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Interreligious Encounter in a West African City: A Study of Multiple Religious
Belonging and Identity Among the Yorùbá of Ogbómòsò, Nigeria

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DECLARATION

I composed this thesis, the work is my own. No part of this thesis has been submitted for any other degree or qualification.

Name.....

Date.....

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ABSTRACT

The details of encounters between religious groups in multireligious African contexts and the intricacies of living, belonging, and identifying within such milieux have hardly been explored. In Yorùbáland, the cultural region of the Yorùbá people—and the geographic context of this thesis—the fine grain and vast array of possibilities of interreligious encounter between Christians, Muslims, and adherents of African Indigenous Religions remains largely undocumented in terms of detailed, quality accounts. While most regions of West Africa and even Nigeria exist with a dominant religious tradition, Yorùbáland is a microcosm of the wider region's multireligious composition, with Christianity, Islam, and African Indigenous Religions all playing prominent roles. The Yorùbá 'spirit of accommodation', a phrase often used to describe how Yorùbá culture not only tolerates, but also embeds and synthesises the religious 'Other', has created a unique multireligious environ and is undoubtedly one of the optimum contexts in the world to study interreligious encounter within a single ethnolinguistic area.

Comprised of fieldwork and research conducted from 2009-2014, this thesis works toward addressing the aforementioned gap in scholarship with two ethnographic case studies of people who simultaneously belong and/or identify with multiple religious groups and traditions in the predominantly Yorùbá city of Ogbómòsò, Nigeria. The first case study examines a new religious group known as the Ogbómòsò Society of Chrislam (OSC). Interreligious encounter in this instance features a group that intentionally combines elements from Christian, Muslim, and indigenous Yorùbá religious traditions, creating dynamic examples of multiple religious belongings and identities. The second case study examines multiple religious belonging and identity at the annual Ogbómòsò *Egúngún* festival. Interreligious encounter in this instance features 12 individual narrative accounts focusing on each individual's religious belonging and identity throughout key points in their life.

Beyond its important ethnographical contributions, the thesis offers methodological and theoretical insight into approaching religious belonging and identity as complex and fluid processes, rather than static and singular events. It argues that approaches

that only allow for the possibility of classifying people in single, discrete categories masks the varied, dynamic, and complex belongings and identities of people in the lived world, many of who live across and within multiple religious groups and traditions.

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ABBREVIATIONS AND COMMON YORÙBÁ TERMS

<i>AASR</i>	African Association for the Study of Religions
<i>ADUPÉ</i>	We thank God
<i>AIR</i>	African Indigenous Religion(s) or an adherent of African Indigenous Religion(s)
<i>AKPADALAND</i>	Land of renewal; pilgrimage site of OSC
<i>BABALAWO</i>	Priest of <i>Ifá</i>
<i>CRM</i>	Christ the Redeemer's Ministries
<i>EGÚNGÚN</i>	Ancestral spirits masquerading
<i>IFÁ</i>	A Yorùbá religion and system of divination
<i>ISNA</i>	Islamic Association of North America
<i>IYANIFA</i>	Priestess of <i>Ifá</i>
<i>LAUTECH</i>	Ladoke Akintola University of Technology
<i>MBB</i>	Muslim Background Believers
<i>NBTS</i>	Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary
<i>NRM</i>	New Religious Movement
<i>ODÙ</i>	<i>Ifá</i> literary corpus
<i>OGBÓMÒSÓLAND</i>	Region within and around Ogbómòsó
<i>OKADA</i>	Motorcycle for hire
<i>OLÓDÙMARE</i>	Manifestation of the Supreme God in <i>Ifá</i>
<i>OLÒRÚN</i>	Manifestation of the Supreme God in <i>Ifá</i>
<i>OPELE</i>	<i>Ifá</i> divination chain
<i>ÒRÌȘÀ</i>	Yorùbá gods or divinities
<i>ORUNMILÁ</i>	An <i>Òrìșà</i> of <i>Ifá</i>

<i>OSC</i>	The Ogbómòsò Society of Chrislam
<i>OYIBO</i>	White man, or, more broadly, a white person
<i>PBUH</i>	Peace be upon him
<i>QDA</i>	Qualitative Data Analysis
<i>RCCG</i>	Redeemed Christian Church of God
<i>RCF</i>	Redeemed Christian Fellowship
<i>TBN</i>	Trinity Broadcasting Network
<i>UBC</i>	University Baptist Church, Ogbómòsò
<i>YORÙBÁLAND</i>	Cultural region of the Yorùbá people that spans the modern nations of Nigeria, Benin, and Togo

CHAPTER 1

CURRENTS IN CONTEMPORARY NIGERIA

*Africa—concept or reality—is an acknowledged continent of extremes, and, by the same token, it is hardly surprising that it draws extreme reactions.*¹

— Wole Soyinka

Introduction

This comment about Africa from Nigerian Nobel Laureate, Wole Soyinka, while pan-African in association, was undoubtedly conceived out of Soyinka's own experience in his native land in West Africa. Modern Nigeria is riddled with extremes. It is paradox par excellence—rising and falling, emerging and fading, enduring and ephemeral, united and divided—a simultaneous existence of seemingly anomalous incongruity. It is a nation consistently ranked as one of the world's most corrupt, and yet also one of the most religious.² Known for its corporate financial scams, deadly riots, and low human development index, Nigeria is at the same time recognised as possessing some of the happiest, most creative people on the planet and is Africa's largest contributor to United Nations peacekeeping operations.³ It is

¹ Wole Soyinka, *Of Africa* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), ix.

² As recently as 2004, Transparency International ranked Nigeria as the most corrupt nation in the world. For the most recent report, see: 'The Corruption Perceptions Index 2012,' *Transparency International*, <http://www.transparency.org/cpi2012/results> (accessed 6 December 2012). In the 2012 report, Nigeria is ranked 139 out the 174 countries surveyed. Nigeria is also listed as being one of the most religious nations in the world according to the following report: 'Tolerance and Tension: Islam and Christianity in Sub-Saharan Africa,' *The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life*, <http://pewforum.org/executive-summary-islam-and-christianity-in-sub-saharan-africa.aspx> (accessed May 26, 2010).

home to Nollywood, the second largest film industry in the world, as well as a host of Africa's most famous and brilliant artists—names like Fela Kuti and Ben Okri—and yet also home to infamous groups like Boko Haram. The nation boasts one of the freest and most vibrant media centres in all of Africa, but police abuses are widespread, oil embezzlement continues unabated, and elections are marred by blatant ballot rigging and thuggery.⁴ This is a land in flux—pulsating between a complex past and an unknown future. As the late Chinua Achebe eloquently put it, 'Nigeria is a powerful possibility.'⁵

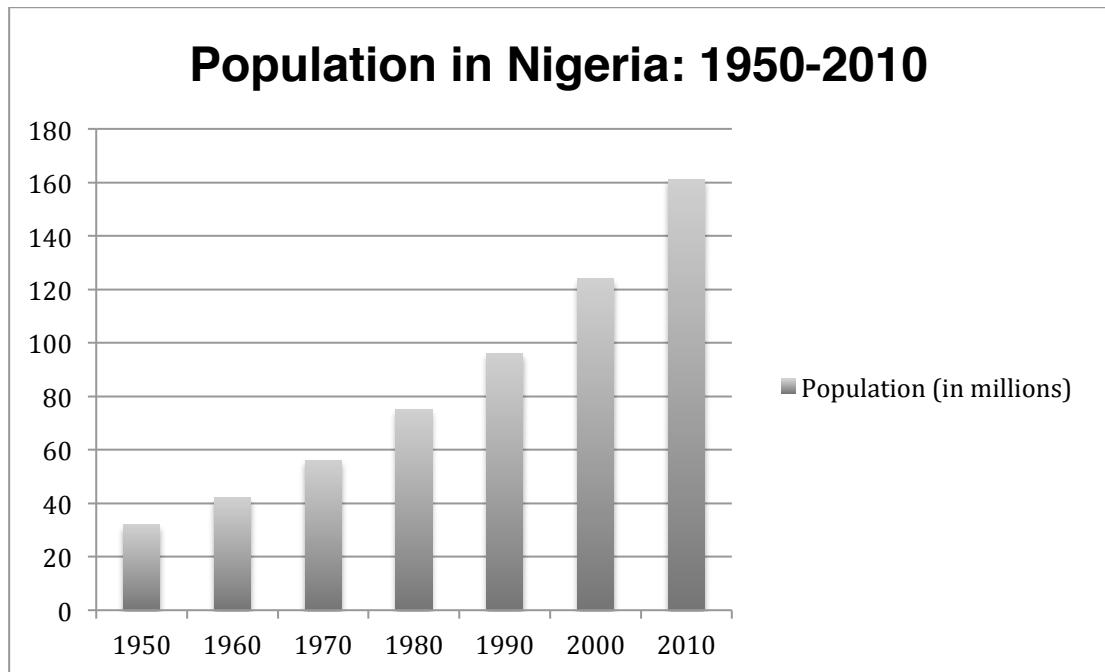
Part I of this chapter takes a look at this powerful possibility through a survey of Nigeria's population, economy, cultural impact, and the wide variety of impediments that face Nigerians on a daily basis. Part II then provides a brief survey of Nigeria's historical and contemporary religious milieu. Part III introduces the rationale, the geographic context, major concepts, and the aims of the thesis. Part IV presents a brief review of literature. Part V gives a summary of the chapters of this thesis.

³ '2011 Human Development Report,' *United Nations*, <http://hdr.undp.org/en/reports/global/hdr2011/> (accessed 29 November 2012). According to the report, Nigeria is ranked 157 out of 187 countries. As recently as 2003, Nigeria was designated as being the happiest country in the world. See: Michael Bond, 'The Pursuit of Happiness,' *New Scientist Magazine*, 4-10 October 2010, 40.

⁴ Nigeria has more than 20 daily newspapers and numerous magazines, as well as privately owned television and radio stations. In contrast to previous elections, the 2011 Presidential election was viewed as largely democratic and a step in the right direction. For more on this, see: International Crisis Group, 'Lessons from Nigeria's 2011 Elections: Africa Briefing No 81,' 15 September 2011.

⁵ Chinua Achebe, 'Chinua Achebe: An Interview,' *Tell*, 13 September 1999.

PART I: THE GIANT OF AFRICA



Source: United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs/Population Division

A significant part of what Achebe refers to in terms of possibility is connected to Nigeria's size. Known colloquially as 'The Giant of Africa', Nigeria is big and it is influential. As can be seen in the graph above, Nigeria's population has been rapidly increasing over the course of the past six decades.⁶ In 1950, the population was estimated to have been just over 37 million. By the year 1980, it had doubled to around 74 million. In the following three decades, the population again increased more than twofold, with 160 million by 2010. As of July 2014, it is estimated that over 175 million people reside in Nigeria's borders, with the city of

⁶ The data in the chart and the text is adapted from: United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs/Population Division, *World Population Prospects: The 2012 Revision* (New York: United Nations, 13 June 2013). As a comparison, Nigeria's last census was taken in 2006 and estimated the population to be over 140 million. For more on this, see: National Population Commission, '2006 Population and Housing Census of the Federal Republic of Nigeria' (Abuja: National Population Commission, 2006).

Lagos edging Cairo as the continent's most populous city at 21 million.⁷

These figures make Nigeria by far the most populous country in Africa and the seventh most populous in the world. Indeed, one out of every six Africans on the continent is Nigerian. Despite an overall decline in the total fertility rate since the late 1970s (with a peak of 7.2 children born per woman), the average remains about 6 children born per woman.⁸ Given current estimates of high fertility rates, rapidly declining infant and child mortality, and with more than half of Nigerian women currently under the age of 19 (entering the peak of child bearing years), Nigeria's population explosion is all but guaranteed to continue into the foreseeable future. By 2050, Nigeria is expected to amass a population of over 440 million, surpassing the United States to become the third most populous country in the world.⁹

With fertility rates plummeting in Latin America and Asia, over half of the

⁷ John Campbell, 'This is Africa's Newest Big City: Lagos, Nigeria, Population 21 Million,' *The Atlantic*, 10 July 2012, <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2012/07/this-is-africas-new-biggest-city-lagos-nigeria-population-21-million/259611/> (accessed 10 July 2013). Around 50 percent of Nigerians are now urban dwellers. Interestingly, Lagos is currently being touted as 'Africa's Big Apple,' 'Africa's Main Business and Economic Hub,' and a 'Model Megacity for the 21st Century.' See: *Lagos: Africa's Big Apple*, DVD, Produced by QCP TV (London: Quality Communication Productions, 2013).

⁸ Six children born per woman is the estimated average from 2005-2015. See: United Nations, *World Population Prospects: The 2012 Revision*, 34. From 2010-2015, Nigeria is expected to post an average annual growth rate of 2.5 percent. See: 'Nigeria: Country Profile,' *United Nations Data*, <http://data.un.org/CountryProfile.aspx?crName=NIGERIA> (accessed 10 July 2013).

⁹ This same explosion is expected to occur with the continent of Africa as a whole. John May, a demographer at the World Bank states: 'The sub-Saharan population is growing at the rate of 2.5 percent per year as compared to 1.2 percent in Latin America and Asia. At that rate, Africa's population would double in 28 years.' For more on this, see: John May, 'Africa's Population Set to Double By 2036,' *The World Bank*, <http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/AFRICAEXT/0,,contentMDK:21709116~menuPK:258659~pagePK:2865106~piPK:2865128~theSitePK:258644,00.html> (accessed 2 July 2013). According to the CIA World Factbook, the fertility rate in Nigeria is 4.91 children born per woman. The rate needed to sustain a population is typically listed as 2.1 children born per woman. The continent of Africa boasts the highest average fertility rate in the world at 4.72 children born per woman. In second place is the Middle East at 2.88 children born per woman. Given these rates, by 2050 Africa will potentially have four countries listed among the top ten most populous countries in the world: Nigeria, Tanzania, Ethiopia, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. For more on these figures, see: 'The World Factbook: Africa,' *CIA World Factbook*, https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-worldfactbook/region/region_afr.html (accessed May 26, 2010).

world's population will be born in Africa in the next four decades. This is an incredible figure and despite an expected drop in Nigeria's total fertility rate to 3.3 children born per woman by 2050, compound growth will continue in a steep and potentially disastrous upward curve. According to the Population Division at the United Nations, the medium variant projection for Nigeria's population in 2100 is just shy of 1 billion, trailing only behind China and India. This figure is roughly as many people as there are currently on the entire African continent and will account for approximately 9 percent of the total global population.¹⁰ As a whole, by 2100, Africa will have a population of 3.6 billion—about one-third of the total population of the world. Over half of the global population growth in this period will be accounted for by a handful of countries. Nigeria is estimated to be at the top of this list with a net gain of 814 million people during the 2013–2100 period, creating a population density of almost 1,000 people per km², by far the densest of any highly populated country.¹¹ Already a giant, Nigeria is just getting bigger.

Top 5 Most Populous Countries in 2100		
RANK	COUNTRY	POPULATION (IN MILLIONS)
1	India	1,546
2	China	1,085
3	Nigeria	989
4	USA	478
5	Indonesia	315

Source: United Nations, *World Population Prospects: The 2012 Revision*

¹⁰ United Nations, *World Population Prospects: The 2012 Revision*, 1. According to this report, the medium-projection variant for the total world population in 2100 is 10.9 billion.

¹¹ The exact figure is 989 km². This calculation is based upon dividing Nigeria's estimated population by Nigeria's land area. By comparison, the other countries in the top 5 will have a population density (people per km²) of 471 (India), 113 (China), 49 (USA), and 166 (Indonesia).

Alongside this boom in population has been an economic boom of equal proportions. With a large territory and vast wealth of resources, Nigeria recently surpassed South Africa to become Africa's largest economy and one of the top 30 economies in the world.¹² Amazingly, just in 2003, Nigeria was ranked 55th. In terms of raw numbers, Nigerian GDP (at ppp) has nearly tripled from 2000-2011, with an average growth rate of 10.45 percent.¹³ This advance has come by way of a variety of emerging markets, including energy, communications, service, agricultural, and financial. While the future is uncertain, it is conceivable that Nigeria could enter into the 20 largest economies in the world as early as 2020.¹⁴

This meteoric rise is causing waves among investors and nations. With the largest consumer market on the continent and rapid growth predicted in the coming years, many believe Nigeria is just beginning to flex its economic muscle. United States President, Barack Obama, has branded Nigeria as the next major economic

¹² For more on this developing story, see: Moran Zhang, 'Nigeria's Economy: GDP Rebasing To Help Nigeria Overtake South Africa As Africa's Biggest Economy,' *International Business Times*, 13 June 2013, <http://www.ibtimes.com/nigerias-economy-gdp-rebasing-help-nigeria-overtake-south-africa-africas-biggest-economy-1304661#> (accessed 2 July 2013). For another perspective, see: Lorenzo Fioramonti, 'Nigeria vs SA in Flawed GDP Battle,' 28 June 2013, *Mail & Guardian*, <http://mg.co.za/article/2013-06-28-00-nigeria-vs-sa-in-flawed-gdp-battle> (accessed 2 July 2013). While Nigeria continued to grow by 4.3 percent in 2009 and is expected to post an increase of 4.8 percent in 2010, South Africa's economy retracted by 1.9 percent in 2009 and is expected to grow by 2.1 percent in 2010. For more on how these nations compare, see: 'Nigeria & South Africa,' *The World Bank*, <http://go.worldbank.org/FIHOT240K0> (accessed May 26, 2010). For more on the future of Nigeria's economy, see: So Ariweriokuma, *The Political Economy of Oil and Gas in Africa: The Case of Nigeria* (New York: Routledge, 2008).

¹³ For more on Nigeria's economic growth, see: 'Nigeria Research,' *The World Bank*, <http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/nigeria/research> (accessed 10 July 2013).

¹⁴ Even at this stage, in terms of global policy making, Nigeria is poised to be a commanding presence in the twenty-first century. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) has their headquarters in Nigeria's capital, Abuja, and any plans made by the West African Monetary Zone (WAMZ) for a single currency will be impacted by and dependent upon Nigeria's economic direction. Additionally, the nation is currently being considered for inclusion in the G-20, which includes the finance ministers and central bank governors from the 20 major economies of the world (currently 19 countries plus the European Union).

giant.¹⁵ Jim O’Neil, former chairman of Goldman Sachs, has identified Nigeria as one of the ‘Next 11’ nations to become economic powerhouses.¹⁶ The World Bank considers Nigeria to be the most attractive investment environment in Africa and Saudi billionaire and Chairman of Kingdom Holdings, HRH Prince Alwaleed Bin Talal Bin Abdul Aziz Al Saud, recently had this to say about investment in Nigeria: ‘Any investor in Africa who does not come to Nigeria has not started and has a long way to go.’¹⁷ This sentiment is clearly shared by many, with Nigeria currently home to the largest amount of annual Foreign Direct Investments (FDI) on the continent. As an example, in 2011 this was \$8.92 billion, accounting for over 20 percent of the total FDI in Africa for the year.¹⁸

¹⁵ Obama’s remarks were made to the US-Nigeria Trade and Investment Forum, which took place in Washington DC from 24-25 August 2012. Former President of the United States, Bill Clinton, recently remarked, ‘When I became President, [I told my] Secretary of Commerce...he should make a list of the 10 most important countries in the world for the 21st century. Nigeria was in the list.’ See: Bill Clinton, Speech, Abeokuta, Nigeria, Annual Thisday Awards Ceremony, 26 February 2013.

¹⁶ Jim O’Neil, *The Growth Map: Economic Opportunity in the BRICs and Beyond* (New York: Penguin, 2011).

¹⁷ Mfonobong Nsehe, ‘Saudi Billionaire Prince Alwaleed to Invest in Nigeria’, *Forbes*, 11 November 2011, <http://www.forbes.com/sites/mfonobongnsehe/2011/11/11/saudi-billionaire-prince-alwaleed-wants-to-invest-in-nigeria/> (accessed 10 July 2013).

¹⁸ United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, *World Investment Report 2012: Towards a New Generation of Investment Policies* (Geneva: United Nations, 2012), 39. Much of this investment has been in Free Trade Zones such as the Onne Oil and Gas Free Zone in Rivers State. The Lekki Free Trade Zone, a public-private venture led by China-Africa Lekki Investment Limited, is currently under the first phase of construction (\$5 billion worth) and intends to be the largest free trade zone in West Africa. 48 investors have committed \$1.1 billion in the zone. Manufacturing and production are set to be the primary industries. See: <http://en.calekki.com/index.html>. Separately, Puma Energy, a subsidiary of the Dutch multinational, Trafigura, alone has committed to investing \$400 million in oil and gas terminal depot construction in Nigeria. Separately, China is making inroads into Nigeria’s oil and construction empire, with a number of investments in recent years. In 2006, China and Nigeria signed a \$4 billion contract, which included four drilling licenses for China. That same year, the China National Offshore Oil Corporation (CNOOC) spent \$2.3 billion on rights to explore an offshore oil block near Nigeria’s coastline. Dwarfing these figures completely, in 2011 the China State Construction Engineering Corporation Limited (CSCEC) signed a \$23 billion contract to build three oil refineries and a fuel storage complex. Nigeria is already Africa’s largest producer of crude oil and with these investments it seems likely that this will continue to be the case.

Cultural Giant: Media, Arts, and Entertainment

Largest Film Industry in Africa	Nollywood
Most Famous African Writers	Chinua Achebe and Wole Soyinka
Most Famous African Musician	Fela Kuti

Sources: can be found in following text and related footnotes.

