worth: \$150 Million — topping the list.
10. It is easy to reason that other factors such as oil and the bilateral trade relations between Nigeria and South Africa may have been an important consideration in tempering South Africa's reaction. However, none of these stopped South Africa from dealing harshly with Nigeria in the past. A good example is the repatriation saga between both countries in 2013 which almost sparked a diplomatic row before South Africa buckled under threats from Nigeria to cripple its business its business interests in Nigeria. Another example would be how South Africa was very quick to embarrass Nigeria in the 2014 when it seized millions of dollars the Nigerian government was transporting through South Africa in a private jet to purchase arms to prosecute its fight against Boko Haram.
 11. In 2007, Nigeria's Foreign Affairs Minister, Mr Ojo Madueke espoused a new foreign policy direction for Nigeria crafted around economic diplomacy and reciprocity in the way Nigerian citizens are dealt with all over the world. Beyond the policy statement and the debates that it drew, not much more exist on paper and on soft power compared to the South Africa's NDP.
 12. Asides, South Africa has on a number of occasions accepted to rescue Africa (CAF) from the embarrassment of the withdrawal of a designated tournament host. Many have also suggested that South Africa should action a similar fashion to accept to host the 2015 CAF Africa Cup of Nations after the withdrawal of Morocco due to fears of the spread of Ebola.
 13. It should be noted however that just like Nigeria, not all South Africans have benefited from its very structured economy which excludes a good majority of especially previously disadvantaged South Africans in spite of BEE efforts to mainstream blacks into the economy. In essence then, not everyone is benefiting from South Africa's economy and its soft power effects.

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