

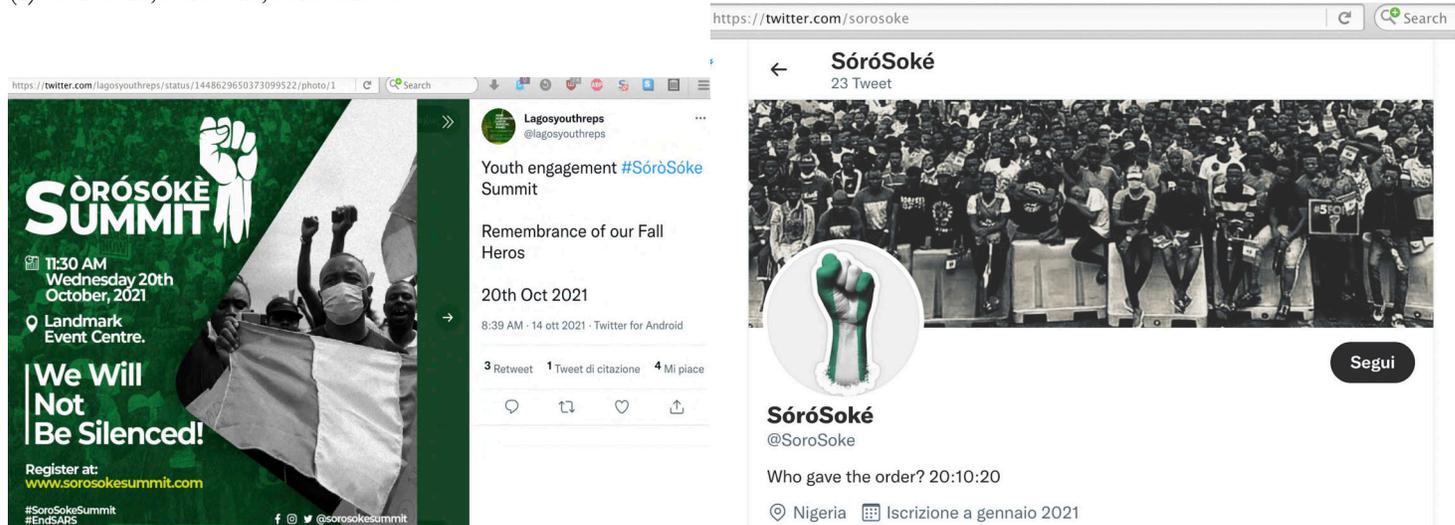
# Sorosokology as visual synaesthesia

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The Yorùbá phrase in (1) has become the latest digital handle of nonviolent mass democratic struggle in Nigeria. And it's a fine slogan, but something strange is happening to the diacritics as can be seen in recent screenshots (2).

(1) sòrò só.kẹ̀ 'speak up, say [it] loud' or in effect, 'shout out your truth' < -sò 'speak', òrò 'speech, talking', -sí 'to', òkẹ̀ 'top/height/hill'<sup>1</sup>

(2) "SòróSokè, SóròSóké, SóróSoké..."



Sources: [twitter.com/lagosyouthreps/status/1448629650373099522/photo/1](https://twitter.com/lagosyouthreps/status/1448629650373099522/photo/1), [twitter.com/sorosoke](https://twitter.com/sorosoke).

Missing subdots in Nigeria are not news. A leading yorubophone journalist signs off as “Bámídelé Adémólá-Olátéjú”<sup>2</sup>—precisely marking each of the nine high tones in her own byline while dropping all three intrinsic subdots of *Adémólá-Olátéjú*. There’s no campaign #BringBackOurDots nor does any stand a chance, given the Unicode Consortium’s decades-long refusal to spare a measly sixteen address points for precomposites of U+0323 “combining dot below” ([www.fileformat.info/info/unicode/char/0323/index.htm](http://www.fileformat.info/info/unicode/char/0323/index.htm)) with four tonemarked vowels *u&#x0303;c*. It’s not puristic pedantry to reclaim the vowel subdot, a historic and standard item in the toolbox of West African literacy, descended from classic graphic innovations of the formative years of modern linguistic science bequeathed by great neogrammarians like Karl Richard Lepsius (1854, cf. Crowther 1843, Àjàyí 1960, Bámgbósé 1976, 1983). No, the indifference/arrogance displayed by software monopolies to basic needs of large populations of intertropical Africa is just old hat, no matter that this back-of-the-hand treatment positions these oligarchs “in direct conflict with the aims of the International Standards Organization” (Mueller 2006, cf. Liberman & al. 2008). By now, everybody knows that the once-progressive internet is catastrophically failing its potential as a social commons and become instead a privatised poaching ground for algorithmic predators, among whom Unicode’s financial sponsors are some of the alpha-most fatcats around—no names, please! Surveillance economics and the datamining of attention don’t sweat the poverty of philology.

Polluted public policy aside, and consigning Crowther’s Yorùbá subdot to the fossil boneyard of the Analog-ocene Era, the present question is what on earth participants in the Nigerian Lives Matter movement are doing when they strew superscript accents around like dry *garri* onto a plate of boiled beans? Such randomness is needless even in a low literacy zone. If the game is just a marketing sense that any exotic decoration on the roman alphabet makes for a recognizable brand like Beyoncé™ and Mötley Crüe™ then why not pick one string of tonemarks among the flux in (2), any one at all even if it’s the wrong one in a grammarian’s quaint opinion, but at least *consistently* wrong?

My guess is that the chaotic set in (2) fulfil a more intensional function, as equivalent icons of vocal expressiveness in a world of virtual synaesthesia. Italic and bold fonts are too old-school, reeking of ink on paper, and such antique styles are anyway doomed in the quickie ASCII ecosystem of SMS and hashtags running on fumes of malapropic autocorrect and driverless reply. Superscripted stuff, by contrast, **vísúállý shóúts óút**. *Hear word!*

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1 The full stop in *só.kẹ̀*, marking the “assimilated low tone” analysed by Bámgbósé (1966) and applied by him in the etymology of *Oló.dùmarè* (1972), can be informally called ‘the Yorùbá downstep’.

2 [web.archive.org/web/20130715122815/http://premiumtimesng.com/author/bamidele-ademola-olateju](http://web.archive.org/web/20130715122815/http://premiumtimesng.com/author/bamidele-ademola-olateju).