Getting beyond the raw numbers, Nigeria's 'giant' status is also hugely connected to its cultural influence, with a disseminated reach that stretches well beyond its geographic enclave in West Africa. Perhaps one of the most well known roles it plays is ambassador for African media, arts, and entertainment. Take for instance the Nigerian film industry, popularly known as Nollywood, which is now the second largest in the world in terms of annual film productions, trailing only Bollywood in India, and is by far the largest in Africa. With roughly 2,000 films produced each year, Nollywood productions are available in even the most remote areas of the African continent, and given that Nigeria has the largest African diaspora population, Nollywood has gone global. The importance of this diffusion and consumption of soft power is difficult to overestimate.¹⁹ Films are among the most powerful cultural and social agents in contemporary life. This sentiment is reflected in President Goodluck Jonathan's recent comments to Nollywood: 'For now, Nollywood is the greatest ambassador we have...For now, we don't have any other group that is as important as Nollywood because you have been able to bring

¹⁹ The term soft power was coined by Harvard political scientist, Joseph Nye, in the late 1980s. He developed the concept further in his books, *Bound to Lead* (1991) and *Soft Power* (2004). According to Nye, culture is one of three resources of soft power, which is based on attracting, rather than coercing (i.e. hard power).

some reputation, some hope to this country.’²⁰

Another example of this cultural diffusion is what is colloquially known as *Naija Muzik*. Often described as ‘the heart of African music’ for its role in the development of the African music industry, the music culture in Nigeria is just as rich and vibrant as ever. From apala, fuji, and afrobeat, to palm wine, highlife, and juju, Nigeria has been at the forefront of the African polyrhythmic imagination. Much of this creative power has come by way of musical fusion. Most influential in this regard is the late Fela Kuti—known not only as Nigeria’s, but also Africa’s most famous musician.²¹ Kuti fused together traditional Yorùbá music such as high-life with the rhythms of jazz, soul, and funk to create the distinctive genre, ‘Afrobeat’. With nearly 50 albums to his credit, Kuti has been ranked #46 on HMV’s list of the 100 most influential musicians of the twentieth century.²²

This trend continues within African literature. Led by the late Chinua Achebe with the best selling African novel of all time, *Things Fall Apart*, first published in 1958, Nigeria continues to provide an anchor for indigenous writing projects. Since

²⁰ Tony Ailemen, ‘Nollywood, Nigeria’s Greatest Ambassadors – Jonathon,’ *Business Day*, 28 November 2012, <http://www.businessdayonline.com/NG/index.php/art-a-life/48206-nollywood-nigerias-greatest-ambassadors--jonathan> (accessed 10 July 2013).

²¹ Fela Kuti is often referred to in this regard. For instance, see: Monica Mark, ‘Fela Kuti Honoured in Lagos,’ Video, *The Guardian*, 19 October 2012, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/music/video/2012/oct/19/fela-kuti-honoured-lagos-video> (accessed 16 July 2013).

²² Among other artists, Babe Tunde King and Sunny Ade are also of importance. King pioneered juju music, mixed together Yoruba palm wine music with Afro-Cuban and Brazilian styles. Taking this a step further, Ade, known as the ‘King of Juju’, and one of the most influential musicians of all time, popularised juju by marrying it with Western rock and roll. While Nigeria has undoubtedly had a major impact upon Africa’s recent musical past, its future is also full of promising influence. Informed by an unapologetic Afrocentrism, the new age of Nigerian music is rooted in traditional elements of style and local slang, while continuously assimilating components of reggae, Hip-Hop, R&B, and electronica, creating a balanced fusion of old and new forms of music. It is a combination that is much in demand, with Nigerian artists seemingly dominating the contemporary African music scene. With technologies such as YouTube and Facebook, and platforms like West African Idol and MTV Africa Awards, *Naija muzik* is following in the footsteps of Nollywood as a truly global operation.

the global critical acclaim of Achebe, which includes his topping of the Forbes list of most influential African celebrities, many others have followed such as Ben Okri and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie.²³ Perhaps most distinguished, however, is playwright, poet, and novelist, Wole Soyinka. Situated in a web of interaction between African and western influences, Soyinka's writings are truly pan-African in orientation. Renowned plays such as *Death and the King's Horseman* and *Opera Wonyosi*, speak to common dilemmas and problems across the African continent. In 1986, Soyinka was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature, becoming the first black African to be honoured in this category. With the recent addition of the 2007 Man Booker International Prize, Soyinka, whose writing career has included imprisonment, exile, and a death sentence for treason, is the best-known playwright from the continent and is considered by many to be the father of modern African literature.

These examples are by no means exhaustive; however, they do serve as symbolic indicators for the type and scale of cultural influence that Nigeria possesses. Nigerian media, arts, and entertainment have tapped into pan-African values and concerns—with issues of poverty, political corruption, colonialism, religious diversity, moral dilemmas, and the encounter between traditional and modern value systems featuring prominently—and have resulted in cultural exports like movies, music, and books that connect with audiences throughout the continent and

²³ Mfonobong Nsehe, 'The 40 Most Powerful Celebrities in Africa,' *Forbes*, 12 Oct 2011, <http://www.forbes.com/pictures/ehed45mef/chinua-achebe/> (accessed 25 June 2013). Ben Okri, a poet and novelist, was awarded the 1991 Man Booker Prize for Fiction for his work, *The Famished Road*. Okri is considered to be one of the foremost African authors writing in the postcolonial tradition. More recently, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, has carried this strong heritage into this generation with works such as *Americanah*, *Purple Hibiscus*, and *Half of a Yellow Sun*. The latter of which was awarded the 2007 Orange Prize for Fiction, and is currently being adapted into a film project. Additionally, Nigerian writers Rotimi Babatunde and Tope Folarin were recipients of the Caine Prize for African Writing in 2012 and 2013.

10 Impediments to Nigeria's Future	
Poverty	Over 60 percent of Nigerians live in absolute poverty
Unemployment	Over 50 percent of youth are unemployed
Overpopulation	Population is expected to reach almost 1 billion by 2100
Corruption	20 percent of the annual budget is embezzled or misappropriated
Power Grid	186 th in the world for sufficient supply of power
Importing	\$11 billion annually on the importation of key products
Health	An array of crises contribute to a Total Life Expectancy of 52.46 years
Transport	Railways, roadways, and ports are in disrepair
Education	About 40 percent of the population is illiterate
Violence	Ranked 7 th in the world for countries most affected by terrorism

Sources: Can be found in following text and related footnotes.

While Nigeria is chock full of powerful possibility, as well as recognised ability, Soyinka's comment about extremes provides balance here.²⁵ For Nigeria, whether fairly or not, is perhaps best known for its infamous reputation—namely, that it is a dangerous, corrupt, and troubled land. Nigeria may indeed be 'The Giant of Africa,' but it is viewed as a sick and crippled giant, that as former United States ambassador John Campbell, assesses, continues to dance on the brink of total

²⁴ During 2011, when I was traveling between Edinburgh and Nigeria, the British Airways inflight entertainment had an advertisement that was rooted in soft power. With scenes of Nigeria's environment, cities, and cultural events flashing across the screen, the dialogue stated: 'Exciting Music Scene; Vibrant Night Life; International Fashion Shows; Africa's Biggest Street Festivals; Luxury Accommodation; Africa's Leading Business Destination; Outstanding Scenery; Feel On Top of the World; Life Time Memories...Fascinating Nigeria.' See: *The Most Welcoming Country*, DVD, Produced by QCP TV (London: Quality Communication Productions, 2012).

²⁵ Phil Baty, 'The 'Giant of Africa' Awakes From its Slumber,' *Times Higher Education*, 7 May 2009, <http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/406413.article> (accessed 26 June 2013).

catastrophe.²⁶ As the National Intelligence Council, with their recent publication titled, ‘Global Trends 2030: Alternative Worlds’, points out, instead of exhibiting signs of stability, Nigeria continues to exist at a high risk of state failure.²⁷ While progress is undoubtedly being made, a myriad of impediments exist in contemporary Nigeria. For instance, despite 20 of the 55 billionaires in Africa calling Nigeria home, including the wealthiest individual in Africa, Aliko Dangote, with an estimated net worth of USD 20.2 billion, as well as the world’s richest black woman, Folorunsho Alakija, with an estimated net worth of USD 7.3 billion, most Nigerians are poor.²⁸ With over 60 percent of the population living in a state of absolute poverty, Nigeria’s per capita GDP is 178th in the world.²⁹ This is a jarring contrast. As Nigeria’s Statistician General, Yemi Kale, has pointed out, ‘It remains a paradox ... that despite the fact that the Nigerian economy is growing, the proportion of

²⁶ John Campbell, *Nigeria: Dancing on the Brink* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield, 2011). Prominent Nigerian commentators also take this critical approach. For examples, see: Reuben Abati, ‘Nigeria: A Crippled Giant at 50,’ *The Guardian (Lagos)*, 1 October 2010; and Eghosa E. Osaghae, *Crippled Giant: Nigeria Since Independence* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1998). For an overview of how Nigeria impacts other parts of Africa, see: David Amanor, Thomas Hubert, Rana Jawad, Randy Joe Sa’ah, Kevin Mwachiro, Jonathan Paye-Layleh, Mutuna Chanda, and Pumza Fihlani, ‘How Nigeria Has Affected the Rest of Africa,’ *BBC News*, 30 Sep 2010, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-11429067> (accessed 26 June 2013).

²⁷ By 2030, Nigeria will be ninth on the list. See: National Intelligence Council, *Global Trends 2030: Alternative Worlds* (Washington DC: Office of the Director of National Intelligence, December 2012), 18.

²⁸ Out of 55 billionaires on the African continent, Nigeria possesses 20. See: ‘The Richest People in Africa 2013,’ *Ventures*, 8 October 2013, <http://www.ventures-africa.com/2013/10/richest-people-africa-2013/> (accessed 8 October 2013).

²⁹ Assessed at GNI per capita (ppp USD). Regarding the poverty rate, see: ‘Nigerian Poverty Rates: 2013-2014,’ *National Bureau of Statistics, Statistical Data Portal*, Abuja, Nigeria, <http://nigeria.prognos.com> (accessed 16 July 2013). According to the NBS, the poverty rate for 2013-2014 is estimated at 64.2 percent. The 2009-2010 report estimated the poverty rate at 62.6 percent. For further verification, see: ‘World Development Indicators: Poverty Rates at National Poverty Lines,’ *The World Bank, Global Poverty Working Group*, <http://wdi.worldbank.org/table/2.7> (accessed 16 July 2013). For the development report, see: Khalid Malik, ‘Human Development Report 2013,’ *United Nations Development Programme*, New York, 2013, 18.

Nigerians living in poverty is increasing every year.³⁰ According to the 2013 United Nations Human Development Report, which produces an index based upon life expectancy, education, and standard of living, Nigeria ranks 153 out of the 187 countries surveyed.³¹ Out of 80 countries surveyed by the Economic Intelligence Unit, Nigeria is ranked as the worst place to be born in 2013.³² Add to this a nearly 50 percent youth unemployment rate and it is no wonder that so many of Nigeria's brightest and affluent continue to drain into the diaspora.³³

Many of these detrimental forces are directly related to overpopulation—paradoxically, the very factor that makes many of Nigeria's industries effective. As Peter Ogunjuyigbe, a demographer at Obafemi Awolowo University remarks, 'Population is key. If you don't take care of population, schools can't cope, hospitals can't cope, there's not enough housing—there's nothing you can do to have economic development.'³⁴ This is perhaps best represented by the health situation in Nigeria. The country is consistently cited for its health crises, which include being one of four countries left in the world where polio is still a major health risk.³⁵ Even

³⁰ 'Nigerians Living in Poverty Rise to Nearly 61%,' *BBC News*, 13 February 2012, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-17015873> (accessed 16 July 2013).

³¹ United Nations, *Human Development Report 2013* (New York: United Nations Development Programme, 2013), 15.

³² 'The Lottery of Life: Where to be born in 2013,' *The Economist* (London: The Economist Newspaper Limited, 21 November 2012), <http://www.economist.com/news/21566430-where-be-born-2013-lottery-life> (accessed 10 July 2013).

³³ 'Youth Unemployment,' *National Bureau of Statistics, Statistical Data Portal*, Abuja, Nigeria, <http://nigeria.prognos.com> (accessed 16 July 2013). See also: 'Nigeria Economic Report,' *The World Bank*, No. 1, May 2013, 8.

³⁴ Elisabeth Rosenthal, 'Nigeria Tested by Rapid Rise in Population,' *New York Times* (New York: The New York Times, 14 April 2012), <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/04/15/world/africa/in-nigeria-a-preview-of-an-overcrowded-planet.html> (accessed 10 July 2013).

³⁵ Jennifer G. Cooke and Farha Tahir, *Polio in Nigeria: The Race to Eradication* (Washington DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2012), 1. The other countries are Pakistan, India, and Afghanistan.

easily managed issues such as pneumonia and diarrhoea are hazardous, as Nigeria, along with the Democratic Republic of the Congo, India, and Pakistan, account for nearly 30 percent of under-five deaths worldwide.³⁶ With life expectancy at a total average of 52.46 years, Nigeria ranks 211 out of 223 countries in the world.³⁷

Linked with each of these impediments is that Nigeria has played host in recent years to some of the most corrupt and ineffective governments in the world.³⁸

Obiageli Ezekwesili, a former World Bank Vice President and co-founder of Transparency International, estimates that since Nigeria's independence in 1960, officials have embezzled or misappropriated more than USD 400 billion of oil revenue. Beyond this figure, Ezekwesili has revealed that upwards of '20 percent of the entire capital expenditure' ends up lining the pockets of government officials annually.³⁹ Systemic corruption has led to every facet of nation management to be neglected and inadequately funded, leaving Nigeria's overall infrastructure in

³⁶ UNICEF Division of Policy and Strategy, *Committing to Child Survival: A Promise Renewed* (New York: United Nations Children's Fund, 2012), 9. Nigeria has the second most newborn deaths in the world. For more on this issue, see: Joy E. Lawn, Mary V. Kinney, and Anne Pfitzer (eds.), 'A Decade of Change for Newborn Survival, Policy and Programmes (2000-2010): A Multi-Country Evaluation of Progress,' *Health Policy and Planning*, 27.3 (2012).

³⁷ The CIA World Factbook, 'Nigeria: People and Society,' <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ni.html> (accessed 17 July 2013).

³⁸ As recently as 2004, Transparency International ranked Nigeria as the most corrupt nation in the world. For the most recent report, see: Transparency International, 'The Corruption Perceptions Index 2012,' <http://www.transparency.org/cpi2012/results> (accessed 6 December 2012). In the 2012 report, Nigeria is ranked 139 out of the 174 countries surveyed.

³⁹ Obiageli Ezekwesili, 'Corruption, National Development, the Bar, and the Judiciary', Lecture, Annual General Meeting, Nigerian Bar Association, Abuja, 28 August 2012. See also: 'Corruption on Trial? The Record of Nigeria's Economic and Financial Crimes Commission,' Human Rights Watch, August 2011, 6. This report estimates that Nigeria lost a minimum of USD 4 billion and USD 8 billion per year to corruption from 1999 to 2007. Ironically, the siphoning of oil money has led to a less lucrative industry. Even though Nigeria is one of the top ten producers of crude oil in the world, it is also one of the largest importers of refined petroleum products because not a single oil refinery functions properly. Therefore, the government sells crude oil only to be bought back at a premium price. This mismanagement of resources is also reflected in the realm of the ecological. With an estimated 300 spills annually, Nigeria has earned the reputation as the 'World Oil Pollution Capital'. See: Caroline Duffield, 'Nigeria: World Oil Pollution Capital,' *BBC News*, 15 June 2010, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/10313107> (accessed 10 July 2013).

shambles. The transport system is in disrepair, with defunct railways, congested ports, and one of the highest traffic fatality rates in the world. The same could be said of the derelict agriculture sector. Since the 1960s, Nigeria's agricultural dominance has evaporated. Instead of exporting products and controlling a major stake in sectors like groundnut oil, palm oil, and cocoa, Nigeria now spends N1.75 trillion (USD 11 billion) annually importing key products.⁴⁰ According to the Nigerian government, the nation is the largest importer of rice in the world and a major importer of wheat, sugar, and fish; products that could easily be produced at home. Perhaps most debilitating, however, is the lack of an effective power grid. Nigeria currently ranks 186th in the world for sufficient supply of power.⁴¹ Over 50 percent of Nigerians have no access to any grid and for those with access, incessant outages are a fact of life. In order to supplement the demand, it is estimated that Nigerians spend up to N3.5 trillion (USD 22 billion) to import and fuel diesel generators, which cost more than double to operate. Years of frustration have led Nigerians to informally designate the now defunct National Electric Power Authority (NEPA) as 'Never Expect Power Always'.⁴²

⁴⁰ According to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization, Nigeria at one time controlled 42 percent of groundnut oil trade, 27 percent of the palm oil trade, and 18 percent of the cocoa trade.

⁴¹ The World Bank ranks Nigeria as 178 out of 185 for 'getting electricity.' For more, see: The World Bank, 'Doing Business 2013,' <http://www.doingbusiness.org/data/exploreeconomies/nigeria/> (accessed 10 July 2013). Nigeria currently generates 5,000 mW annually and has a per capita consumption of 106.63 kWh annually. By way of comparison, South Africa generates 40,000 mW annually, with a per capita consumption of 4,347 kWh annually and is ranked 60th in the world. See also: CIA, CIA World Factbook, 2013.

⁴² The government promises that reforms are currently underway. They have set up a website to monitor progress (www.nigeriapowerreform.org), as well as an independent regulatory agency called the Nigerian Electricity Regulatory Commission (www.nercng.org). Another site for information that is officially endorsed by the government is: <http://www.nigeria-power.com>. Interestingly, social media is also playing a role in curbing corruption. For example, see: 'Nigeria Police Officer Sacked Over YouTube Video,' BBC News, 8 August 2013, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-23620433> (accessed 9 August 2013).

exports ensure that what happens in Nigeria does not stay in Nigeria. The same could be said of its long list of impediments, which have the potential to spill over borders. As a result, Nigeria is among a handful of countries in Africa that have the genuine capacity to either stabilise and enrich, or wreak havoc throughout the continent and beyond.

PART II: NIGERIA'S RELIGIOUS MILIEU

A man boarded the minibus and stooped in front of the passengers to bellow the gospel at us. 'Brothers and sisters, before we complete this journey, let us pray!' Everyone lowered their heads and closed their eyes while the preacher called for the 'blood of Christ to cover this bus and protect us from thieves'. By the time the bus pulled out of the motor park and rattled along the expressway, we had received a full service of hymn, prayers, and a sermon steaming with ideological fervour ... I learnt from this point onward that there was no need to attend church in Nigeria—the church always found me no matter where I hid.⁴⁵

—Noo Saro-Wiwa

Introduction

This Lagos public transportation story from Noo Saro-Wiwa's, *Looking for Transwonderland*, illustrates perfectly the pervasiveness of religiosity in contemporary Nigeria. Manifestations of religion are omnipresent across the country; from its sprawling urban centres to rural villages, coasts to deserts, physical and non-physical religious phenomena are bountiful and boundless. Religion is fervently embraced in this 'Giant of Africa'. Whether part of the rising elite or the marginalised poor, there are unending opportunities to, as scholar Thomas Tweed puts it, 'intensify joy and confront suffering.'⁴⁶ Rather than existing separately from the aforementioned portrait of Nigeria in Part I, religion is a significant part of Nigeria's powerful possibility. As the population, economy, and impact of industries like Nollywood grow and increase; connected to this is the scale and influence of

⁴⁵ Noo Saro-Wiwa, *Looking for Transwonderland: Travels in Nigeria* (London: Granta, 2012), 21-22.

⁴⁶ Thomas A. Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling: A Theory of Religion* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 54. Tweed offers the following definition of religion: 'Religions are confluences of organic-cultural flows that intensify joy and confront suffering by drawing on human and suprahuman forces to make homes and cross boundaries.'

religion in Nigeria. Even in the midst of various impediments that the country faces, this scale and influence embeds further as Nigerians overwhelmingly turn to religious communities and traditions to confront suffering. Indeed, religion is at the very epicentre of Nigerian daily life and culture.

Religion in Numbers

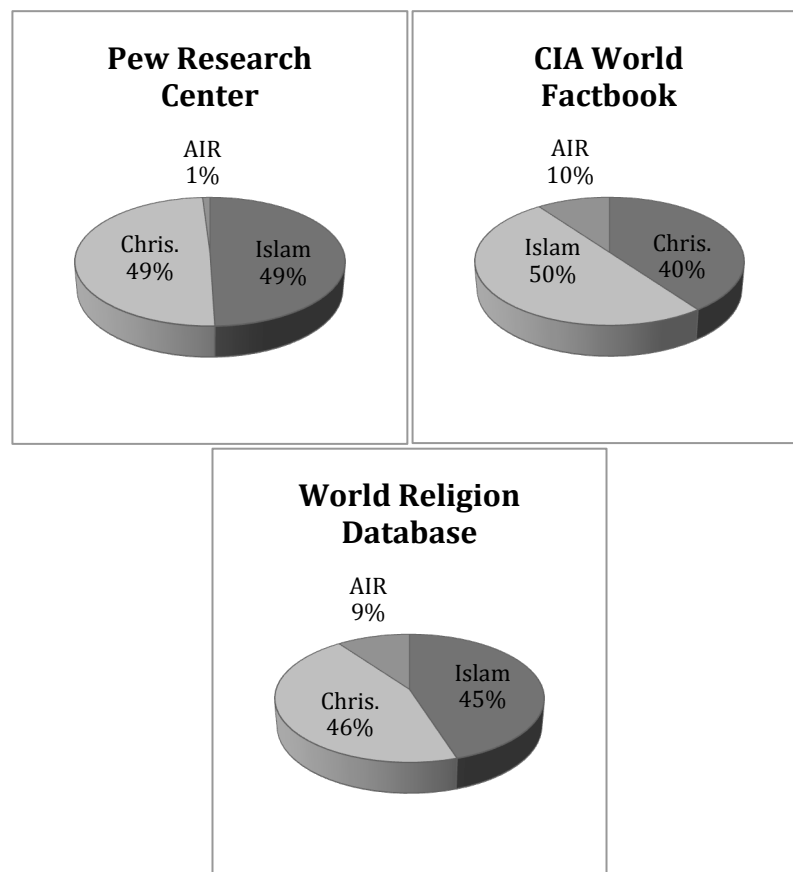
Religious meetings and rituals, both private and public, are ubiquitous in Nigeria and reported belief in God is nearly universal.⁴⁷ As a recent Pew Research survey reveals, Nigeria is one of the most religious places on the planet with 87 percent of Nigerians attending religious services at least once per week, 92 percent praying daily, and 94 percent absolutely certain of their belief in God.⁴⁸ But not only is Nigeria extremely religious, it is also truly multireligious, as one of the few countries in the world in which no single religious group or tradition commands a dominant majority.⁴⁹ Within this multireligious composition, religious affiliation is complex and diverse, both historically and contemporarily. Although a variety of religious traditions have existed and continue to exist in Nigeria, in terms of

⁴⁷ While nearly universal, it is not. There are those who are nonreligious. For an example of this, see: Leo Igwe, 'Leaving Religion and Living Without Religion in Nigeria,' *Butterflies and Wheels*, 26 July 2011, <http://www.butterfliesandwheels.org/2011/leaving-religion-and-living-without-religion-in-nigeria/> (accessed 2 July 2013).

⁴⁸ 'Tolerance and Tension: Islam and Christianity in Sub-Saharan Africa,' *The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life*, <http://pewforum.org/executive-summary-islam-and-christianity-in-sub-saharan-africa.aspx> (accessed May 26, 2010).

⁴⁹ Most countries are not religiously diverse, as most have a clear majority religion. Using the World Religion Database, the following countries join Nigeria in this unique composition: Bosnia and Herzegovina (55 percent Muslim; 40 percent Christian); Cote d'Ivoire (37 percent IR; 34 percent Christian; 28 percent Muslim), Eritrea (49 percent Muslim; 47 percent Christian), Guinea-Bissau (45 percent IR; 42 percent Muslim), Liberia (42 percent IR; 40 percent Christian), Madagascar (51 percent Christian; 47 percent IR), Mozambique (50 percent IR; 39 percent Christian), Sierra Leone (46 percent Muslim; 39 percent IR), Togo (45 percent Christian; 35 percent IR; 19 percent Muslim), Mongolia (32 percent IR; 30 percent NR; 22 percent Buddhist), Israel and the Occupied Territories (50 percent Jewish; 41 percent Muslim). See: Todd M. Johnson and Brian J. Grim, 'World Religion Database: International Religious Demographic Statistics and Sources,' *Brill Publications and Services*, http://www.worldreligiondatabase.org/wrd_default.asp (accessed 16 July 2013).

affiliated numbers and influence, only traditions related to Islam, Christianity, and African Indigenous Religions (AIR) are of significance.⁵⁰ The statistical division of these traditions has been and continues to be a matter of much contestation and tension within Nigeria. The topic is so politically sensitive that the national census has not inquired about religious affiliation since 1963. At that time, the census reported that Muslims accounted for 47.2 percent of the population, Christians for 34.5 percent of the population, and other religions 18.3 percent.⁵¹ In the fifty years since this census occurred, these numbers have undoubtedly shifted.



⁵⁰ While it is often assumed that AIR is homogenous, as Afe Adogame points out, AIR is highly diverse and is 'often shaped by particular ethnic groups, power structures and even the characteristics of natural phenomenon in each locality.' See: Afe Adogame, 'How God Became Nigerian: Religious Impulse and the Unfolding of a Nation', *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 28.4 (2010), 480.

⁵¹ Federal Republic of Nigeria, 'Population Census of Nigeria, 1963: Combined National Figures, Volume III' (Lagos: Office of Statistics, 1963), 37.

Typical estimates of current religious adherence range from the following: (1) Islam and Christianity each account for around 50 percent of the population with perhaps one or two percent claiming another religious tradition⁵²; (2) Islam accounts for 50 percent, Christianity for 40 percent, and AIR for 10 percent⁵³; and (3) Christianity accounts for 46 percent of the population, Islam for 45 percent, and AIR for 9 percent.⁵⁴ As Afe Adogame remarks about these figures for Christianity and Islam: ‘As there are no concise official figures, the unauthentic percentages of Christians and Muslims are projected between 40-50 percent for either of the traditions depending on the information source’.⁵⁵ Regarding AIR, while seemingly marginal according to such estimates, they form an important sub-structure in Nigerian society. Furthermore, statistics such as these fail to take into account multiple religious belongings and identities, a nuance that almost always escapes the range of these figures. As a recent Pew Forum report, ‘Tolerance and Tension: Islam and Christianity in Sub-Saharan Africa’, notes: ‘...many of those who indicate they are deeply committed to the practice of Christianity or Islam also incorporate elements

⁵² Two recent reports from the Pew Research Center indicate this. (1) ‘Mapping Out the Global Muslim Population: A Report on the Size and Distribution of the World’s Muslim Population,’ *The Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life* (Pew Research Center: Washington DC, October 2009), 19. This report suggests that African Indigenous Religions in Nigeria no longer make up a substantial portion of the population. As a result, their statistics show Islam makes up about 50 percent of the population and Christianity about 48 percent of the population. (2) ‘Global Christianity: A Report on the Size and Distribution of the World’s Christian Population,’ *The Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life* (Pew Research Center: Washington DC, December 2011), 11. This report claims that Christianity represents 50.8 percent of the population.

⁵³ The CIA World Factbook, ‘Nigeria: People and Society,’ <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ni.html> (accessed 10 January 2013).

⁵⁴ Todd M. Johnson and Brian J. Grim, ‘World Religion Database: Religious Adherents in Nigeria from 1900-2050,’ *Brill Publications and Services*, http://www.worldreligiondatabase.org/wrd_default.asp (accessed 16 July 2013).

⁵⁵ Afe Adogame, ‘Nigeria,’ in *Encyclopaedia of Religion and War* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 328.

of African traditional religions into their daily lives.⁵⁶ Thus, despite being largely absent from quantitative surveys, AIR presence and influence is often disproportionately felt and seen on the ground; presenting a good reminder that statistical data does not always reflect the lived world.⁵⁷

With this in mind, given a current population of 177 million, Nigeria is undoubtedly a major bastion for multiple religious groups. Assuming that both Islam and Christianity each account for at least 45 percent of the population (and with the recognition that this may only form one of multiple religious belongings and identities), Nigeria plays host to approximately 80 million Muslims and 80 million Christians.⁵⁸ The scale of these numbers is extreme, as they translate into Nigeria possessing the largest Muslim *and* largest Christian population on the African continent.⁵⁹ Accordingly, this would mean that Nigerian Muslims account for around

⁵⁶ 'Tolerance and Tension: Islam and Christianity in Sub-Saharan Africa,' *The Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life* (Pew Research Center: Washington DC, 2010), 4.

⁵⁷ Given this reminder, it is important to point out that I came across other forms of religion while in Nigeria, including Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism, Eckankar, and Krishna Consciousness, as well as those whom are non-religious or not affiliated with any religious tradition. Undoubtedly, many other religious traditions also call Nigeria home.

⁵⁸ According to the World Religion Database, 78 percent of Nigeria's Christians are classified as Protestant or Independent and 22 percent Catholic. See: Johnson and Grim, 'World Religion Database: Religious Adherents in Nigeria from 1900-2050.' A further breakdown is reported by the Center for the Study of Global Christianity, which reveals that within Africa, Nigeria has the "...largest total populations of four out of the six major Christian traditions ... (Anglicans, Independents, Marginals, and Protestants). See: 'Christianity in its Global Context, 1970-2020,' (South Hamilton, MA: Center for the Study of Global Christianity, June 2013), 22. See also: Ruth Marshall, *Political Spiritualities: The Pentecostal Revolution in Nigeria* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009). According to Marshall, 'Nigeria has been the site of Pentecostalism's greatest explosion on the African continent, and the movement's extraordinary growth shows no signs of slowing' (2). It must be noted that constructing a denominational typology is difficult considering that many Nigerian Christians are affiliated with multiple denominations. Regarding the Muslim population, the only up to date resource is: Pew Research Center, 'Tolerance and Tension', 21. According to the April 2010 report, Muslims in Nigeria identified as follows: 42 percent 'just a Muslim', 38 percent 'Sunni', 12 percent 'Shia', 3 percent 'Ahmadiyya', and 2 percent 'something else'. The remaining responded as either 'none', 'don't know', or they refused to respond. Other Islamic sects include Boko Haram, Quranlyoon, Ansaru, Maitatsine, Darul Islam, among others. For more on the diversity within Nigerian Muslims, see: Nigeria Research Network, 'Islamic Actors and Interfaith Relations in Northern Nigeria: Policy Paper No 1,' March 2013, 4-7.

17 percent of all African Muslims (and almost one-third of all Muslims in Sub-Saharan Africa), while Nigerian Christians account for around 15 percent of all African Christians.⁶⁰ With Nigeria predicted to approach a population of one billion in the coming century, these figures will only continue to fortify Nigeria's religious hegemony.⁶¹

Multireligious Shift

It is important to note, however, that these figures represent a monumental and dramatic shift from the rest of Nigeria's religious history.⁶² While Islam and Christianity have existed in the land we now know as Nigeria for centuries, their prominence is only relatively recent. Islam emerged for the first time in the ninth century CE, coming from north to south by way of trans-Saharan trade routes. During the Bornu Empire (1396-1893), Islam spread throughout much of northern Nigeria and even into the central region, but throughout much of this time it was primarily a religion of the elite ruling class. It was not until the early nineteenth century CE, after the Fulani War (1804-1808), that Islam took root and started to

⁵⁹ For Christianity, the Democratic Republic of the Congo comes in second with around 65 million Christians. For Islam, Egypt comes in second with around 76.5 million Muslims.

⁶⁰ Johnson and Grim, 'World Religion Database: Religious Adherents in Nigeria from 1900-2050.'

⁶¹ The dramatic shift in the twentieth century is unlikely to repeat itself anytime soon. For more on this, see: Pew Research Center, 'Tolerance and Tension'. As the report indicates: '...there is little evidence in the survey findings to indicate that either Christianity or Islam is growing in sub-Saharan Africa at the expense of the other. Although a relatively small percentage of Muslims have become Christians, and a relatively small percentage of Christians have become Muslims, the survey finds no substantial shift in either direction' (12). For Nigeria in particular, the report records no 'net change' from 'religious switching' (12).

⁶² Much has been written about Nigeria's religious history. For an excellent overview, see: Lamin Sanneh, *West African Christianity: The Religious Impact* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1983). See also: Toyin Falola, *A History of Nigeria* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012). For a more in-depth account of the twentieth century, see: William Roger Louis and Judith M. Brown, eds., *The Oxford History of the British Empire, Volume IV: The Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

become established on a large scale. Christianity, on the other hand, arrived with the Portuguese in the late fifteenth century CE. By the end of the eighteenth century CE, however, it appears that the religion suffered extreme atrophy and likely even death. A second wave of transmission began with the arrival of the British in the nineteenth century CE. Yet, despite earnest efforts, by the beginning of the twentieth century CE, 73 percent of the population continued to adhere to AIR. Islam garnered around 25 percent of the population, while Christianity accounted for only around 1 percent.⁶³ A well-known Yorùbá adage encapsulates this reality:

*Aye l'a ba 'fa, aye l'a ba 'male,
osan gangan ni 'gbagbọ wole de*

Translation: We met Ifa in the world, We met Islam in the world,
but it was high noon before Christianity arrived.⁶⁴

As J. D. Y. Peel notes in *Religious Encounter and the Making of the Yoruba*, '... while Christianity was an entirely novel addition to the Yoruba religious repertory when it was introduced in the 1840s, Islam and the traditional religion had known one another for a long time.'⁶⁵ The long time that Peel refers to, however, is relative. Even in the eighteenth century, Islam's presence was comparably marginal. Thus, in comparison with recent estimates, it becomes clear that Nigeria's religious landscape has been phenomenally altered to become multireligious within a relatively short period of time.

The most prominent story related to this multireligious composition in contemporary Nigeria is undoubtedly one of religious conflict. Indeed, almost 60

⁶³ Johnson and Grim, 'World Religion Database: Religious Adherents in Nigeria from 1900-2050.'

⁶⁴ J. D. Y. Peel, *Religious Encounter and the Making of the Yoruba* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2000), 187.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 187.

percent of Nigerians claim that religious conflict is a very big problem in their country. This is the highest in Africa.⁶⁶ Events related to the Shari'a crisis, the Danish cartoon and Miss World controversies, and recent violence and kidnappings at the hands of Islamist groups like Jamā'a Ahl al-sunnah li-da'wa wa al-jihād, better known as Boko Haram, and related splinter groups such as Jama'atu Ansarul Muslimina Fi Biladis-Sudan, better known as Ansaru, have solidified the popular perception that Nigeria is undergoing a clash of civilisations—depicted unequivocally in sensational headlines as religious warfare.⁶⁷ While each case of conflict is diverse and complex, conditions in Nigeria have created a powerful role for religious identity—an identity that bonds communities, as well as divides them in a myriad of competitions. As Afe Adogame notes about this process:

The failure of successive governments to improve the general socio-economic conditions in Nigeria has led to the belief by some segments of the civil society that religion is the panacea to both individual and collective problems. Thus, religious communities have provided significant channels for the expressions of frustration as well as an avenue to legitimate alternative source of conflict resolution. Closely related are the politicization of religion and the religionization of politics by some religious entrepreneurs. The quest and scramble for political power has partly occurred within the framework of religion in ways that reinforced ethnic and regional antagonism ... the mixture of religion and partisan politics promotes mutual distrust and suspicion to the extent that virtually every national issue is seen with religious lenses.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Pew Research Center, 'Tolerance and Tension,' 9. Rwanda is tied with Nigeria.

⁶⁷ Events outside of Nigeria have also contributed to this image. In particular, the killing of Lee Rigby in London by British Nigerian Muslims and the attempt by Nigerian Umar Farouk Abdulmuttalab to detonate an explosive aboard Northwest Airlines flight 253 en route from Amsterdam to Detroit. As Jacob K. Olupona remarks regarding Boko Haram, 'It's important to understand that Boko Haram did not emerge in a vacuum. It is almost a direct result of the failed state that is corrupt and unable to provide even a basic level of safety and services to the country's citizens, from education, to healthcare, roads, electricity, and even sanitation.' See: Jacob K. Olupona, 'To Save the Girls, the World Must Help Nigeria', *The World Post*, 12 May 2014, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/jacob-k-olupona/to-save-the-girls-the-wor_b_5312078.html (accessed 14 May 2014).

⁶⁸ Afe Adogame, 'Politicization of Religion and Religionization of Politics in Nigeria,' in *Religion, History, and Politics in Nigeria: Essays in Honor of Ogbu U. Kalu*, edited by Chima J. Korieh and G. Ugo Nwokeji (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 2005), 125.

While pundits speculate that a lethal combination of economic, political, and ethnic factors are also at play, there is very little completed research to verify these claims.

PART III: INTERRELIGIOUS ENCOUNTER AND MULTIPLE RELIGIOUS BELONGING AND IDENTITY IN OGBÓMÒSÓ

Introduction

In lieu of the situation that Adogame outlines, studies of multireligious Nigeria tend to be confined to examining violent flashpoints between Muslims and Christians in a few select regions of northern Nigeria, portraying it as a place of ruin, with widespread violence and rioting in the name of religion—further entrenching the depiction of a one-dimensional, facile discourse of brutal clash and intolerance. Indeed, while research on religious life in Nigeria is teeming with broad historical accounts, or studies of politics, violence, and corruption, in many cases, little is known about the intricacies of living, identifying, and belonging within a multireligious context. As Benjamin F. Soares recently noted regarding Muslim-Christian encounters throughout all of Africa:

... their interactions in Africa are still not properly understood ... there is a vast array of possibilities between the idealized notion of the peaceful coexistence of Muslims and Christians and Bernard Lewis's notion of the 'clash of civilizations' that Samuel Huntington has popularized and made to seem inevitable.⁶⁹

An on-going European Research Council project led by Insa Nolte at the University of Birmingham, titled 'Knowing Each Other: Everyday Religious Encounters, Social Identities and Tolerance in Southwest Nigeria', has noticed a similar discrepancy:

Since the end of the Cold War, and especially since September 2001, most research exploring religious difference, and especially Muslim-Christian relations, has focused on politics and the public sphere. At the same time, the majority of detailed work on the role of religion for everyday life focuses on the practices and transformations within Muslim or Christian societies. As a

⁶⁹ Benjamin F. Soares, 'Introduction: Muslim-Christian Encounters in Africa', in *Muslim-Christian Encounters in Africa*, ed. Benjamin F. Soares (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2006), 2.

result, we know very little about the practices that structure the fine grain of everyday life in religiously mixed societies.⁷⁰

Yorùbáland

In the case of Yorùbáland, the cultural region of the Yorùbá people—and the geographic context of this thesis—this ‘fine grain’ and ‘vast array of possibilities’ between Christians, Muslims, and AIR has hardly been explored. Indeed, even as the multireligious shift has been particularly felt in this region, it remains largely undocumented in terms of detailed, quality accounts. While most regions of West Africa and even Nigeria exist with a dominant religious tradition, Yorùbáland is a microcosm of the wider region’s multireligious composition, with Christianity, Islam, and AIR all playing prominent roles. The Yorùbá ‘spirit of accommodation’, a phrase often used to describe how Yorùbá culture not only tolerates, but also embeds and synthesises the religious ‘Other’, has created a unique multireligious environ and is undoubtedly one of the optimum contexts in the world to study interreligious encounter within a single ethnolinguistic area. I use interreligious encounter here and throughout the thesis as a broad term to encapsulate the diverse ways that religious traditions, individuals, and groups meet or confront each other.⁷¹

Multiple Religious Belonging and Identity

One of the many underexplored themes of interreligious encounter, and the subject of this thesis, is the concept of multiple religious belonging and identity. By

⁷⁰ ‘The Project,’ *Knowing Each Other: Everyday Religious Encounters, Social Identities and Tolerance in Southwest Nigeria*, <http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/schools/historycultures/departments/dasa/research/knowning/project.aspx> (accessed 15 May 2014).

⁷¹ This notion is taken from: Soares, ‘Introduction: Muslim-Christian Encounters in Africa’, 1-16. As Soares notes: ‘The roots of the English word “encounter” can be traced to the Latin *contra*, meaning “against”, and to the Old French *encontrer*, which refers to the meeting of rivals. In current usage, “encounter” can mean “an unexpected or casual meeting” or “a confrontation or difficult struggle” (3).’

this phrase, I am referring to individuals or groups who belong to and/or identify with more than one religious tradition. As Catherine Cornille suggests:

In a world of seemingly unlimited choice in matters of religious identity and affiliation, the idea of belonging exclusively to one religious traditions or of drawing from only one set of spiritual, symbolic, or ritual resources is no longer self-evident ... The erosion of religious territories formerly affixed by geography or politics seems now also to have come to affect the individual consciousness. A heightened and widespread awareness of religious pluralism has presently left the religious person with the choice of not only *which* religion, but also of *how many* religions she or he might belong to.⁷²

However, while scholars have long considered this lived experience within certain parts of the world and with certain combinations of religions, there is a dearth of literature exploring the concept in Africa among Muslims, Christians, and AIR.⁷³

This thesis is an attempt at filling this important gap.

As will be demonstrated throughout, while belonging and identity often go hand-in-hand, this is not always the case. Thus, it is important to employ both concepts. In terms of definition, by belonging I mean the quality of being a member or adherent, either officially or unofficially, public or private. Belonging can relate to a variety of categories, such as ethnic, racial, linguistic, or national belonging. In this thesis, however, the focus is on religious belonging. Some categories of belonging are flexible and fluid, whereas others are more fixed and determined. I employ a rather inclusive definition for two reasons. First, some religious traditions are more institutionally bound and public than others. For instance, participation in AIR is

⁷² Catherine Cornille, ed., *Many Mansions? Multiple Religious Belonging and Christian Identity* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2010), 1.

⁷³ Cornille 1. As Cornille notes: 'It may be argued that in this, religion in Europe, America, and Australia is just coming to terms with a practice or a form of religiosity that has been prevalent for ages in most of the rest of the world, and especially in the East. The idea of belonging to only one religion has been more or less alien to most of the religious history of China and Japan, and in India and Nepal individuals visit shrines and temples and pray for blessings regardless of which religion a particular saint or temple might belong to. In the wider history of religion, multiple religious belonging may have been the rule rather than the exception, at least on a popular level.'

often private and without institutional (i.e. official) acceptance. Second, with a more traditional understanding of belonging, it is often those who exist on the margins who are excluded from consideration. Given my interest in new religious movements and the boundaries of religious traditions, employing an inclusive understanding of belonging shifts power to the margins. Thus, a person that is privately and/or unofficially a member or adherent of a group deserves equal consideration alongside those who are publically and/or officially members. Indeed, the former experience provides an important contrast to the latter experience.

The definition and use of identity as a concept is vigorously contested. While I believe that identity provides a useful analytical framework to categorize what I observed and documented in the field, there are undoubtedly limitations. The work of Stuart Hall and Rogers Brubaker was particularly helpful for both understanding the limitations and providing a useful framework from which the concept remains useful.⁷⁴ In terms of defining identity, Mike Morris provides a helpful starting point for how I have utilised the concept: ‘the combination of characteristics that collectively demarcate an individual or group, both to themselves and others’.⁷⁵

Several points are worth noting. First, individuals and groups can be considered in discussions of identity. While there are distinctions to be made between individuals and groups, each is influenced by the other and is unable to be isolated completely. Second, identity is defined and mutually constructed by both the

⁷⁴ In particular, the following works were most helpful: Stuart Hall, ‘The Question of Cultural Identity’, in *Modernity: An Introduction to Modern Societies*, Eds. Stuart Hall, David Held, Don Hubert, and Kenneth Thompson (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2000), 595-634. Stuart Hall, ‘Who needs ‘identity’?’, in *Identity: a reader*, Eds. Paul du Gay, Jessica Evans, and Peter Redman (London: Sage Publications, 2000), 15-30. Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay, eds., *Questions of Cultural Identity* (London: Sage Publications, 1996). Rogers Brubaker, *Ethnicity Without Groups* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006).

⁷⁵ Mike Morris, *Concise Dictionary of Social and Cultural Anthropology* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 127.

individual and the other. Thus, it is not just an affair of the individual. Regarding this ‘combination of characteristics’, there are two further points to note. First, while my focus is primarily upon religious individuals and groups, I recognise that characteristics of identity are inherently intertwined. Thus, other characteristics such as gender and ethnicity are highlighted as well. Second, the ‘combination’ is inherently flexible, which results in the individual or group lacking a stable, coherent ‘self’. As Stuart Hall remarks regarding the nature of this flexibility:

This produces the post-modern subject, conceptualized as having no fixed, essential, or permanent identity ... the subject assumes different identities at different times, identities which are not unified around a coherent “self.” Within us are contradictory identities, pulling in different directions, so that our identifications are continuously being shifted about ... The fully unified, completed, secure, and coherent identity is a fantasy. Instead, as the systems of meaning and cultural representation multiply, we are confronted by a bewildering, fleeting multiplicity of possible identities, any one of which we could identify with – at least temporarily.⁷⁶

Hall and Brubaker have pointed out how extreme conceptions of identity—what Brubaker terms as ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ meanings—have produced ambiguity surrounding the term.⁷⁷ As Brubaker states: ‘Understood in a strong sense—as implying a singular, abiding, foundational sameness—“identity” tends to mean too much; understood in a weak sense—as multiple, fluid, fragmented, negotiated, and so on—it tends to mean too little.’ He suggests that when used in this latter sense, the term ‘loses its analytical purchase.’⁷⁸ In an effort to go ‘beyond identity’, Brubaker argues that scholars should use terms such as ‘identification’ instead.⁷⁹ He

⁷⁶ Hall, ‘The Question of Cultural Identity’, 598.

⁷⁷ Hall, *Questions of Cultural Identity*, 1-17. Brubaker 28-63.

⁷⁸ Brubaker 28.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 41.

states:

As a processual, active term, derived from a verb, “identification” lacks the reifying connotations of “identity.” It invites us to specify the agents that do the identifying. And it does not presuppose that such identifying (even by powerful agents, such as the state) will necessarily result in the internal sameness, the distinctiveness, the bounded groupness that political entrepreneurs may seek to achieve. Identification—of oneself and of others—is intrinsic to social life; “identity” in the strong sense is not.⁸⁰

While I largely agree with Brubaker’s assessment, I disagree that identity lacks a conceptual framework that can include, as he puts it, ‘processual’ research and an active understanding that lacks the reifying notions that a strong sense of identity implies. Thus, relating this to Morris’s definition, my conception of identity connects the ‘combination of characteristics’ not just to the result (i.e. identity), but also the process (i.e. identification).

Location and Primary Research Questions

Comprised of research and fieldwork conducted over the course of more than four years (2010-2014), this thesis attempts to work toward correcting the gap in knowledge regarding the intricacies of living, belonging, and identifying within a multireligious context. In particular, this thesis presents an in-depth study of interreligious encounter among the Yorùbá of Ogbómòsò, Nigeria. While Ogbómòsò is situated in the midst of an historic triangle of multireligious influence, comprised of prominent Muslim, Christian, and AIR groups, individuals, and traditions, and despite attention being given to nearby cities such as Ìbàdàn, Oşogbo, and Ilorin, no other serious academic study of its multireligious life exists. To the southeast of Ogbómòsò sits the town of Ifè, the cradle of Yorùbá civilisation and spiritual centre of Yorùbá indigenous religious traditions. To the west is the country of Benin, one of

⁸⁰ Ibid., 41.

the very few countries in the world that continues to primarily identify with AIR; an influence that spills over the border into nearby places like Ogbómòsò. Just a short way up the road to the northeast sits the city of Ilorin, the former edge of the Sokoto Caliphate, a once expansive and powerful Islamic empire. While the power of the Caliphate drastically waned with British colonisation in the twentieth century, Islam became thoroughly integrated in its territories. Finally, in the south, all the way from the coast to Ogbómòsò's doorstep, the impact of foreign Christian mission efforts and indigenous agencies are very apparent, with some of the largest and most influential Christian groups in Africa dotting the landscape. Many refer to this area as the future Jerusalem and there are modern day prophecies about this area being the new cradle of Christendom. Thus, in reality, Ogbómòsò is situated not so much in a triangle of influences, but rather a mixing pot of convergence.

Grounded in qualitative fieldwork, the thesis utilises two case studies to highlight issues of multiple religious belonging and identity in this multireligious urban context.⁸¹ The first case study examines a new religious group known as the Ogbómòsò Society of Chrislam (OSC). Interreligious encounter in this instance features a group that intentionally combines elements from Muslim, Christian, and AIR traditions, creating dynamic examples of multiple religious belongings and identities. The second case study examines multiple religious belonging and identity at the annual Ogbómòsò *Egúngún* festival. Interreligious encounter in this instance features 12 individual narrative accounts focusing on each individual's religious belonging and identity throughout key points in their life. Both cases are guided by the following primary research question:

⁸¹ The most recent estimates put Ogbómòsò's population at around 1.3 million.

How has interreligious encounter in Ogbómòsò created multiple religious belongings and identities among individuals and groups?

Additionally, the following related questions are also explored:

Why do individuals have multiple religious belongings and identities?

How do individuals negotiate belonging and identifying with multiple religious traditions?

How has interreligious encounter impacted each religious tradition?

PART IV: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A number of studies provide a crucial foundation for this thesis and were consulted throughout this project. On a methodological level, several works give a convincing case for the local and contextual study of interreligious encounter and have influenced the qualitative design of the thesis immensely. Of particular importance are the edited volumes by Benjamin F. Soares (2006) and Stephen R. Goodwin (2009). While these books are primarily devoted to historical encounters, both provide a collection of essays assigned to reexamining the Muslim-Christian relationship and the pivotal issues that play a role in the contemporary world. Out of these pages, Akintunde E. Akinade's short essay, 'Christian-Muslim Relations in Contemporary Nigeria,' offers a simple way forward in the study of encounter that is committed to a 'context-sensitive approach.'⁸² In a similar manner, Soares suggests the need to get beyond the one-dimensional dichotomy of clash or coexistence and to begin understanding interactions between Muslims and Christians in their full complexity.⁸³ The essays in the Soares volume were integral in the decision to use ethnographic case studies to discover the range and depth of distinct interreligious encounters in Nigeria. For ingenuity in regards to the concept of multiple religious belonging and identity, Catherine Cornille's edited volume, *Many Mansions? Multiple Religious Belonging and Christian Identity*, was especially helpful despite its disproportionate focus on Christian perspectives.

⁸² Akintunde E. Akinade, 'Christian-Muslim Relations in Contemporary Nigeria,' in *World Christianity in Muslim Encounter: Essays in Memory of David A. Kerr*, ed. Stephen R. Goodwin (London: Continuum Publishing, 2009), 340.

⁸³ This same complexity is noticed by Martha Th. Frederiks in her article titled, 'Let Us Understand Our Differences: Current Trends in Christian-Muslim Relations in Sub-Saharan Africa,' *Transformation: An International Journal of Holistic Mission Studies* 27.4 (October 2010): 261–274.

While there are many studies of the interaction between Muslims and Christians in Nigeria, there is an astonishing lack of scholarship based upon ethnographic fieldwork. There are, however, a few that deserve attention. Amongst the best field studies are: Lissi Rasmussen (1993 and 2007), J. D. Y. Peel (2000) and Yushau Sodiq (2010). Unlike many other studies of encounter, these works offer genuine examples of fieldwork focused upon understanding the nuanced particulars of local situations.

In terms of focus, a majority of the present material on interreligious encounter in Nigeria is heavily concentrated upon the issue of conflict. Three works in particular have been influential and provide good examples of fieldwork studies: Philip Ostien (2009), Matthews A. Ojo (2007) and Hajiya Bilkisu Yusuf (2007).⁸⁴ As a natural extension of the focus on conflict, scholars have also devoted much of their energy toward the role and place of Shari`a in northern Nigeria. While a majority of these studies are concerned about the legality of reinstating Shari`a within a secular governmental system, a few studies genuinely consider the local impact and relational encounters between religious groups. Of these the most important are: Umar H. D. Danfulani (2005), Frieder Ludwig (2008) and Philip Ostien, Jamila M. Nasir and Franz Kogelmann (2005).

⁸⁴ Other important studies on conflict between Muslims and Christians include: Yushau Sodiq, 'Can Muslims and Christians Live Together Peacefully in Nigeria?' *The Muslim World* 99.4 (2009): 646–688. Matthews A. Ojo and Folaranmi T. Lateju, 'Christian-Muslim Conflicts and Interfaith Bridge-Building Efforts in Nigeria,' *The Review of Faith and International Affairs* 8, no. 1 (2010): 31–38. Dave Thomas, 'The Past and the Future in Christian-Muslim Relations,' *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 18, no. 1 (2007): 33–42. Matthew Hassan Kukah, 'Christian-Muslim Relations in Sub-Saharan Africa: Problems and Prospects,' *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 18, no. 2 (2007): 155–164. Muhib O. Opeloye, 'The Socio-Political Factor in the Christian-Muslim Conflict in Nigeria,' *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 9, no. 2 (1998): 231–237. Yusufu Turaki, 'The Social-Political Context of Christian-Muslim Encounter in Northern Nigeria,' *Studies in World Christianity* 3, no. 2 (1997): 121–137. Rabiatu Ammah, 'Christian-Muslim Relations in Contemporary Sub-Saharan Africa,' *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 18, no. 2 (April 2007): 139–153.

Focusing more broadly, it is necessary to mention a few works that give a general, but important account of interreligious encounter. In studies of Nigeria and West Africa, the following works deserve attention: Isidore U. Nwanaju (2008), Lamin Sanneh (1996) and the nine volume series by Jan H. Boer (2003–2009).⁸⁵ On a global scale, the following works are important: Hugh Goddard (2000), Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad and Wadi Z. Haddad (1995) and Anthony O’Mahony and Emma Loosley (2008).⁸⁶

Lastly, two recent quantitative survey projects are worth mentioning. The first of these, carried out by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, was written-up in an April 2010 report titled, *Tolerance and Tension: Islam and Christianity in Sub-Saharan Africa*. This large-scale project traversed the cities and countryside of 19 sub-Saharan African countries, including Nigeria, carrying out over 25,000 face-to-face interviews. These interviews dealt with a wide range of issues including religious affiliation, divine healing, and interreligious understanding. Although the report offers a limited amount of analysis, this serves as its primary strength, as the data in many circumstances does not warrant conclusive understanding, but rather points the way toward further and more in-depth qualitative studies. The second survey project, carried out by the African-led organisation, Afrobarometer, has conducted multiple rounds of questionnaires and interviews in some 20 African nations, including 6 separate rounds in Nigeria between 1999–2008. While the survey topics range from democracy and economic

⁸⁵ Another study that discusses broadly the historical and current challenge of interreligious dialogue is: Edmund Emeka Ezegbobelu, *Challenges of Interreligious Dialogue: Between the Christian and the Muslim Communities in Nigeria* (New York: Peter Lang, 2009).

⁸⁶ For two other important studies of encounter on a global scale, see: Hugh Goddard, *Christians and Muslims: From Double Standards to Mutual Understanding* (London: Routledge, 1995) and Michael Nazir-Ali, *Frontiers in Muslim-Christian Encounter* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2007).

livelihood, to national identity and water access, there are also questions related to interreligious encounter. Of the briefing papers released on Nigeria, ‘Popular Perceptions of Shari`a Law in Nigeria’ and ‘Violent Social Conflict and Conflict Resolution in Nigeria’ offer their most relevant work for the present purposes.

PART V: SUMMARY OF CHAPTERS

While Chapter One has provided a brief introduction and research synopsis, Chapter Two, titled, ‘Approaches to Research: Methodology, Methods, and Issues of Fieldwork and Data Analysis’, provides an explanation and description of the methodological approach and methods employed in this thesis, before moving on to a discussion of various issues encountered during fieldwork and data analysis. Chapter Three is a case study titled ‘Multiple Religious Belonging and Identity in a New Religious Movement: The Case of the Ogbómòsó Society of Chrislam’. Chapter Four is a case study titled ‘Multiple Religious Belonging and Identity at the Ogbómòsó *Egúngún* Festival’. Chapter Five is the concluding chapter titled ‘Cross-Case Study Analysis and Summary’.

CHAPTER 2

APPROACHES TO RESEARCH: METHODOLOGY, METHODS, AND ISSUES OF FIELDWORK AND DATA ANALYSIS

Introduction

A methodology is the theoretical underpinning for approaching any research project. Likewise, methods assist as the corresponding apparatus—a selection of procedures and techniques that act as tools throughout data gathering and analysis. All methodologies and methods have merit insofar as they are utilised properly.⁸⁷ Thus, prior to solidifying any given methodological approach or method, it is requisite to consider how these relate to the epistemological aims of the research.⁸⁸ The direction of any research project is contingent upon these variable aims. As Steinar Kvale and Svend Brinkmann note: ‘We should consider what we want to know before determining our ways of knowing it.’⁸⁹ When the former variables (i.e. what the researcher wants to know) have been formulated, a methodological approach and methods are selected in order to provide: (1) the best access to the

⁸⁷ Steinar Kvale and Svend Brinkmann, *Interviews: Learning the Craft of Qualitative Research Interviewing* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2009), 117. Methodologies and methods should not be viewed hierarchically. As Kvale and Brinkmann note, similar to the trade of a craftsman, the approaches and tools he uses are dependent upon the project at hand. The same is true of the theoretical approaches (i.e. methodologies) and tools (i.e. methods) that researchers select. Additionally, it is important to note that simply applying a methodology or method does not automatically generate insight.

⁸⁸ By epistemological aims, I am referring to those things I want to know.

⁸⁹ Kvale and Brinkmann 305. See also: Matthew B. Miles and A. Michael Huberman, *Qualitative Data Analysis: An Expanded Sourcebook* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1994), 34. Miles and Huberman put it this way: ‘Knowing what you want to find out ... leads inexorably to the question of how you will get that information.’

data; and (2) an effective analysis of the data.⁹⁰ This chapter provides a systematic rationale and description of the methodologies and methods employed in this thesis, as well as a discussion of various issues encountered during fieldwork and analysis.

Social Science and the Academic Study of Religion

As was stated in Chapter 1, the primary interest of this thesis is the lived world of interreligious encounter and the multiple religious belongings and identities that result from this encounter in Ogbómòsò. As these phenomena are rooted in human society and social relationships, their interrogation is suited to a social scientific approach rooted in the academic study of religion. Within this approach, there are a variety of sub-disciplines to be discerned. Interreligious encounter and the issue of multiple religious belongings and identities present a dynamic and diverse topic and while a single sub-discipline could offer access and a legitimate analysis, an interdisciplinary approach provides an advantageous myriad of access points and frameworks of analysis. Given the epistemological aims of the thesis, a theoretical coalition incorporating elements of sociology, anthropology, and phenomenology offers the most suitable approach. Furthermore, as the thesis is particularly interested in the role of religion from a non-confessional perspective, there is a need for expertise in the academic study of religion. Thus, this study has been conducted

⁹⁰ This process is certainly not restricted to a linear sequence. It is an iterative process. Throughout the duration of the project, there should be reflection on the selected approaches, the realities of the field, and the data.

within a School of Theology and Religious Studies.⁹¹

Fieldwork

The methodological approach outlined above necessitated fieldwork.

Fieldwork is defined here as conducting research while living among a specific community for an extended period of time.⁹² This is to be distinguished from either a short-term fieldtrip or an indefinite residence.⁹³ The length of the time in the field is no guarantee of success. Yet, prolonged periods of stay do allow for the researcher to get beyond tourism and official versions of stories. As Sarah J. Tracy states, ‘There is no magic amount of time in the field. The most important issue to consider is whether the data will provide for and substantiate meaningful and significant claims.’⁹⁴ The fieldwork for this project occurred at intervals stretching from 2009 until 2012.⁹⁵ This process allowed for beneficial reflection outside of the field. The

⁹¹ Defining Religious Studies is a matter of much debate. For how the University of Edinburgh defines the discipline, see: ‘Religious Studies,’ The University of Edinburgh, April 2013, http://www.ed.ac.uk/polopoly_fs/1.44137!/fileManager/Religious-Studies.pdf (accessed 24 July 2013). Here is the definition given: ‘What is Religious Studies? The discipline of Religious Studies is concerned with all aspects of religion, with all religions, and with the integral part they play in human culture. It is pursued from a non-confessional perspective, on the principle that religions give meaning to human life, influencing most other human endeavours, artistic, social and political, for good or ill. Questions of experience and truth are explored along with the many phenomena of religion, such as belief systems, ritual, mythology, iconography, spirituality and ethics.’

⁹² This definition is adapted from: *Dictionary of the Social Sciences*, ed. Craig Calhoun (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012). As the dictionary states, fieldwork is ‘Research conducted by social scientists among specific groups or communities, although its classic and strongest reference is to long-term anthropological research in face-to-face settings.’

⁹³ *In Pursuit of History: Fieldwork in Africa*, Eds. Carolyn Keyes Adenaike and Jan Vansina (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1996), 129. ‘For a start, one should distinguish between residence, fieldtrip, and fieldwork; and the term ‘fieldwork’ should be reserved for the activity of collecting data during a lengthy stay by a researcher living within the community studied...When I went to Gabon for a month in 1980 to gather data...I was not doing fieldwork...I was on a fieldtrip. The stay was too short and I was not really living in a community that I was studying. Thus, historians consulting archival depots in Africa are not doing fieldwork: they too are on fieldtrips.’

⁹⁴ Tracy, Sarah J., ‘Qualitative Quality: Eight ‘Big Tent’ Criteria for Excellent Qualitative Research,’ *Qualitative Inquiry* 16 (2010): 841.

⁹⁵ The total amount of fieldwork for this project was approximately eighteen months.

initial contact commenced in November 2009. This served as a survey trip during which I travelled extensively throughout Nigeria. My primary concern was finding a suitable research location. Admittedly, my a priori criterion for suitability evolved throughout the trip. After initially traveling in the central region of Nigeria (Kaduna, Bauchi, Plateau, and Kano), I developed the following criteria for a location that I felt aligned with my research aims: (1) an area not consumed by recent riots and violence; (2) access can be negotiated in a timely manner; and (3) a multireligious environment composed of Christianity, Islam, and AIR. These factors led me to head to southwest Nigeria where I visited the following states: Lagos, Ogun, Oyo, Osun, Kwara, Ondo, and Edo. The discovery of Ogbómòsò occurred immediately after the African Association for the Study of Religions (AASR) conference, held in Ile-Ife in January 2010. Dr Afe Adogame introduced me to Israel Akanji, at the time one of his PhD students. I spoke to Israel about my research project and the criterion outlined above. He suggested Ogbómòsò in Oyo State as a possibility. Israel then introduced me to Dr Deji Ayegboyin, Professor of Religious Studies at the University of Ibadan and President of the Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary in Ogbómòsò. Ayegboyin kindly invited me to visit Ogbómòsò and carry out an initial survey. I engaged in participant observation at various cultural and religious events, sought out potential informants, and conducted a series of informal interviews with both local leaders and laypeople. This initial data indicated that Ogbómòsò offered a potential fit.⁹⁶ While not exactly the perfect haven of interreligious tolerance and peace I was told about, it was not consumed by riots and violence. The logistics of access seemed to be negotiable in a timely manner and it offered the type of

⁹⁶ Before coming to Ogbómòsò, I had been informed that the area was a haven of interreligious tolerance and peace. Yet, during these informal interviews, the stories offered tremendous range. The experiences I recorded contradicted the popular perception of the area.

multireligious environment I was searching for. Given this alignment and considering that no other location surfaced that offered the same, in July 2010 I made the decision that I would return to Ogbómòsò for further fieldwork.

In September 2010, I began the PhD programme at the University of Edinburgh under the supervision of Dr Afe Adogame and Professor James Cox. For a period we considered a comparative project in which Ogbómòsò would be but one of the areas considered. Given the time constraints of the project and the in-depth aims, however, we decided it was best to focus on one geographic area. A subsequent period of fieldwork commenced in September 2011 and concluded in August 2012.

Qualitative and Particularising

There are generally two types of research design within a social scientific approach: qualitative and quantitative. This thesis is explicitly qualitative in design. A systematic rationale for this selection follows. First and foremost, the research aims are qualitative in nature. They emphasise local expressions through in-depth, quality case studies. Likewise, the research questions highlight issues related to ‘how’ and ‘why’ the phenomena occur. In comparison, a quantitative design would be interested in a broad base of knowledge. It would collect data that is neatly quantifiable and tends to highlight issues of quantity via questions of ‘how many’ and ‘what type.’⁹⁷ A quantitative design, for instance, could reveal how many people say they have multiple religious belongings and identities, but could reveal very little in terms of describing the complex dynamics at play, or the intricate experiences

⁹⁷ As Kvale and Brinkmann note, ‘... qualitative methods refer to *what kind*, and quantitative methods to *how much of a kind*’ (117).

underlying the responses.⁹⁸ Secondly, the research aims require flexibility throughout data collection and analysis. This is precisely what a qualitative design offers. On the other hand, a quantitative design is largely inflexible once data collection commences. Regardless of changing circumstances and new understandings, questions are concretised and data becomes formed out of and locked into a priori conceptual categories.⁹⁹ As Kathy Charmaz points out, ‘... researchers who use elicited texts cannot modify or reword a question once they ask it. Nor do they have any immediate possibility of following up on a statement, encouraging a response, or raising a question ...’¹⁰⁰ If a quantitative approach was employed, it would be misaligned with the aim of accessing the lived world of experience, resulting in inadequate data and an empirically detached interpretation.¹⁰¹ Furthermore, a quantitative approach leads inexorably to the cultivation of an interviewer-interviewee relationship that is staid and formal,

⁹⁸ My opinion is that in the case of interreligious encounter in Nigeria, we need to understand more about the particulars before we can critically engage the general.

⁹⁹ Kathy Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory: A Practical Guide Through Qualitative Analysis* (Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 2010), 17. As Charmaz states: ‘... the logico-deductive model of traditional quantitative research necessitates operationalizing established concepts in a theory as accurately as possible and deducing testable hypotheses about the relationships between these concepts. In this model, the research is locked into the original concepts.’ See also, Blumer 32-37; 48; 68.

¹⁰⁰ Charmaz 37.

¹⁰¹ While quantitative designs are often touted as possessing a type of objectivism, when applied to the wrong aims and questions, they produce inadequate data. As a result, the interpretation of this data commits what Herbert Blumer termed the ‘worst type of subjectivism,’ by basing its understanding within the life of the scholar and replacing the lived experience of the empirical world with empirically detached social philosophizing. Blumer argues that, ‘The prevailing disposition and practice is to allow the theory, the model, the concept, the technique, and the scientific protocol to coerce the research and thus to bend the resulting analytic depictions of the empirical world to suit their form. In this sense, much current scientific inquiry in the social and psychological sciences is actually social philosophizing’ (34). As a result, Blumer notes that, ‘All too frequently, the scholar confronted with an unfamiliar area of social life will fabricate, in advance, analytical schemes he believes necessary to account for the problematic features of the area’ (42). And even after the research, Blumer adds that, ‘...the objective observer is likely to fill in the process of interpretation with his own surmises in place of catching the process as it occurs in the experience of the acting unit which uses it’ (86).

making it impractical to uncover people's experiences. As anthropologist Lynn Hirschkind has suggested, 'The nature of a relationship determines the kinds of information exchanged ... [when it comes to survey interviewing] ... it can be expected to provide census-type data, answers to yes/no questions, and opinions of unknown veracity and meaning.'¹⁰² Given the epistemological aims of this thesis, it was critical to establish rapport with participants. I sought after respectful relationships with participants that were relaxed, friendly, and dedicated to allowing space for an open discourse—precisely what a qualitative design offers.

Within qualitative research, the focus can be, as James V. Spickard and J. Shawn Landres have noted, either of a particularising or generalising type.¹⁰³ This is also commonly referred to as idiographic or nomothetic. As Jürgen Habermas noted almost 50 years ago in *Knowledge and Human Interests*, both designs are valuable, but are dependent upon what aims are sought after.¹⁰⁴ As was demonstrated in the Review of Literature in Chapter 1, a majority of the existent literature on interreligious encounter in contemporary Nigeria is of the generalising type. This saturation has entrenched a nomothetic and facile understanding, resulting in the construction of paradigms that dictate how encounters are, ought to be, or have been known to be in the past. There is a distinct lack of familiarity with actual empirical

¹⁰² Lynn Hirschkind, 'Redefining the 'Field' in Fieldwork,' *Ethnology* 30, no. 3 (1991): 239. See also, Smith, Flowers and Larkin: '... when we say that 'rich data' are required, we mean to suggest that participants should have been granted an opportunity to tell their stories, to speak freely and reflectively, and to develop their ideas and express their concerns at some length' (56).

¹⁰³ James V. Spickard and J. Shawn Landres, 'Introduction: Whither Ethnography? Transforming the Social-Scientific Study of Religion,' in *Personal Knowledge and Beyond: Reshaping the Ethnography of Religion*, eds. James V. Spickard, J. Shawn Landres, and Meredith B. McGuire (New York: New York University Press, 2002), 2-4.

¹⁰⁴ Jürgen Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971).

particulars, as these have rarely been accessed and analysed.¹⁰⁵ In response to this deficiency, this thesis is designed as a particularising type. While particularising research is often criticised for being parochial, it is precisely such research that contributes to exactness in social scientific understanding.¹⁰⁶ As Francis Galton, the pioneer of statistics so adequately put it many years ago, ‘Acquaintance with particulars is the beginning of all knowledge – scientific or otherwise ...’¹⁰⁷ And as Clifford Geertz concludes in *Islam Observed*, ‘... there is no route to general knowledge save through a dense thicket of particulars.’¹⁰⁸

Interrogation by Ethnography

Connected to this qualitative, particularising design is the corresponding apparatus. This apparatus is made up of the methods employed for accessing and

¹⁰⁵ Willem A. Bijlefeld, ‘Christian-Muslim Relations: A Burdensome Past, a Challenging Future,’ *Word and World* 16.2 (Spring 1996): 117. In this article, Bijlefeld warns of, ‘... the need to avoid self-constructed and monolithic images of Islam and Christianity and all speculations about the imagined relation between these two’ and calls for a return to what he terms, ‘concrete data’ (117).

¹⁰⁶ Clifford Geertz, *Islam Observed: Religious Development in Morocco and Indonesia* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), vi. Geertz writes: ‘The bulk of what I have eventually seen (or thought I have seen) in the broad sweep of social history I have seen (or thought I have seen) first in the narrow confines of country towns and peasant villages.’ See also: ‘Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture’ and ‘Religion as a Cultural System’ in *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1977), 3–30.

¹⁰⁷ Francis Galton, quoted in Gordon W. Allport, *The Use of Personal Documents in Psychological Science* (New York: Social Science Research Council, 1951), 56.

¹⁰⁸ Geertz, *Islam Observed*, 22. For Geertz, getting to general knowledge came by employing ‘thick description,’ a term he borrowed from Gilbert Ryle to refer to the process of explaining not only behaviour, but also the context and meaning of behaviour. Geertz’s most famous application of this method is in the following work: ‘Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight,’ in *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1977), 412–453. As a defense of this type of research, he states in *Islam Observed*: ‘Is it not reckless to assume any such miniature social system – some bypath town or village or region – is typical of the country as a whole? Is it not absurd to divine the shape of the past in a limited body of data drawn from the present? The answer to all of these questions, and others like them, is, of course, ‘yes’: it is invalid, reckless, absurd – and impossible. But the questions are misplaced. Anthropologists are not... attempting to substitute parochial understandings for more comprehensive ones, to reduce America to Jonesville or Mexico to Yucatan. They are attempting... to discover what contributions parochial understandings can make to comprehensive ones, what leads to general, broad-stroke interpretations in particular, intimate findings can produce’ (vi – vii).

collecting data. Given the social scientific interest in a specific community (i.e. Ogbómòsò), an ethnographical interrogation offers the most suitable approach. Ethnography is defined here as a thick, empirical exploration of a particular culture. It is an enquiry into contexts, meanings, and structures, not only actions and words. It seeks rich data that reveals the fullness of the lived world. The search for universal meanings is not the goal. Instead, detailed accounts of particular people and situations take precedence. While thick descriptions are not disconnected from broad understandings, this thesis is not interested in reifying the data to fit any normative social laws. Furthermore, an ethnographical design allowed me to study people's lives in everyday contexts.¹⁰⁹ Rather than isolating the phenomena in an experiment, ethnography takes place *in situ* using relatively unstructured and informal processes. With its repertoire of particularising data gathering methods, ethnography allows for a polymethodic, in-depth approach that triangulates social phenomena. Beyond the core ethnographic activities of engaging in participant observation, gathering artifacts, and writing copious fieldnotes, I also employ individual and focus group interviews.¹¹⁰ All of these data collecting methods combine to thickly explore the complexity of interreligious encounter and multiple religious belonging and identity in Ogbómòsò.

¹⁰⁹ This is sometimes referred to as naturalism; based on the idea that social life is best studied in its natural state. While access to this ideal is never actually met, the researcher should strive after it regardless. For further discussion of naturalism in the context of ethnography, see: Martyn Hammersley and Paul Atkinson, *Ethnography: Principles in Practice* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 7ff.

¹¹⁰ In total I interviewed 18 individuals (six for the case study on OSC; 12 for the case study on *Egúngún*). In total I interviewed 23 people within the six focus group interviews for the case study on OSC. As a participant observer, I took part in a range of local social gatherings including weddings, funerals, political events, university classes, public lectures, festival events, and a variety of religious functions.

Ethnography and Theory

On a theoretical level, I do not approach ethnography as being either exclusively inductive or deductive. There are obvious deficiencies that result from either being wedded to a specific ideological approach or lacking theoretical perspective. This project is a combination of field and theory driven research. As Elijah Anderson has noted about this combination: ‘... the most penetrating ethnographic questions often results from a fusion of concern that reflect both the ethnographers engagement of the social setting as well as his or her own sociological orientation’.¹¹¹ In other words, some questions and concepts were brought to the project, whereas others emerged throughout the course of fieldwork. This is always the case whether or not the researcher admits it or not. As an example, the works of Afe Adogame, J.D.Y. Peel, and Jacob Olupona particularly informed my understanding of religion in Nigeria. However, as no serious work had been conducted in Ogbómòsó, I relied on ethnographical fieldwork for a micro-level perspective.

Yet, despite this combination, it is important to note that I privilege fieldwork data and have allowed it to operate as a filter for both inductive and deductive theory use, analysis, and construction. This approach stands against what Anderson has termed as ‘ideological driven’ research, which as he states, tends to ‘subordinate the cultural complexity he or she finds in the field to ...[existing] theor[ies].’¹¹² To assist in this theoretical filtering, I have relied substantially upon the work of Kathy

¹¹¹ Elijah Anderson, ‘The Ideological Driven Critique’, *American Journal of Sociology* 107.6 (2002): 1537.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 1534.

Charmaz in *Constructing Grounded Theory*.¹¹³ While classical models of grounded theory are often criticised for being unsophisticated and theoretically disengaged, Charmaz's model recognizes that all data is connected to the researcher and that outside theories play an important role. As she states:

In the classic grounded theory works, Glaser and Strauss talk about discovering theory as emerging from data separate from the scientific observer. Unlike their position, I assume that neither data nor theories are discovered. Rather, we are part of the world we study and the data we collect. We *construct* our grounded theories through our past and present involvements and interactions with people, perspectives, and research practices.¹¹⁴

At the same time, however, Habermas reminds us that there are limits to empirical research and that given human subjectivity, no researcher is able to balance this combination of influences perfectly:

Empiricism attempts to ground the objectivist illusion in observations expressed in basic statements. These observations are supposed to be reliable in providing immediate evidence without the admixture of subjectivity. In reality basic statements are not simple representations of facts in themselves, but express the success or failure of our operations. We can say that facts and the relations between them are apprehended descriptively. But this way of talking must not conceal that as such the facts relevant to the empirical sciences are first constituted through an a priori organization of our experience in the behavioral system of instrumental action.¹¹⁵

In the case of this thesis, I utilise Charmaz's version of grounded theory in an effort to mitigate abstractions and misinterpretations by keeping theory use and

¹¹³ Kathy Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory: A Practical Guide Through Qualitative Analysis* (Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 2010). I have reviewed a number of texts on grounded theory and believe that overall this book offers the best description and guide for implementing the method.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 10.

¹¹⁵ Habermas 308-309.

construction closely connected to and filtered through the data.¹¹⁶

Grounded Theory in Practice

Beyond these general guiding principles, the actual practice of grounded theory is inherently flexible and occurs in an iterative, rather than a strict linear sequence. In the sections below, I give an overview of how I utilised and implemented grounded theory at different stages of the research.

Even at the beginning, I realised how important it was to gather rich, thick data.¹¹⁷ This type of data is what allows grounded theory to work properly. If theories come out of thin data, they are more than likely to be loosely grounded. Fortunately, my ethnographic interest aligned with this need. In order to systematise the large amount of data I would be collecting, I used the NVivo 9 software programme. This qualitative data analysis (QDA) programme allows for data to be organised and classified quickly and effectively. Throughout the process of data collection, I employed the constant comparative method. Comparing and contrasting collected data at all stages of fieldwork allowed for concept exploration, theoretical sampling, and the possibility of testing and revising pre-established images and

¹¹⁶ See: Steinar Kvale and Svend Brinkmann, *Interviews: Learning the Craft of Qualitative Research Interviewing* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2009), 202. As they note: ‘The purpose of grounded theory is not to test existing theory, but to develop theory inductively ... the goal is the development of categories that capture the fullness of the experiences and actions studied ... data-driven coding implies that the researcher starts out without codes, and develops them through readings of the material (e.g., in grounded theory)’ (202). For a discussion about keeping theory close to the ground, see: Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1977), 24.

¹¹⁷ Charmaz 18–19; 42ff. Charmaz suggests asking the following questions for controlling the quality of gathered data: ‘Have I collected enough background data about persons, processes, and settings to have ready recall and to understand and portray the full range of contexts of the study? Have I gained detailed descriptions of a range of participants’ views and actions? Do the data reveal what lies beneath the surface? Are the data sufficient to reveal changes over time? Have I gained multiple views of the participants’ range of actions? Have I gathered data that enable me to develop analytic categories? What kinds of comparisons can I make between data? How do these comparisons generate and inform my ideas?’

hypotheses through the lens of the data itself.¹¹⁸

For the initial stages of collection, I utilised Herbert Blumer's notion of sensitising concepts. These are research interests that guide the outset of fieldwork and assist in identifying potential themes. For instance, I knew that I was interested in interreligious encounter, but I had to spend time in Ogbómòsò being sensitised to specific, local issues.¹¹⁹ Again, my commitment to qualitative fieldwork, rather than a quantitative fieldtrip aligned with this need. I utilised a variety of exploratory methods for this purpose, including: (1) informal conversations with experts and non-experts; (2) participant observation at religious and cultural events; (3) taking daily field notes; and (4) collecting data in local archives. The data I collected at this stage was instrumental in my understanding of Ogbómòsò life and culture. Rather than relying purely on my own interests, I began to grasp the important issues in this particular lived world.

As is common with a grounded theory approach, I began coding data even in the early stages of data collection. Coding is the process of sorting, synthesising, and

¹¹⁸ Blumer 32. As Blumer notes: 'Very simply put, the only way to get this assurance is to go directly to the empirical social world—to see through meticulous examination of it whether one's premises or root images of it, one's questions and problems posed for it, the data one chooses out of it, the concepts through which one sees and analyzes it, and the interpretations one applies to it are actually borne out.' Again, this is an intention, as empirical observation is not free from a priori knowledge.

¹¹⁹ The topics I had in mind prior to fieldwork no doubt influenced my case selections, but I was intent on constructing themes that I empirically discovered in Ogbómòsò.

labelling pieces of data.¹²⁰ They operate as concise definitions and are the first major step of analysis and interpretation—providing an initial anchor for identifying significant points in the data—and a data-driven transition to theory construction.¹²¹

It is important to note that I employed a basic premise from Discourse Analysis, particularly from the work of James Paul Gee, to guide this process.¹²² As Gee suggests:

... there are important connections among saying (informing), doing (action), and being (identity). If I say anything to you, you cannot really understand it fully if you do not know what I am trying to do and who I am trying to be by saying it. To understand anything fully you need to know *who* is saying it and *what* the person saying it is trying to do.¹²³

With this in mind, I inquired beyond the level of saying and sought to connect my participants' language to their actions and identity, which is consistent with an ethnographic approach.¹²⁴ This occurred simultaneously as I collected, analysed, and coded the data, and remained important throughout the process of constructing

¹²⁰ Charmaz 3; 43; 93. I generally used emic terms for early coding, however, as my coding progressed I tended to use etic terms. Given that coding is an interpretation, while emic terms may seem more closely grounded to the data, this is not always the case. There are times when emic terms are not precise or accurate enough to synthesise data. In both cases, the premise should be that the selected terms reflect the experience of the participants. Charmaz gives a 'code for coding' that I found helpful: 'Remain open. Stay close to the data. Keep your codes simple and precise. Construct short codes. Preserve Actions. Compare data with data. Move quickly through the data' (49). Charmaz also gives a further set of questions to identify actions and processes: 'What process(es) is at issue here? How can I define it? How does this process develop? How does the research participant(s) profess to think and feel while involved in this process? What might his or her observed behavior indicate? When, why, and how does this process change? What are the consequences of this process?' (51). Charmaz also suggested reflecting on the following: 'How does my coding reflect the incident or described experience? Do my analytic constructions begin from this point? Have I created clear, evident connections between the data and my codes? Have I guarded against rewriting—and therefore recasting—the studied experience into a lifeless language that better fits *our* academic and bureaucratic worlds than those of our participants' (69).

¹²¹ Ibid., 46.

¹²² James Paul Gee, *An Introduction to Discourse Analysis: Theory and Method* (New York: Routledge, 2011).

¹²³ Ibid., 2.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 5. Gee remarks, 'Saying follows, in language, from doing and being' (5).

concepts and categories. The preciseness of coding developed as fieldwork progressed. Once codes were identified, I further explored the theoretical possibilities in the field and began constructing more precise codes for further evaluation. During the initial stages of fieldwork, the codes I used were broad and I had many questions about them. They essentially gave me leads to follow-up on. As fieldwork progressed and I collected more precise data, the codes developed into potential concepts.¹²⁵ I used memo writing as a way to further explicate relationships between concepts and inductively craft these concepts into tentative conceptual categories. Again, the constant comparative method was an essential component here, as I constantly revisited, compared, and contrasted collected data, producing a more focused direction for precise sampling. With tentative categories in place, I used a theoretical sampling strategy to explore properties, refine particulars, discover gaps or patterns, and saturate the categories for theoretical consideration.¹²⁶ Research and focus group interviews were the primary tool for this in-depth inquiry. With each interview, I sorted the data, coded it, and wrote detailed memos from it. This process allowed me to construct interpretative theories of the phenomena under study.¹²⁷ When writing up this thesis, I retained verbatim and empirical accounts of

¹²⁵ Charmaz 68. I utilised the following questions from Charmaz to construct concepts: ‘Do these concepts help you understand what the data indicate? If so, how do they help? Can you explicate what is happening in this line or segment of data with these concepts? Can you adequately interpret this segment of data without these concepts? What do they add?’ (68).

¹²⁶ Ibid., 103, 108. As Charmaz points out, theoretical sampling allows the researcher, ‘To delineate the properties of a category. To check hunches about categories. To saturate the properties of a category. To distinguish between categories. To clarify relationships between emerging categories. To identify variation in a process’ (104).

the participants. Rather than just describing my interpretation, I seek to demonstrate my interpretation with concrete data. It should follow that the reader has the ability to connect my abstract theories directly to the data.¹²⁸ This important step mitigates the possibility that I have merely superimposed my preconceived notions on the data.

Case Studies

A further design feature of the thesis is the use of case studies to structure the ethnographical interrogation. Case studies offer the ability to demonstrate the existence of phenomena—as Smith, Flowers, and Larkin note, to ‘... simply show that (or how) something *is* ...’¹²⁹ This is especially helpful when attempting to problematise set paradigms and understandings. While proving incidence is not the aim, conducting multiple case studies, which I have for this thesis, allows for comparison and perspective.¹³⁰ The intention is that the cases can shed light on one

¹²⁷ Charmaz 96. Charmaz offers the following criteria for evaluating the credibility of grounded theories: ‘Has your research achieved intimate familiarity with the setting or topic? Are the data sufficient to merit your claims? Consider the range, number, and depth of observations contained in the data. Have you made systematic comparisons between observations and between categories? Do the categories cover a wide range of empirical observations? Are there strong logical links between the gathered data and your argument and analysis? Has your research provided enough evidence for your claims to allow the reader to form an independent assessment—and *agree* with your claims?’ (182). For the criteria involved in evaluating the originality, resonance and usefulness of grounded theories, see Charmaz 181–183.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 82. As Charmaz notes: ‘Providing ample verbatim material ‘grounds’ your abstract analysis and lays a foundation for making claims about it’ (82). See also: Clive Seal, *The Quality of Qualitative Research* (Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 1999), 148. As Seal notes, it is of utmost importance to record and write-up observations and conversations ‘... in terms that are as concrete as possible, including verbatim accounts of what people say, for example, rather than researchers’ reconstructions of the general sense of what a person said, which would allow researchers’ personal perspectives to influence the reporting.’

¹²⁹ Jonathan A. Smith, Paul Flowers and Michael Larkin, *Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis: Theory, Method and Research* (London: Sage Publications, 2010), 30.

¹³⁰ For a more detailed explication of the role of case studies, see: Robert K. Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods, Fourth Edition* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2008), 3-21. He defines case studies as, ‘... an empirical inquiry that...investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context, especially when...the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident’ (18).

another.¹³¹ The selection process for the case studies in this thesis flows out of this understanding. Prior to and during the initial stages of fieldwork, I decided to cast a wide exploratory net for potential cases. I spoke with informants in the field and when a potential theme surfaced, I would take note and then explore it with other informants. Several criteria emerged in this exploration process. First, the potential cases had to be underexplored and likely result in new knowledge. Next, they had to have social pertinence in Ogbómòsó. In other words, I was only interested in illuminating a theme that was highly relevant. Last, the potential cases had to fit my timeframe and logistic limitations. Otherwise, I was open to the themes I encountered in the field. Admittedly, the two cases I chose and the participants within them are among an infinite array of other potential cases. Yet, I think they demonstrate well some important issues surrounding interreligious encounter and multiple religious belonging and identity in Ogbómòsó.

Phenomenology, Reflexivity, and Limitations

This ethnographic exploration is guided by the phenomenological premise that the reality perceived by subjects is the most important reality. Thus, I attempt to access and understand the world and the meaning of experiences through the subjects' point of view.¹³² As Bronislaw Malinowski pointed out: 'The final goal, of which an Ethnographer should never lose sight ... is, briefly, to grasp the native's

¹³¹ Geertz, *Local Knowledge*, 11. As Geertz illustrates regarding case research, 'The question is not whether art (or anything else) is universal; it is whether one can talk about West African carving, New Guinea palm-leaf painting, quattrocento picture making, and Moroccan versifying in such a way as to cause them to shed some sort of light on one another.'

¹³² Blumer 51. As Blumer remarks, '... if the scholar wishes to understand the action of people it is necessary for him to see their objects as they seem them ... Simply put, people act toward things on the basis of the meaning that these things have for them, not on the basis of the meaning that these things have for the outside scholar.' Importantly, this thesis is not wholly committed to the discipline or philosophy of phenomenology.

point of view, his relation to life, to realize *his* vision of *his* world.’¹³³ By utilising this approach to social life, the intended objective was to perform *epochè*, suspending my own judgments and analysis as far as possible, in order to first understand, describe, and explain the phenomena from the perspective of participants.¹³⁴ As James L. Cox rightly asserts of this process: ‘What is important for the phenomenologist of religion is not what is true, but the attainment of understanding and an accurate description of what the adherent believes to be true.’¹³⁵ In his critical work, *The Ethnographic Interview*, James P. Spradley offers a glimpse into the disposition required for this type of approach:

I want to understand the world from your point of view. I want to know what you know in the way you know it. I want to understand the meaning of your experience, to walk in your shoes, to feel things as you feel them, to explain things as you explain them. Will you become my teacher and help me understand?¹³⁶

As Kvale and Brinkmann argue, this sensitivity and interest in the subjects’ life-world grants the researcher credibility, and it is through this granting that ‘...obtain[ing] rich and nuanced descriptions of the phenomena investigated in the subjects’ everyday language’, becomes possible.¹³⁷

¹³³ Bronislaw Malinowski, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Limited, 1922), 25. While Malinowski’s terminology is outdated, his phenomenological approach remains grounded in contemporary ethnography.

¹³⁴ For an extended discussion of the stages of the phenomenological method, see: James L. Cox, *An Introduction to the Phenomenology of Religion: Key Figures, Formative Influences and Subsequent Debates* (London: Continuum Publishing, 2006), 48–72. *Epochè* is also referred to as phenomenological reduction and bracketing.

¹³⁵ Cox, *An Introduction to the Phenomenology of Religion*, 56. As a preliminary note, Cox recognises that, ‘... *epochè* cannot be practised perfectly and is best understood as a self-reflexive attitude ...’ (52).

¹³⁶ Spradley 34. See also: Smith, Flowers and Larkin 36. Their perspective points to the adoption of an insider’s perspective, while at the same time looking at the phenomena from other angles.

¹³⁷ Kvale and Brinkmann 207.

Admittedly, the examination of social life and its portrayal is always partial. Empirical observation is not free from a priori knowledge, nor is it a guarantee of an accurate hermeneutic. As Jurgen Habermas expressed nearly 50 years ago, ‘Access to the facts is provided by the understanding of meaning, not observation ... Hermeneutic knowledge is always mediated through this pre-understanding, which is derived from the interpreter’s initial situation.’¹³⁸ Data is never an exact representation of the lived world. Neutrality is not possible. We cannot escape the social world and study it from without. We are not passive receptacles. The researcher, to varying degrees, has an effect, an impact, on the social life under study. As Geertz notes regarding Bronislaw Malinowski’s, *A Diary in the Strict Sense of the Term*, the idea of the ‘... chameleon fieldworker, perfectly self-tuned to his exotic surroundings, a walking miracle of empathy, tact, patience, and cosmopolitanism ...’ is simply a myth.¹³⁹ This thesis is a discourse, an interchange—meaning that not only are the participants part of the construction process, the resulting data, and the interpretation of this data—I am also enmeshed in this process. I recognise the façade of being an omniscient observer and invisible recorder.¹⁴⁰ As James Spickard remarks, ‘Our dialogues become the subject of ethnography, not its means, and ethnography becomes personal: a matter of a cross-

¹³⁸ Habermas 309. He continues: ‘Empiricism attempts to ground the objectivist illusion in observations expressed in basic statements. These observations are supposed to be reliable in providing immediate evidence without the admixture of subjectivity. In reality basic statements are not simple representations of facts in themselves, but express the success or failure of our operations. We can say that facts and the relations between them are apprehended descriptively. But this way of talking must not conceal that as such the facts relevant to the empirical sciences are first constituted through an a priori organization of our experience in the behavioral system of instrumental action’ (308-309).

¹³⁹ Geertz, *Local Knowledge*, 56.

¹⁴⁰ Spickard 240-241.

cultural encounter rather than a one-way view.’¹⁴¹ This admission brings to the surface a myriad of questions surrounding this type of research. As James L. Cox asserts:

A central problem for the study of religion is how the subjective observer gains knowledge of an objective entity when that objective entity (religious life and practice) is embodied in subjective experience ... even though the observer endeavors to suspend all previous judgements, this is impossible in the literal sense ...¹⁴²

Clifford Geertz put it like this: ‘What happens to *verstehen* [understanding] when *empfinden* [empathy] disappears?’¹⁴³ There is no doubt that the data I present are subjective constructions; reinterpretations of reinterpretations.¹⁴⁴ There is no pure empathy nor unadulterated hermeneutic. To add to the limitations, the type of data I collect are always contingent and in a constant state of flux.¹⁴⁵ Social life is ongoing

¹⁴¹ Spickard 247.

¹⁴² Cox, *An Introduction to the Phenomenology of Religion*, 50-52.

¹⁴³ Geertz, *Local Knowledge*, 56. Geertz states: ‘If we are going to cling—as, in my opinion, we must—to the injunction to see things from the native’s point of view, where are we when we can no longer claim some unique form of psychological closeness, a sort of transcendental identification, with our subjects?’

¹⁴⁴ Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, 9–20. As Geertz states: ‘Nothing is more necessary to comprehending what anthropological interpretation is, and the degree to which it *is* interpretation, than an exact understanding of what it means – and what it does not mean – to say that our formulations of other peoples’ symbol systems must be actor-oriented ... In short, anthropological writings are themselves interpretations, and second and third order ones to boot ... They are, thus, fictions; fictions, in the sense that they are ‘something made,’ ‘something fashioned’ ...’ (14–15). See also: Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology* (New York: Basic Books, 1963), 1–27. In comparing the methods of history and ethnography, Lévi-Strauss asks: ‘What constitutes the goal of the two disciplines? Is it the exact reconstruction of what has happened, or is happening, in the society under study? To assert this would be to forget that in both cases we are dealing with systems of representations which differ for each member of the group and which, on the whole differ from the representations of the investigator. The best ethnographic study will never make the reader a native’ (16). Despite his positivist stance toward ethnography, even Malinowski admitted that ethnographers must construct and interpret what they think they see and understand. As he states: ‘... the Ethnographer has to *construct* the picture of the big institution, very much as the physicist constructs his theory from the experimental data, which always have been within reach of everybody, but needed a consistent interpretation’ (83–84).

in the purest sense. Thus, this thesis does not pretend to have captured any static, timeless, or changeless data.¹⁴⁶ Indeed, as Geertz has declared, ‘... sketches may be all that can be expected.’¹⁴⁷ This is especially true of research areas that are new or deficiently interrogated. The data I present are intrinsically incomplete. As Geertz reveals:

Such, indeed, is the condition of things. I do not know how long it would be profitable to meditate on the encounter of Cohen, the sheikh, and ‘Dumari’ (the period has perhaps already been exceeded); but I do know that however long I did so I would not get anywhere near to the bottom of it. Nor have I ever gotten anywhere near to the bottom of anything I have ever written about ... Cultural analysis is intrinsically incomplete. And, worse than that, the more deeply it goes the less complete it is. It is a strange science whose most telling assertions are its most tremulously based ...¹⁴⁸

Yet, despite these transcendental limitations, this is no cause for invalidation.¹⁴⁹

These acknowledgements do not mean that nothing can be recognised or understood.

As Martyn Hammersley and Paul Atkinson note, ‘... to say that our findings, and

even our data, are *constructed* does not automatically imply that they do not or

cannot represent social phenomena.’¹⁵⁰ Indeed, while social science is intrinsically

partial, always a reconstruction, a reinterpretation, this does not imply a total lack of

¹⁴⁵ Lynn Davidman, ‘Truth, Subjectivity, and Ethnographic Research,’ 19. As Davidman asserts: ‘... these accounts are partial not only because they are limited by the subjectivities of authors and respondents, but also because the biographical construction of identity through narrative is an ongoing process. Narratives of the self are always in flux and subject to revision with each new telling.’

¹⁴⁶ Spickard 242.

¹⁴⁷ Geertz, *Islam Observed*, vi.

¹⁴⁸ Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, 29.

¹⁴⁹ *In Pursuit of History: Fieldwork in Africa*, Eds. Carolyn Keyes Adenaike and Jan Vansina (Rochester: James Currey Publishers, 1997). ‘Knowledge resulting from fieldwork is thus contingent; it depends on a particular moment in the middle. But contingency does not invalidate it’ (103). ‘Long before the worker arrives in the field, evidence has changed; evidence remaining in the field will continue to change long after the fieldworker leaves. The fieldworker, however, records evidence—writing notes, taping interviews, taking photographs—and removes it from the field of forces. No longer subject to change, this evidence now becomes an archive, or part of an archive’ (95).

¹⁵⁰ Hammersley and Atkinson 16.

meaning or perspective. While there may be interpretations *ad infinitum*, it does not follow that all interpretations are the same; my own position is that some interpretations are better than others.¹⁵¹ Some theories are simply wrong. While I cannot replicate the lived world, I can construct an analytic interpretation. This is where reflexivity plays a critical role. As Habermas goes on to conclude, ‘If the latter [i.e. self-reflection] cannot cancel out interest [i.e. transcendental limitations], it can to a certain extent make up for it.’¹⁵² The aim remains, at least as an attempt, as an intended purpose, to illuminate the subjects’ lived world. As James Spickard has noted, ‘Ethnography remains scientific to the degree that it still tries accurately to understand—and portray—the people it investigates.’¹⁵³

Representation, Negotiating Access, and the Insider/Outsider Paradigm

A major component of reflexive research involves identifying researcher representation. This is related to the ever-present enigma of the insider/outsider paradigm.¹⁵⁴ This paradigm presents a myriad of issues and perspectives to consider. In my estimation, whether one is an insider, outsider, or somewhere in between, all

¹⁵¹ Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, 29-30. ‘My own position in the midst of all this has been to try to resist subjectivism on the one hand and cabalism on the other, to try to keep the analysis of symbolic forms as closely tied as I could to concrete social events and occasions, the public world of common life, and to organize it in such a way that the connections between theoretical formulations and descriptive interpretations were unobscured by appeals to dark sciences. I have never been impressed by the argument that, as complete objectivity is impossible in these matters (as, of course, it is), one might as well let one’s sentiments run loose. As Robert Solow has remarked, that is like saying that as a perfectly aseptic environment is impossible, one might as well conduct surgery in a sewer.’ Another helpful observation comes from the historian, E.H. Carr, *What is History?*, 30. ‘It does not follow that because a mountain appears to take on a different shape from different angles of vision, it has objectively no shape at all or an infinity of shapes.’

¹⁵² Habermas 314.

¹⁵³ Spickard 246.

¹⁵⁴ For an excellent description and example of how this enigma is dealt with during fieldwork, see: Afe Adogame and Ezra Chitando, ‘Moving Among Those Moved by the Spirit: Conducting Fieldwork within the New African Religious Diaspora,’ *Fieldwork in Religion* 1.3 (2005): 253-270.

researchers encounter hurdles related to their status. Identifying these and how they might have impacted the data is critical for a more honest portrayal. In terms of this thesis, how have I as a self-identifying outsider been able to negotiate access to the lived world of insiders? How was I perceived? Was I trusted? What details did I share or not share? As is especially the case with being an outsider, considerable tact and diplomacy was required to overcome the various hurdles of this status. I found that no exact combination existed; the way I represented myself was diverse and depended upon each interaction. In general, however, I employed full disclosure, meaning that any questions informants or participants had, I did my best to answer honestly. While full disclosure has associated risks, I believe the benefits far outweighed these risks. My informants provided critical access points to participants and sites for participant observation through their networks. Being open about myself was a necessary component in building trust and getting beyond any suspicion or scepticism they might have had. Additionally, I found that this relationship translated to the participants I met under the guidance of informants. If an informant trusted me, so too did their network of potential participants.

In order to facilitate my receptivity, I utilised various identities and associations. My specific identity as a 'Christian' and broader identity of 'being religious' provided some level of cultural commonality and extended insider status. I believe I would have found it much more difficult if I refused to talk about my religious affiliation or if I openly disclosed that I was non-religious or a member of a religious group unfamiliar to most Nigerians. My identity as 'married' carried considerable weight. I was accepted, shown respect, and given access more quickly on the basis of being married. I can imagine that single researchers might encounter

some difficulty. My identity as a ‘researcher’ from the University of Edinburgh legitimised my presence. I found that as an academic in Nigeria, I was given access and trust quite quickly. My motivations as a researcher were generally understood and even commended. Additionally, my identity as a ‘student of Nigeria’ was particularly important. I demonstrated a genuine interest in Nigeria and its people. My attempts to learn the language and cultural customs were greatly appreciated. My grasp of Nigerian history, contemporary issues, and my awareness and sensitivity regarding colonial and neo-colonial power structures was met with embrace. My commitment to discourse, rather than imposing a superior and normative perspective was vital. Lastly, and unexpectedly, Nigerians were very receptive to my identity as an ‘American.’ Most of the colonial baggage is connected to the United Kingdom or France. As well, this ‘outsider’ identity played to my favour in many ways. As I am unconnected to any ethnic group in Nigeria, I was often perceived to be nonpartisan. This was hugely important for encouraging participants to be open.

Overall, I was favourably received in Ogbómòsò. There were, however, a number of specific hurdles I had to negotiate with people in the field. Issues surrounding language were the most common. With over 250 different ethnolinguistic groups in Nigeria, this is an issue that even locals deal with on a daily basis. While my study was limited to the Yorùbá, there are a number of different dialects. Fortunately, consulting with local language experts mitigated many potential misinterpretations. While my identity as a Christian was mostly positively received, there were a few participants that refused to be involved when they discovered my religious identity. I respected their decision and moved on. Issues surrounding sex and gender also presented hurdles. There were occasions when

individuals were unable to participate in interviews as a result of cultural barriers related to sex or gender. There were also occasions when participants or informants were unable to participate due to scheduling conflicts. If after several attempts they failed to be involved, I made the decision to move on. There were also issues that arose involving informants and participants seeking to convert me, bribe me, or request that I support them in various ways. These types of situations were very rare, however. While I was legally in Nigeria, I did encounter some difficulty with immigration officials and police officers. This is certainly not rare even for citizens of Nigeria. While most people were highly receptive to my presence, there were a few exceptions. Several Nigerian academics I came into contact with were not pleased with me conducting research in Nigeria. The same was true of one worker at the National Archives of Nigeria. They felt that I was stealing research from Nigerians and was operating as a colonial agent. I was sensitive to their concerns and did my best to assure them that they were mistaken. Fortunately, these figures had no direct contact with any of my informants or participants, as they lived in neighbouring cities. In general, I understood these various hurdles early in my research and was able to mitigate their negative impact. My familiarity with Ogbómòsó life and culture, utilisation of common or respected identities and associations, and my reflexive sensitivity to these issues operated as a catalyst for successful fieldwork. In many respects, my outsider status fluctuated toward some degree of insider status over the course of fieldwork.

Logistics of Interviews

Research interviews do not materialise spontaneously. They require careful consideration, planning, and negotiation. During the initial stages of fieldwork for

each case study I set up meetings with potential informants and gatekeepers. These meetings varied in style and length, but tended to be with academics, politicians, and religious leaders. These were carried out with the snowball effect; each contact leading to another contact. I kept in contact with many of those I met throughout the duration of fieldwork. This contact was critical for negotiating initial and continued access in Ogbómòsò. For example, my multiple meetings with the Oba (king) of Ogbómòsòland, His Holiness Alayeluwa Oba Oladunni Oyewumi Ajagungbade III, were critical for me being allowed to conduct research in the area. These and other meetings with respected figures legitimised my project and led to access of interview participants.¹⁵⁵ They also sensitised me to local issues. As I explain in the section on case selection, these meetings partly informed this process. When possible, I recorded these conversations. When recording was not possible, I recorded fieldnotes immediately after the meeting. Many of these conversations not only informed my data, but also became data in their own right.

The timeline before I conducted individual research interviews varied for each case study. For the case study on religious OSC, it took almost two years of negotiating access. I first came into contact with members of the group (although I was unaware of their affiliation) in January 2010, but did not conduct any fieldwork with the group until October 2011. For the case study on the Ogbómòsò *Egúngún* Festival, I wanted the interviews to be conducted around the time of the annual festival. For both the 2011 and 2012 festival, I had about one year to plan and negotiate the interview schedule, even though the interviews themselves took place over only a few weeks time.

¹⁵⁵ Many participants would ask if I had met certain figures. It helped build trust when I knew the figures they referred to.

In line with the intention to demonstrate existence, rather than incidence, my sampling technique for the individual research interviews was purposive. I was interested in demonstrating the range of the phenomena for each case. No exact number of interviews was set prior to fieldwork; it was estimated between 10-15 for each case study.¹⁵⁶ This estimate was based upon prior experience, as well as the type, size, and timeframe of the project.¹⁵⁷ Importantly, in the field I was guided by the following recommendation made by Kvale and Brinkmann: ‘Interview as many subjects as necessary to find out what you need to know ...’¹⁵⁸ This is connected to the law of diminishing returns, in which at a variable point the theoretical prospects become saturated, generating little new knowledge.¹⁵⁹ Additionally, a large number of interviews generate a larger set of data; within the confines of a timed research project, this often leads to the lack of focus and penetrating analysis. Given the qualitative aims of this thesis, conducting a smaller number of in-depth interviews became clear early in the research process. I was committed from the beginning to reject a quantitative presupposition; that the more interviews I conducted, the more scientific the thesis became. Indeed, this type of approach often results in tourist interviewing. This style is more akin to snapshot journalism, in which the interviewer is often untrained on the topic and the participant is barely known by the

¹⁵⁶ As Kvale and Brinkmann note, studies typically have 15 +/- 10 interviews (113).

¹⁵⁷ The estimated timeframe of the project was confined to a total of 4 years. This is the maximum allotment given for a research PhD at the University of Edinburgh.

¹⁵⁸ Kvale and Brinkmann 113.

¹⁵⁹ Understanding this saturation is easier if the research aims are clear and concise. As Kathy Charmaz proposes in *Constructing Grounded Theory*, a researcher can stop collecting data when they thoroughly saturate their theoretical categories. However, as she puts it, this saturation ‘... is not the same as witnessing repetition of the same events or stories’ (113). Instead, Charmaz argues that, ‘... categories are ‘saturated’ when gathering fresh data no longer sparks new theoretical insights, nor reveals new properties of your core theoretical categories’ (113). Thus, the number of interviews I performed was largely dependent upon this method of saturation.

researcher.¹⁶⁰ In my opinion, the type of knowledge gleaned from this approach is similar to a quantitative survey or questionnaire. This can be useful, of course, but is misaligned with the aims of this thesis.

The length of each research interview varied from 60 to 90 minutes and was recorded with an audio recorder.¹⁶¹ The participants were made aware of the time commitment prior to the interview. As well, I had each participant verbally confirm whether or not they were comfortable with being recorded. Only three people were permitted to be involved during each interview: (1) the participant; (2) an interpreter; and (3) myself.¹⁶² Given this arrangement and considering that individual research interviews can be particularly penetrating, the setting for each interview was incredibly important. In my experience, interviews work best when the participant feels they can express themselves both freely and safely. Thus, the research interviews for this thesis all took place indoors in a semi-private location.¹⁶³ This arrangement provided a space: (1) with a degree of anonymity for participants; (2) a balance of privacy and protection; and (3) without constant interruption. Importantly, participants were always involved in negotiating a setting they felt comfortable with. In fact, participants recommended a majority of the locations, which included: houses, flats, classrooms, businesses, churches, and mosques.

In addition to individual research interviews, I also conducted focus group

¹⁶⁰ Kvale and Brinkmann 299.

¹⁶¹ I also used a back-up recorder.

¹⁶² There were several occasions when potential participants requested to have a family member or friend present for the interview. These requests were gently denied and I explained to them why this was the case. There were two occasions when participants did not feel comfortable with an individual interview, so I had them participate in a group interview instead.

¹⁶³ I use semi-private to denote that the interview locations were selected so that no one else could hear our conversation, but we were not in a completely private location.

interviews. The rationale for utilising focus group interviews was twofold. First of all, as I had discovered in previous fieldwork, the participant, or their family, may not grant me permission for a private interview. There are a variety of reasons for this denial, but typically this related to cultural boundaries between men and women. As I explained above, I had a protocol for this situation, but there were times when I had to transfer individual interview participants to a group interview context.¹⁶⁴ Secondly, focus groups can add an element of spontaneous interaction and debate to an interview situation. As Steinar Kvale and Svend Brinkmann note, 'In the case of sensitive taboo topics, the group interaction may facilitate expression of viewpoints usually not accessible.'¹⁶⁵ While interreligious encounter is often spoken about in Ogbómòsò, there are many taboo issues involved with multiple religious belongings and identities. In order to facilitate this discussion, I largely conducted these interviews after all the individual research interviews were complete. This allowed me to bring in concrete data to the focus group interview for discussion, which I believe allowed taboo issues to come to the surface in a more relatable way. My sampling technique was the same as the individual interviews. In terms of numbers, I conducted six focus group interviews for the case study on OSC. Each group contained 4-6 people and the interviews varied in length from 1-2 hours. As a standard protocol, the total number of interviewees for the focus groups needed to include a roughly equal number of females and males.

¹⁶⁴ In general, this was not a problem in Ogbómòsò. During previous fieldwork in northern Nigeria, this was more of an issue.

¹⁶⁵ Kvale and Brinkmann 150.

Semi-Structured Interview Guide

To promote an open disposition to the subject, the interview guide for the research and focus group interviews was limited to a series of themes and suggested questions within these themes; always allowing for a change of direction, sequence, and new themes to emerge based upon the interviewee's responses. New knowledge was integrated even as the interview was occurring. This format required what Pierre Bourdieu termed a 'reflex reflexivity,' in order to '... perceive and monitor *on the spot* ...' this new knowledge.¹⁶⁶ While I memorised the guide prior to the interview, the actual discourse provided substantial direction. Every interview was different. Not only did the participants change, but I also changed throughout the course of the fieldwork. Thus, even when I asked the same question in multiple interviews, I knew it was not really the same question. Discourse is inherently non-standardised. I inevitably presented the question and probed the response in a different way each time, even if only slightly. The data are not a perspicuous record, what Pierre Bourdieu called 'tape recorder sociologies.' Every participant has a contextual understanding and interpretation. There is no concrete meaning. As the famous biologist Alfred C. Kinsey once noted:

Standardized questions do not bring standardized answers, for the same question means different things to different people. In order to have questions mean the same thing to different people, they must be modified to fit the vocabulary, the educational background, and the comprehension of each subject.¹⁶⁷

These modifications have infinite possibilities. Barring omniscience, it is illogical to

¹⁶⁶ Pierre Bourdieu, *The Weight of the World: Social Suffering in Contemporary Society* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 608. See also: Kvale and Brinkmann 16.

¹⁶⁷ Alfred C. Kinsey, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1998), 52.

standardise an interview. With this in mind, however, I did approach the process with a few basic rules of engagement and structure: (1) express interest in the participant; (2) refrain from jumping in too quickly; (3) allow for silence at times; (4) arrange sensitive topics later in the interview; (5) always attempt to end the interview on a positive note; (6) probe without overstepping social boundaries; and (7) present questions as non-judgmental and open-ended.¹⁶⁸ The objective throughout was to encourage the participant to feel comfortable and take their time in extrapolating their lived world. I took it as a sign of success when the participant was doing a majority of the talking.¹⁶⁹ While I did not refrain from probing and even questioning the reasoning of the participant, I did so in a respectful and understanding manner.¹⁷⁰ Again, many of these methodological decisions took place on the spot, but I had thought considerably about my role even prior to fieldwork.

Language: Translation and Transcription

This thesis engages with a number of languages in written and oral form including English, Yorubá, and French. While my native tongue is English, I have a working proficiency in the other languages, although not enough capability to carry out an interview on my own. During the individual research and focus group interviews, the participants were given a choice to be interviewed in the language they felt most comfortable with. This was always either English or Yorubá. In either

¹⁶⁸ The first four rules were easy to implement overall. The last three required a substantial amount of contextual knowledge and awareness.

¹⁶⁹ Charmaz 26. As Charmaz notes: ‘By creating open-ended, non-judgmental questions, you encourage unanticipated statements and stories to emerge.’ See also, Smith, Flowers and Larkin: participants need to be allowed the ‘... opportunity to tell their stories, to speak freely and reflectively, and to develop their ideas and express their concerns at some length’ (56).

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 19. As Charmaz suggests, ‘... we offer our participants respect and, to our best ability, understanding although we may not agree with them. We try to understand but do not necessarily adopt or reproduce their views as our own; rather we interpret them’ (19).

case, I had a Yorùbá interpreter with me in every interview in order to deal with any nuances in the language I might not understand. The participants were made aware of this ahead of time. I employed five interpreters throughout fieldwork. They were each trained by myself to give an accurate interpretation. For purposes of transcription and further reflection, I used a digital recorder to capture the interviews. All non-English data has been translated into English. I used a multi-comparative translation procedure in order to mitigate inaccuracies in the translation. During the live interviews, the interpreter gave an on the spot translation from Yorùbá into English. Additionally, I employed another translator to perform a second translation of each interview from Yorùbá into English. When there were inconsistencies, I consulted with my informants.

Anonymity of Participants

Tension surrounding encounters between Nigeria's religious groups was apparent even prior to fieldwork. Once in the field, however, I realised how severe repercussions could be for participants with multiple religious belongings and identities. In the early stages, I found that people were willing to tell their stories as long as there was some manner of protection. There were many participants that felt their livelihood or even their lives would be at stake by telling their stories. For instance, as the case study on OSC reveals, most people surreptitiously guard their affiliation with the group. As a result, I found it ethically necessary to provide a reasonable level of protection. The following protocol was utilised for this purpose: (1) I will only audio record the interviews; and (2) I will anonymise names using

pseudonyms.¹⁷¹ While there are certainly downsides to anonymity, this option was necessary for the safety of participants and I believe it encouraged them to be more open and willing to share their experiences.¹⁷²

¹⁷¹ While I photographed and video recorded at times while I was a participant observer, I never utilised these tools for research or focus group interviews.

¹⁷² To view the consent forms I used for each case study, see APPENDIX A and APPENDIX B.

CHAPTER 3

MULTIPLE RELIGIOUS BELONGING AND IDENTITY IN A NEW RELIGIOUS MOVEMENT: THE CASE OF THE OGBÓMÒSÓ SOCIETY OF CHRISLAM

You see it was God who came to us. It was divine intervention ... God acted and inspired us to be part of this plan of founding OSC.

— Tantoluwa, co-founder of the Ogbómòsò Society of Chrislam

Introduction

The following case study offers an ethnographic account and analysis of an Ogbómòsò-based group known as the Ogbómòsò Society of Chrislam (OSC). OSC is part of a new religious movement (NRM) in Nigeria that uses the term Chrislam to refer to itself.¹⁷³ This study offers the first glimpse, academic or otherwise, of the group, which was founded in 2005. Born out of a dynamic appropriation and (re)-construction of multiple religious traditions, OSC is a multireligious *bricolage*.¹⁷⁴ While OSC occupies a peripheral place within the dominant religious systems in Ogbómòsò, it is highly relevant to the primary research question of this thesis: how has interreligious encounter in Ogbómòsò created multiple religious belongings and identities among individuals and groups? Additionally, the related questions of ‘why

¹⁷³ The term ‘New Religious Movement’ has been largely adopted by scholars in place of derogatory terms like ‘cult’. The term applies to OSC and other Chrislam groups because it is a modern movement that occupies a peripheral place within the dominant religious systems in Ogbómòsò and throughout Yorùbáland. While OSC is formed from existing traditions, it is also distinct from them. For a helpful discussion on New Religious Movements, see: *New Religious Movements: Challenge and Response*, eds. Jamie Cresswell and Bryan Wilson (New York: Routledge, 1999). See also: *Revisionism and Diversification in New Religious Movements*, ed. Eileen Barker (Ashgate, 2013). For the seminal study on NRM’s in Nigeria, see: *New Religious Movements in Nigeria*, ed. Rosalind I. J. Hackett (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1987).

¹⁷⁴ The use of *bricolage* is explored further in Chapter Five.

do individuals have multiple religious belongings and identities?', 'how do individuals negotiate belonging and identifying with multiple religious traditions?', and 'how has interreligious encounter impacted each religious tradition?' are also explored in the context of OSC.

The chapter is divided into five parts. Part I addresses issues of negotiating access and the specific timeline of my fieldwork with the group. Part II documents the origins, antecedents, and current structure of the group. Part III explores the primary tenets and major practices of OSC using an ethnography of a group meeting. Part IV picks up on the sermon from the ethnography and explores some of the most significant and common religious beliefs at OSC. Part V presents a selection of conversations I had with OSC members regarding how they negotiate their multiple religious belongings and identities in the midst of what they call 'religious persecution'. It includes member accounts from Ayokunle, Monifa, Bolaji, Opeyemi, Tula, Romoluwa, Jimoh, and Grace.

PART I: ACCESS AND FIELDWORK

Negotiating Access

Negotiating access to OSC did not come easily. It was a long process, taking almost two years from learning about the group, unknowingly encountering a few of its members, having their membership unveiled, to finally being granted access. Yet, given that OSC exists on the margins of society in Ogbómòsò, with most members belonging surreptitiously and keeping their identities concealed due to a legitimate fear of being oppressed, this timeline is unsurprising. Indeed, most people in the Ogbómòsò area, while having some knowledge of OSC's existence, do not possess any concrete details. Even as many religious groups in Ogbómòsò enjoy an observable and legitimised public presence, occupying prominent spaces along main thoroughfares, OSC has been forced to exist primarily as a private, illegitimate group, far from the city centre. This marginalised existence has created a contemporary legend surrounding OSC and many people in Ogbómòsò do not believe that it actually exists.

In late 2009, while conducting survey work for another research project on Muslim-Christian interaction in Ogbómòsò, informants recited rumours of the existence in Nigeria of what they termed 'the Chrislam church' and the 'Chrislamists' or 'Chrislamics'.¹⁷⁵ However, while there were confirmed reports of groups similar to OSC in Lagos, none of my informants could, or perhaps would verify its existence in Ogbómòsò. Nevertheless, as I was looking to conduct my PhD research on interreligious encounter in Nigeria, I was intrigued and continued to

¹⁷⁵ The result of that project was the following work: Corey L. Williams, 'Conflict and Peace in Nigeria: Comparing the Intercultural and Ethnoreligious Interaction Between Muslims and Christians in Ogbómòsò and Kaduna', (Unpublished M.A. Thesis, Pepperdine University, 2010).

search for leads. As I later discovered, my repetitive questioning about the group was essential to gaining access.

My first encounter with a member of OSC occurred on Sunday, 24 January 2010 at the Redeemed Christian Fellowship (RCF), Ladoke Akintola University of Technology (LAUTECH) Chapter.¹⁷⁶ After attending the morning service at RCF, I was invited to lunch by a small group of university students. I discovered in late 2011 that two of these students, Adebayo and Femi, were members at OSC. As we sat at a chophouse near LAUTECH, the conversation was engaging and as is typical in Nigeria, often touched on topics related to religion and politics. I discussed my interest in interreligious encounter in Ogbómòsò and particular fascination with the phenomena I had heard about known as ‘Chrislam’. They denied any knowledge of the group, saying while they had heard about a so-called ‘Chrislam church’, that it did not likely exist in Ogbómòsò. We exchanged contact information and said we would keep in touch. The very next weekend, on Sunday, 31 January 2010, I attended University Baptist Church (UBC), Ogbómòsò. After attending the morning service, I was invited to a wedding reception nearby. While at the reception, I met a university student named Matthew who had also attended church at UBC that morning. We discussed a range of topics, including my interest in Chrislam. We chatted throughout the afternoon and exchanged contact information. As I would discover almost two years later, he was also a member at OSC.

¹⁷⁶ Christ the Redeemer’s Ministries (CRM), a ministry branch of the The Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG), oversees RCF. RCF typically meets together at the Redemption Tabernacle, which has a capacity of 2,500 people. For more information, see: The Redeemed Christian Fellowship, ‘Our History’, <http://www.rcflautech.org/index.php/about-rcf-lautech/our-history> (accessed 7 September 2013).

Transition to Fieldwork

Oblivious of their belonging at OSC, I developed a friendship with these three university students. Even though we met together many times, it was not until September 2011 that Adebayo and Femi revealed their affiliation with OSC. Prior to this unveiling, they had informed others in the group about my research interest, vouching for my academic professionalism. As I would later learn from Adebayo and Femi, many at OSC were open to the prospect of allowing me access to the group, but there were also legitimate concerns expressed. In the weeks that followed, Adebayo and Femi facilitated a series of meetings between myself and other OSC members.¹⁷⁷ During these meetings, we discussed their concerns. I learned that they were particularly troubled by the potential danger that might befall them if their location or membership was exposed. In light of this and other concerns, we agreed upon several conditions of access: (1) I would not be allowed to publish videos or photographs of the group or their property; (2) I would assist in protecting the identity of individuals by anonymising their names with pseudonyms; (3) I would not publish details regarding member locations or the location of their property; and (4) the research would be social scientific in orientation, rather than theological. During a business meeting at OSC on 15 October 2011, at which I was not present, members of the group discussed these conditions and voted on a proposal allowing me to conduct research with the group. The proposal was approved allowing me immediate access. With a research protocol in place, I conducted fieldwork with OSC from October 2011–March 2012 and from June–July 2012. During this time, I was a participant observer at 26 group events and took down detailed ethnographic

¹⁷⁷ These members were on the Organising Committee of OSC at the time. As I will later discuss, this committee forms a rotating leadership structure for the group.

fieldnotes. In addition to informal conversations, I also conducted six semi-structured individual interviews, six focus group interviews, and one demographic survey.

PART II: ORIGINS, ANTECEDENTS, AND THE CURRENT DEMOGRAPHY AND STRUCTURE OF OSC

Locating 'Chrislam'

If the term 'Chrislam' sounds like something out of a science fiction novel, perhaps that is because linguistically that is where it originates. The first usage of the term can be traced to G.K Chesterton's 1914 novel, *The Flying Inn*. Set in dystopian, futuristic England, a progressive form of Islam, sprinkled with remnants of Christianity, dominates the social and political life of the nation. One of the characters, an Irishman named Patrick Dalroy, concerned and discussing this state of affairs, wittily refers to the evolving religion as Chrislam. Chesterton writes:

'I carl it rubbish' cried Patrick Dalroy, 'when ye put the Koran into the Bible and not the Apocrypha; and I carl it rubbish when a mad parson's allowed to propose to put a crescent on St. Paul's Cathedral ...' 'Lord Ivywood is very enthusiastic, I know', said Pump, with a restrained amusement. He was saying only the other day at the Flower Show here that the time had come for a full unity between Christianity and Islam'. '*Something called Chrislam perhaps*', said the Irishman, with a moody eye. 'But you exaggerate, you know', went on Pump, polishing his gun, 'about the crescent on St. Paul's. It wasn't exactly that. What Dr. Moole suggested, I think, was some sort of double emblem, you know, combining cross and crescent [*italics mine*]'.¹⁷⁸

While there is talk of 'full unity between Islam and Christianity', it is ultimately Islam that triumphs in this story.

A similar reference to the term 'Chrislam' is also found in Arthur C. Clarke's 1992 short story, 'The Hammer of God: A New Story'.¹⁷⁹ In this fictitious, end times narrative, a super religion known as Chrislam emerges as a result of the USA's involvement in the Gulf Region. Clarke writes:

¹⁷⁸ Gilbert K. Chesterton, *The Flying Inn* (New York: John Lane Company, 1914), 45.

¹⁷⁹ Arthur C. Clarke, 'The Hammer of God: A New Story', *Time Magazine* 140.9 (Fall 1992): 83-87. Clarke adapted parts of this story to become a novel, released the following year as: Arthur C. Clarke, *The Hammer of God* (New York: Bantam Books, 1993).

The sudden rise of Chrislam had been traumatic equally to Rome and Mecca. Christianity was already reeling from John Paul XXV's eloquent but belated plea for contraception and the irrefutable proof in the New Dead Sea Scrolls that the Jesus of the Gospels was a composite of at least three persons. Meanwhile the Muslim world had lost much of its economic power when the Cold Fusion breakthrough, after the fiasco of its premature announcement, had brought the Oil Age to a sudden end. The time had been ripe for a new religion embodying, as even its severest critics admitted, the best elements of two ancient ones ... Thanks to the brilliant use of neural programming to give previews of Paradise during its ceremonies, *Chrislam had grown explosively*, though it was still far outnumbered by its parent religions [italics mine].¹⁸⁰

Beyond this ideological function in science fiction, the term 'Chrislam' has also emerged in a recent evangelical turf war in the USA. In 2011, American televangelist Jack Van Impe created a stir during his Trinity Broadcasting Network (TBN) show when he accused mega church founder Rick Warren, commonly referred to as 'America's Pastor', among others, of propagating the 'cult of Chrislam'; as Van Impe described it, 'the uniting of Christianity with Islam'.¹⁸¹ This accusation was based on Warren's involvement in interfaith dialogue. In particular, Warren participated and delivered a speech at the 2009 Islamic Association of North America (ISNA) Convention and served as a signatory for a publication released by the Yale Center for Faith and Culture and members of the Yale Divinity School, titled 'Loving God and Neighbor Together'.¹⁸² Warren unequivocally denied the

¹⁸⁰ Clarke, 'The Hammer of God', 84.

¹⁸¹ Jack and Rexella Van Impe, *Chrislam: One World Religion Emerging*, DVD, written and presented by Jack and Rexella Van Impe (Rochester Hills, MI: Jack Van Impe Ministries, 2011).

¹⁸² Rick Warren, 'Remarks Delivered at the 46th Annual ISNA Convention'. 4 Jul 2009, Washington DC. 'Loving God and Neighbor Together: A Christian Response to 'A Common Word Between Us and You'', *New York Times*, 18 Nov 2007. The origins of the Yale document are related to a lecture given by Pope Benedict XVI at the University of Regensburg on 12 September 2006. During the lecture, the Pope quoted a Byzantine Emperor's critique of Muhammad. Despite his insistence that he did not share in this critique, some found its use to be insensitive. In response, on 13 October 2006, a group of 38 Islamic scholars wrote a letter titled, 'An Open Letter to the Pope'. Exactly one year later, a group of 138 Islamic figures signed a letter to 'Leaders of Christian Churches, everywhere' in promotion of interfaith dialogue, titled 'A Common Word Between Us and You'. The Yale document was subsequently written in response.

accusations, stating ‘The so-called ‘Chrislam’ rumor is 100 percent false’, while Van Impe left his decades-long post at TBN over the controversial claim.¹⁸³ Following this controversy, the term ‘Chrislam’ has been utilised in a number of publications, largely in reference to groups such as the ‘Insider Movement’ and ‘Muslim Background Believers’ (MBB).¹⁸⁴

Beyond science fiction and American evangelical turf wars, it is in Nigeria where ‘Chrislam’ has been taken from new word to NRM. The following sections document several of OSC’s antecedent groups that might have had an influence on the construction of OSC itself.¹⁸⁵ While the content and form of each group varies, they each have attempted to construct a group from multiple religious traditions and most prominently from Christianity, Islam, and AIR.

¹⁸³ Adelle M. Banks, ‘Van Impe leaves TBN over ‘Chrislam’ remarks’, *Religion News Service*, 20 Jun 2011, <http://www.religionnews.com/2011/06/20/van-impe-leaves-tbn-over-chrislam-remarks/> (accessed 6 September 2013). A 2012 article with the *Orange Country Register* served to further fan the Chrislam rumour. See: Jim Hinch, ‘Rick Warren Builds Bridge to Muslims’, *Orange Country Register*, 23 Feb 2012, <http://www.oregister.com/articles/muslims-341669-warren-saddleback.html> (accessed 6 September 2013). Warren responded by doing an interview and releasing the following article: Rick Warren, ‘On Responding to False Accusations’, 12 Mar 2012, <http://pastors.com/on-responding-to-false-accusations/> (accessed 6 September 2013). The text of the interview can be found at: Brandon Cox, ‘Rick Warren on Muslims, Evangelism, and Missions’, 2 Mar 2012, <http://pastors.com/rick-warren-on-muslims-evangelism-and-missions/> (accessed 6 September 2013). During the interview, Cox questioned whether Warren was promoting Chrislam. Warren responded: ‘Of course not. It’s the lie that won’t die. No matter how many times we refute it and correct that lie, people keep passing it on as truth’.

¹⁸⁴ For more on the use of ‘Chrislam’ in reference to Muslim Background Believers and the Insider movement, see: Joel Richardson, *Mideast Beast: The Scriptural Case for an Islamic Antichrist* (Washington DC: WND Books, 2012). See also: Joshua Lingel, Jeffrey J. Morton, and Bill Nikides, *Chrislam: How Missionaries are Promoting an Islamized Gospel* (Garden Grove: i2 Ministries, 2011). See also: Paul L. Williams, *Crescent Moon Rising: the Islamic Transformation of America* (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 2013).

¹⁸⁵ I use ‘might’ here for good reason. As discussed later in the chapter, the co-founders claim to have received a ‘divine revelation’ from God to found OSC and they reject any suggestion that they borrowed the idea from other groups. However, while it is difficult to say how antecedent groups influenced the founding of OSC, several contemporary members revealed that they at least knew about these groups prior to joining OSC.

Oba Aken-zua II and the Holy Aruosa Cathedral

It was Bishop Stephen Neill, the Scottish missionary and scholar, who first documented a Chrislam-esque group in Nigeria; although the term ‘Chrislam’ was not used at the time.¹⁸⁶ During his grand 1950 tour and evaluation of theological education in Africa, Neill made a stop in Benin City, where he encountered a group that ‘... contained elements from Christianity, from Islam, and from pagan traditions’.¹⁸⁷ The group was initiated by Oba Aken-zua II, who was the King of Benin from 1933-1978. As Neill notes, Aken-zua II was officially ‘a Christian and an Anglican ... but some years ago he decided to start a religion of his own’.¹⁸⁸ While Neill notes that the group experienced some popularity, he was informed that, ‘... it has dwindled and no one takes any interest in it any more’.¹⁸⁹ Whatever the case, Neill toured the ‘church’ that Aken-zua II was in the process of constructing for the group. While there is no definitive link, this group is very likely within the heritage of the Holy Aruosa Cathedral, which still exists in Benin today.¹⁹⁰ Today, the Holy Aruosa Cathedral is led by Aken-zua II’s son, the Oba of Benin, His Royal

¹⁸⁶ While there are undoubtedly other examples of groups with multiple religious traditions influencing the group, none that I am aware of attempt to construct their identity based on Christianity, Islam, and AIR. Furthermore, while other ‘Chrislam’ groups may have existed or continue to exist, they remain undocumented, or are at least unknown to me.

¹⁸⁷ Bishop Neill’s Travel Diary, Entry No. IX (28 May 1950), 6. The diary has been transcribed and is available within the archives of the Centre for the Study of World Christianity at the University of Edinburgh.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ For more on the Holy Aruosa Cathedral, see: Flora Edouwaye S. Kaplan, ‘Understanding sacrifice and sanctity in Benin indigenous religion, Nigeria: a case study’, in *Beyond Primitivism: Indigenous Religious Traditions and Modernity*, ed. Jacob K. Olupona (New York: Routledge, 2004), 185-194. See also: Wilson E. Ehianu, ‘Holy Aruosa Cathedral in Benin: historical and phenomenological perspectives’, *ORITA* 42.1 (2010), 51-65. Interestingly, the next stop for Neill was in Ogbómòsò. For an overview of Neill’s journey, see: Stephen Neill, ‘African Theological Survey’, *International Review of Mission* 39.154 (April 1950): 207-211. For an updated perspective on Neill’s journey, see: Dyron Daugherty, ‘Bishop Stephen Neill, the IMC and the State of African Theological Education in 1950’, *Studies in World Christianity* 18.1 (2012): 41-62.

Majesty Omo n’Oba n’Edo Uku Akpolokpolo Erediauwa I, and the group is attended by Christians, Muslims, and AIR.

Ifeoluwa

The second antecedent group cropped up in Lagos, Nigeria in the early 1970s.¹⁹¹ It was founded and continues to be led by Holy Royal Highness Tela Tella. Tella claims that he received a divine revelation in which he was commissioned to start a religious group called *Ifeoluwa: The Will of God Mission*. The name *Ifeoluwa* is a Yorubá term, meaning ‘God’s love’. As Tella recalls, *Ifeoluwa* was established to bridge the divide between Nigeria’s religious traditions by incorporating elements of Christianity, Islam, and AIR. Members of *Ifeoluwa* revere Tella as the Living Messiah and he claims to continue to receive divine revelations.¹⁹² He is currently writing the *Ifeoluwa Book*—said to be the final book of revelation from God. Despite its decades-long presence in Lagos, the group has remained relatively small with a few hundred members. Scholars Marloes Janson and Mustapha Bello believe this may be due in part to the strict regulations imposed on members.¹⁹³ Yet, Hazzan-Odede Adeboye, the group’s new crusader, believes they will expand significantly in the coming years.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹¹ The only published academic research on *Ifeoluwa* is: Marloes Janson and Mustapha Bello, ‘Chrislam: Forging Ties in Nigeria’s Multi-Religious Society’, in *New face of Islam in Eastern Nigeria and the Lake Chad Basin*, ed. Egodi Uchendu (Makurdi: Aboki Publishers, 2012). For a journalistic piece, see: Eno Reuben and Annette Edo, ‘Nigeria: Inside Chrislam’, 26 January 2003, *Newswatch (Lagos)*, <http://allafrica.com/stories/200301271122.html> (accessed 12 September 2013).

¹⁹² Within these revelations, Tella does not see God. Instead, the message is communicated through angels such as Gabriel and Michael.

¹⁹³ There are at least 80 rules and regulations related to behavior, morality, discipline, dress, food taboos, and hygiene.

¹⁹⁴ Adeboye has written a book to assist this expansion. See: Hazzan-Odede Adeboye, *The Last Trumpet* (Lagos: Foffi Publishers, 2009).

Chrislamherb and Oke-Tude

The origins of a third antecedent group, also launched in Lagos, can be traced to the late 1980s. It was founded and continues to be led by Prophet Dr Samusideen-Oladimeji Saka. He claims to have had no knowledge of *Ifeoluwa* at the time. While performing the *Hajj* in 1989, Saka claims to have received a divine revelation. As Kehinde Emmanuel Obasola, in his important research on the group, relates, Saka ‘... dreamt that he received the mandate to pioneer a religious movement that will bring both Christians and Muslims to worship together in the same place without any inhibition’.¹⁹⁵ Based on this revelation, Saka founded the *Chrislamherb* World Faith Mission in 1990.¹⁹⁶ The term *Chrislamherb* denotes a synthesis of Christianity, Islam, and herbalism. Despite the inclusion of herbalism, Saka maintains that the group has never practised AIR fully.¹⁹⁷ In 1996, Saka received further divine inspiration, after which he dropped his career in AIR medicine and herbalism.¹⁹⁸ Subsequently, the group’s name was changed to *Oke Tude*, a Yorùbá phrase meaning ‘Mountain of Loosing Bondage’.¹⁹⁹ The minimal existent literature on *Oke Tude*

¹⁹⁵ Kehinde Emmanuel Obasola, ‘Religious Syncretism in *Oke Tude* in South Western Nigeria’, (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Ibadan, 2007), 54. Saka’s revelation was also corroborated by others including Alhaji Bashir. As Obasola remarks, ‘As a way of confirming this divine revelation, the same message was revealed to Alhaji Bashir who was also on pilgrimage to Mecca in a dream. He corroborated the views expressed by Dr Saka to be the pioneer of a new religion for the promotion of religious interaction in Nigeria and also for the emancipation of man from the bondage of oppression and diseases’ (57).

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 55. This group was also referred to as the *Chrislamherb* Society. For more on this early form of the group, see: I. Aliyo, ‘*Chrislamherb*: Experiment in Religious Harmony’, *Aura magazine*, 13 May 1991, 11.

¹⁹⁷ Obasola 59.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 59. While Saka does not facilitate AIR medicine and herbalism any longer, he does not preach against its use.

reveals a movement defined by its deliverance ministry.²⁰⁰ In particular, Saka claims to be able to free women from the bondage of barrenness. He also ‘... claims that he has the ability to catch and arrest those operating with the spirit of witchcraft and that members of *Oke Tude* are immuned [sic] from the activities of these malevolent forces’.²⁰¹ The group is mostly female, uneducated, poor, and around 80 percent are from a Muslim background.²⁰² Given this latter demographic and the group’s charismatic style of worship, this has led Janson and Bello to classify this group within Islamic Pentecostalism. In terms of numbers, several reports indicate *Oke Tude* is around 1500 strong, with domestic branches in Lagos, Ibadan, and Abuja, as well as an international branch in London, United Kingdom. However, in Obasola’s research, the group claims to have around 15,000 members spread all throughout southwest Nigeria in the states of Lagos, Ogun, Oyo, and Osun.²⁰³

Origins of OSC

Information related to the origins of OSC is limited to claims made by the five self-proclaimed co-founders of the group: Ibukunoluwa, Tantoluwa, Ayokunle,

¹⁹⁹ Janson and Bello 203. As Janson and Bello note, the Nigerian government refused to register the name *Chrislamherb*, however, with the name change to *Oke Tude*, the group was officially registered. See also: Obasola 18. Obasola states: ‘*Oke Tude* simply means the Mountain of loosening bonds or the Mountain where fetters are disconnected’. The group has also been called ‘The True Message of God Mission’.

²⁰⁰ Beyond the article published by Janson and Bello and the unpublished PhD thesis by Obasola, the existent resources are scant. PBS has produced a six-minute segment on *Oke Tude*. See: Fred de Sam Lazaro, ‘Chrislam’, *PBS: Religion and Ethics Newsweeky*, 13 February 2009, <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/religionandethics/2009/02/13/february-13-2009-chrislam/2236/> (accessed 12 September 2013). See also: Abraham McLaughlin, ‘In Africa, Islam and Christianity are growing – and blending’, *The Christian Science Monitor*, 26 January 2006, <http://www.csmonitor.com/2006/0126/p01s04-woaf.html> (accessed 12 September 2013).

²⁰¹ Obasola 2.

²⁰² Janson and Bello 210. While capturing motivations is always tenuous, many join the group to access education, healing, economic improvement, spiritual improvement, social mobility, and a belief in the unity Saka preaches.

²⁰³ Obasola 58. This figure has not been carefully verified.

Olumide, and Ọbáfẹ̀mí. Prior to this report, beyond a few concise OSC leaflets produced by the group, the history of OSC only existed in oral form. While I gathered information on the origins of OSC over the course of fieldwork, a majority of the details are derived via focus group interviews I conducted with the five co-founders on 22 October 2011 and 7 July 2012. I also attempted to corroborate the details where possible through informal conversations, semi-structured individual interviews, and being a participant observer.

While the co-founders are now aware of the neologistic origins of the term ‘Chrislam’, as well as the other ‘Chrislam’ groups in Nigeria, they claim to have been unaware when they founded the group. As Olumide made clear, ‘We did not know such things ... these are very interesting details, but we were unaware they even existed’. In response to my question, ‘Can you tell me about how OSC began?’, the co-founders all agree that the group was founded as a result of what they term ‘divine intervention’, ‘divine revelation’, or ‘God ordained’. Tantoluwa explained, saying ‘We did not, you know, make this on our own. Uh huh? You understand? You see it was God who came to us. It was divine intervention ... God acted with divine revelation and inspired us to be part of this plan of founding OSC’. Ayokunle offered further clarity: ‘OSC is God ordained. We were, all of us, doing our own business ... each of us were doing fine, not in any bad situation, money, or family difficulty ... none of us was seeking this ... God ordained and we have simply followed his commands to co-found OSC’. An important point to note is that while each of the co-founders identify as male, Yorùbá, middle class, and were resident students at LAUTECH at the time, living with a few minutes walk of each other, they claim to have been strangers prior to founding OSC. ‘We did not know each

other when all of this started’, Qbáfěmi recalled, ‘We were strangers ... God introduced us, you see, for this purpose’. Despite being strangers, they believe God selected them due to their divergent religious backgrounds and networks. Prior to OSC, Ibukunoluwa primarily belonged to and identified as Catholic, Tantoluwa as Pentecostal, Ayokunle as Muslim, Olumide as Ahmadiyya, and Qbáfěmi as *Ifá*. Thus, in terms of these primary religious belongings and identities, two of the co-founders came from a Christian background, two from a Muslim background, and one from an AIR background. ‘This diversity of backgrounds’, Ibukunoluwa remarked, ‘allows us to act as contact points with the various religious communities in Ogbómòsò ... these are bridges and help us understand each other better’.

Visions & Revelations

In terms of an inception date, the co-founders point to Saturday, 1 January 2005. It was on this day that after returning home from attending their respective religious groups, they claim to have each received the same vision from God. In response to my question, ‘What was the vision like?’, Tantoluwa recalled: ‘It came upon us suddenly, like a deep sleep ... there was no doubt it was God intervening, coming to us ... [God] manifested in this vision ... what was revealed came directly from the mind and mouth of God ... God had no form, no visual presence, but embodied the vision completely’. With the other co-founders nodding in agreement, they told me how God spoke to them in English and in a neutral voice—indistinguishable as male or female. They all agreed that the vision felt real, vibrant, and time seemed to fade away.

In terms of content, the vision contained three major segments: (1) a film-like display about corruption and conflict among religious groups; (2) a revelation of

what they term, ‘God’s Truth’; and (3) an explanation of ‘God’s Truth’, a command to found OSC, and a series of eschatological promises. During the first segment of the vision, each of the co-founders described it as being film-like. As Ọbáfẹ̀mi explained, ‘The vision started off with what I can only say was a film. It was moving and active, like a film. Uh huh ... like watching television’. Olumide continued, adding, ‘We were shown very diverse religions from all over the world ... all are corrupt and conflict with one another. All religions were shown to be guilty of this’. Tantoluwa agreed, saying ‘This conflict and corruption is in all the religions ... we were shown all of them, with them practising their beliefs, singing, dancing ... and yet, I was very sad, you see ... the sadness overwhelmed me because religions are used to take advantage instead of unite people together ... to divide people instead of coming together. We humans are so confused. So out of touch with God’. As this segment of the vision progressed, the focus shifted to the religious landscape of Nigeria—particularly on Christian, Muslim, and AIR traditions and groups. Ibukunoluwa provided the following description of how Christianity was presented to them in the vision:

This image was not surprising to me. I see it everyday in Nigeria. I have no doubt you as well have experienced this. In the vision God gave, Christianity was shown to be very wealthy ... not everyone though. This was only clergy and business people. Everyone else was poor, very poor. As I said before, this is just like the situation we have in Nigeria. God showed us people dying all around churches and cathedrals. These Christians had wealth, but people were dying. Even other Christians were dying. More than this, Christianity was shown to be a ruthless landowner ... You see, in Nigeria, those who own land have power ... But Christianity is abusive of this power. Instead of using it for good, it uses it to acquire more power, more money, taking advantage of the uneducated, the ignorant. All the while, Nigerians and people all over starve to death and are misled by false promises.

Ayokunle provided the following description of how Islam was presented to them in the vision:

These images out of the vision were disturbing. Very disturbing to me, so that I had many nightmares ... as someone who claimed to be Muslim, seeing Muslims so violent was difficult ... this vision was full of war and killing. Muslim leaders encouraging destruction of western countries and eventually all nations of the world. Teaching children to kill in the name of *Allah*. Bombings of cities, blood everywhere, in churches and in the streets ... and believing that this is what God wants from us. That is what was truly disturbing, you see? Nigerians even today believe this. This is a reality for us. No, this is not good.

Finally, Obáfẹmi provided the following description of how AIR was presented to them in the vision:

African religions are very different to the images given to us about Christianity and Islam. The latter are given as powerful and destructive ... violent even as they've told you. The former, our African religions, you see, are worn out ... like a withered and dying tree. That is the image that we received about them in the vision ... Christians and Muslims have misused and misinterpreted our traditions. They once used to be the heart of our villages; now they have no soul. They have been robbed of their souls ... the image of the withered tree represents how African religions have sold their value. That is their own fault. They were not strong enough. People, our ancestors, were mesmerised by the colonialists' technology and books. They were blinded by wealth and power. They were pacified with religion. Told not to fight ... that their religion was false ... what we have today is exactly like a withered tree. It is almost dead, almost lifeless.

The co-founders told me how this segment of the vision ended with a twist on a popular Yorùbá proverb. While there are many variations of the proverb, it is commonly: *Bi ewe ba pe l'ara oṣẹ, yio di oṣẹ* (If the leaf stays long upon the soap, it will become soap).²⁰⁴ As J.D.Y. Peel has noted:

This common proverb alludes to the fact that the soft black soap which was manufactured by the Yorùbá from ash and palm oil was kept wrapped in leaves which would over time gradually dissolve into the soap itself. It is used to indicate how people will adapt to the circumstances they are placed in, gradually taking on the characteristics of a new environment'.²⁰⁵

While the explicit meaning sees the leaf turning into soap, the implicit meaning is

²⁰⁴ Another common translation I heard in Nigeria is: 'When a leaf used to wrap soap remains long enough with it, it turns to soap'.

²⁰⁵ J.D.Y. Peel, *Religious Encounter and the Making of the Yorùbá* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2003), 248.

that the soap assimilates elements of the leaf—a sort of mutual assimilation. In the vision, however, the proverb was adapted into the following form: ‘As the leaf fell off the soap, nothing remained but a shell’. Obáfẹ̀mi explained: ‘What we have here is an overhaul on an old proverb. We once thought these religions enhanced each other, improved each other. No, no, no. What has happened is not improvement. What has happened is [they have] been emptied of their substance ... their interaction has caused each to lose track of their common ground ... their common source’. Ayokunle offered further clarity: ‘God has unblinded us. He revealed to us that religions in Nigeria have been corrupted by each other. Instead of enhancing each other, you see, the proverb reveals that the religions have become nothing but a shell’. When I asked about the specific meaning of the shell, Obáfẹ̀mi commented that, ‘A shell has no substance. Uh huh. Okay, so the shell is ... what you see from the outside. It may look intact. But on the inside it has been corrupted. Emptied of its substance’.

The second segment of the vision began with what they described as a large banner in the sky. ‘This was very strange’, Olumide recalled, ‘The sky was darkened to become black ... then a ... I want to say a banner, you understand? Uh huh, rolled out with bright lights ... God spoke the words that were on the banner: one God, one religion, one people, one love. This is my truth’. The co-founders described the banner as black with bright white lettering, in the following pattern:

ONE

GOD RELIGION PEOPLE LOVE

THIS IS MY TRUTH

Ayokunle remarked that, ‘This is God’s truth, you see. It was revealed to us, a revelation ... within this truth, God’s truth, we can understand why we are here, why we exist ... what our purpose is in life. This is not complicated. It’s not a complicated theology, you know? It is simple and you can see it easily. Anyone can see it’.

During the final segment of the vision, the co-founders claim that God delivered a monologue explaining the revelation, commanding them to found a group called the Ogbómòsò Society of Chrislam, and making a series of eschatological promises. During our conversation about the monologue, the co-founders brought out a plaque with the following inscription:

One God. I am God. I am One. I have called you as my servant. I have revealed my Truth to you. There is only One Religion. Humanity has corrupted and divided my Truth. I bless you to work with and unite the religions of Nigeria and the world. Use the Yorùbá Spirit of Accommodation. The source of my Truth is One. Bring my Truth together in One Religion. Gather together my people under the Ogbómòsò Society of Chrislam. There is only One People. Race, colour, ethnicity do not matter in my Truth. You are my People. This is my Kingdom. Work together with your brothers and sisters to establish my Truth in my Kingdom. Not with the powers and forces of this world, but with and by my love. There is only One Love. You will face many trials and persecutions, but I give you my promises now and forevermore. Love those whom persecute you. As I have loved, so you must love. Other servants are already on their way. You will be the messengers of my Truth across the world. My Truth will be known throughout. You will be the generation of renewal. You shall welcome and reconcile all nations,

tribes, peoples, and tongues. Do not worry, for I am with you always.

As the vision subsided, the co-founders recall feeling exhausted. Olumide confessed:

‘My family was in the other room. I told them I felt very sick. What was I to do? I retired to my room to be alone ... I never sleep during the day ... this was very unusual. But I had to sleep. My body and mind were overwhelmed by it all’.

Ibukunoluwa said that he felt ‘... a deep sleep come over me. I could not halt it. God had worked inside of us that day and it was almost too powerful for our bodies to withstand ... he gave us this rest to renew our bodies and minds’. As they awoke on Sunday, 2 January 2005, the co-founders were excited, yet also confused and afraid. ‘We were excited and knew God would act’, Ibukunoluwa commented, ‘We had no doubt about this ... but it is not easy waiting and I think we all questioned our sanity at different points’. Ayokunle elaborated: ‘I began to question myself. Thinking what is this? Have I gone mad? Did it even happen? Is this the devil playing tricks on me, trying to get me to participate in some evil thing?’

Akpadaland

Just before dawn on Saturday, 8 January 2005, the co-founders claim to have experienced a second vision. As Oḃáfẹmi recalled, ‘This vision was very short, lasting only a few seconds it seemed ... God just commanded us to go to *Akpadaland* ... this means the land of renewal ... Now, we had no idea where this place was, but God guided us there’. Thus, having never met before, the co-founders claim to have been guided by God to *Akpadaland*, a circular field surrounded by a grove of trees just outside of Ogbómòsò. They claim to have each arrived from different directions and entered the space at the same time. Their reactions to this event varied. Oḃáfẹmi acknowledged that he was excited about what was going to

happen. He stated: 'I woke up very early from a dream and could not go back to sleep. I felt like I did when I was a kid ... expecting a present ... when I saw the others, it was very exciting to me because I knew this was God at work'.

Ibukunoluwa remembered thinking immediately when he saw the others: 'These will be my partners with God. I knew already God was at work coordinating these things'. Ayokunle, however, was less certain: 'You know, in Nigeria, you have to be very careful. Being out there in the rural areas can be very dangerous ... but as we came together and met, my fears went away immediately'. As they came together and spoke, they realised that each of them had experienced the same visions. 'We were amazed', Oḃáfẹmi remarked, 'that our stories were exactly the same. Not one detail was different. The visions, the revelations, all of it was the same'. Over the coming weeks, they prayed together and asked for God's continued guidance. As Olumide confessed, 'We had no idea what we were getting ourselves into. Just because you receive a vision from God does not mean putting it into practice will be easily accomplished ... we had to work out so many details'. Ayokunle added, 'We knew God wanted us to start OSC, but we needed help ... we prayed and God always intervened on our behalf'.

Expansion

By mid-March, the co-founders agreed to start inviting others to meet with them. They admitted being very concerned for their safety. 'We did not know', Olumide confessed, 'how people would receive these ideas. People can be very protective of religion in Nigeria'. As Tantoluwa explained:

You see, in Nigeria, here in Ogbómòsò, there is a false idea that everyone is welcome. All religions. All ethnicities and peoples. But this is not true. Uh huh? What we have here is actually quite competitive. All of these religions

and groups running around trying to grab up resources and converts ... it is not often spoken about, but people even here in Ogbómòsò are ostracised or killed over such matters, you see what I mean? So, here we are, creating a group that goes against these categories, that goes against the conventional boundaries of, 'I am Muslim', or 'I am Christian', 'My family follows *Ifá*' ... There was a very real concern for how others would respond. Would we be labeled as heretics? Or even worse? We knew the risks, you see.

Alongside these fears, however, they assert they were given peace from God. 'We knew we might be going to our deaths', Ayokunle stated, 'but it would be a good death. One that God is pleased with ... [because] we followed God'.

The initial invitees included their close friends at LAUTECH. As Olumide recalls, 'These friends were initially very surprised ... Whoa! They would say. What is this? What is it you are participating in? Like a cult? Are you possessed and fooling with *juju* and charms? ... but many of these friends came to believe in our story'. Oḅáfẹ̀mi added:

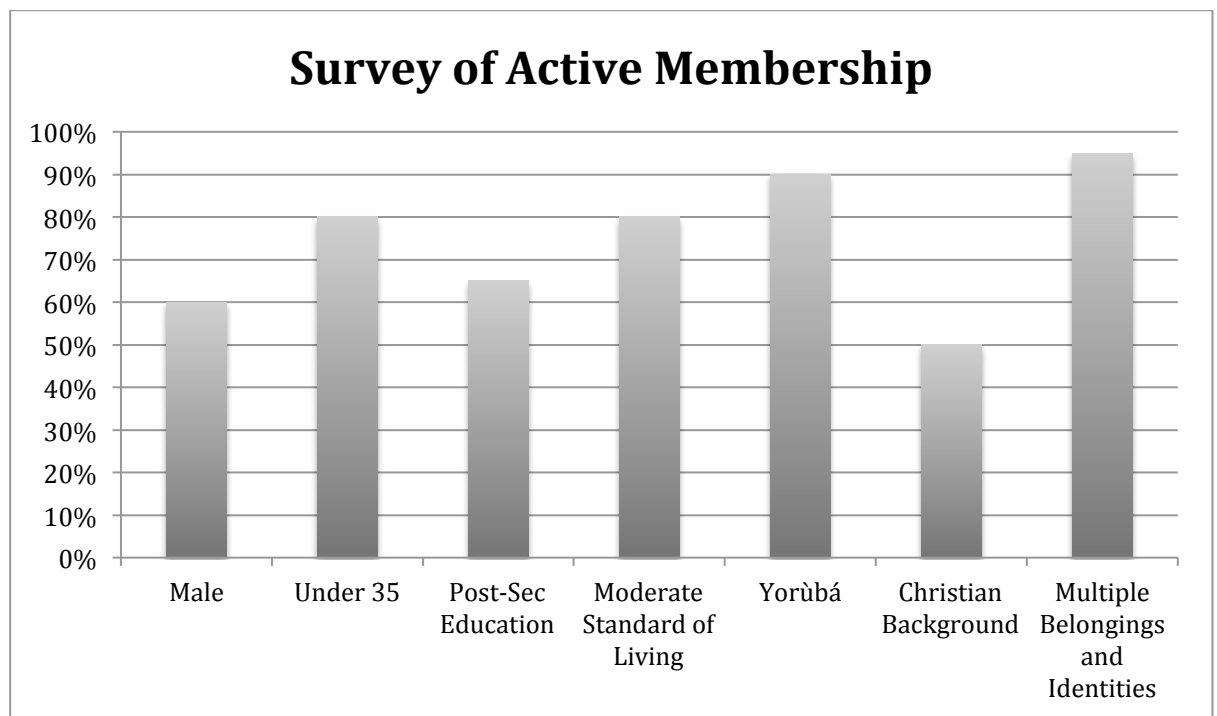
It is God's Truth that really changes people ... I myself was initially afraid of what I had experienced. I did not understand, so we expected this from others ... Yet, as we share God's Truth, one God, one religion, one people, one love ... the simplicity and beauty of it opens up people to God. These people are changed not by us, but by God's Truth. Their eyes become unblinded, just like we were unblinded ... we were really witnessing miracles. God was doing all of this right in front of us. It was miraculous.

From 2005-2006, OSC met in various locations on the campus of LAUTECH. The group expanded considerably during this time, boasting around 100 active members by 2006. After failed attempts to rent out a community hall and a church in Ogbómòsò for their meetings, they decided to construct a building on Oḅáfẹ̀mi's private land just outside of Ogbómòsò. Their first meeting at the building took place on Saturday, 5 January 2008, and is where the group continues to meet. As of early 2014, OSC boasts an active membership of approximately 250 members and a

membership directory of close to 1000 people.²⁰⁶

Demographic Structure

While the demographic structure of OSC is complex and in a constant state of flux, the following chart attempts to capture a basic portrait of the active membership. The chart is based upon an anonymous survey I administered in July 2012.²⁰⁷



First, the membership is over 60 percent male. Whether or not this is typical for the area depends upon the religious group. In my own experience, Christian churches have a dominant female membership—perhaps 60-70 percent in many cases. Males,

²⁰⁶ I define active here as attending OSC events at least once per month. The membership directory is a record of all the people who have ever attended an OSC event.

²⁰⁷ The survey was administered during a 'Tabernacle Gathering' on Saturday, 7 July 2012. I gave the following instructions: (1) only active members (those who attend OSC events at least once per month) should fill out a survey; (2) parents or guardians should fill out a survey for those under the age of 12; and (3) the surveys are anonymous, so do not list your name. Based upon these guidelines, I received 112 surveys. A blank copy of the survey can be found in APPENDIX C.

however, dominate the local mosques. AIR sites and festivals have a relatively even mix of males and females, although this is difficult to track. Yet, despite being a slight majority male, the female membership is very active and involved in the leadership and organisation of OSC. In terms of age, about 80 percent are under the age of 35. This dominance by the youth population is unsurprising, considering that close to 80 percent of Nigeria's population is under the age of 35. Indeed, according to recent estimates from the United Nations, 44.4 percent is aged 0-14, while only 4.5 percent reach the age of 60.²⁰⁸ Also, given that the five co-founders were university students when they started OSC, most of the earliest members were university students. Interestingly, around 65 percent of the active membership over the age of 18 is either currently enrolled or has already completed a post-secondary degree programme. Compared to the surrounding population, OSC is a highly educated group. For Oyo State as a whole, as of 2009 only 7.6 percent of the population had completed a post-secondary degree programme.²⁰⁹ Of course, given the origins of OSC on an urban, university campus, this is not so surprising. Connected to this variable are the living conditions for the group. Approximately 80 percent of OSC claims to have a moderate standard of living.²¹⁰ A recent government survey for the whole of Ogbómòsò places just under 50 percent in this

²⁰⁸ United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs/Population Division, *World Population Prospects: The 2012 Revision* (New York: United Nations, 13 June 2013), 25. Based upon Nigeria's most recent census in 2006, the estimate for the population under the age of 35 was 77.45 percent. For more information, see: National Population Commission, '2006 Population and Housing Census of the Federal Republic of Nigeria' (Abuja: National Population Commission, 2006).

²⁰⁹ 'Statistical Data Portal: Socio-Economic Data, Human Development, Percentage Distribution of Persons, Post-Secondary, Oyo State, 2009', *National Bureau of Statistics*, <http://nigeria.prognoz.com> (accessed 9 April 2014).

²¹⁰ The options were very poor, poor, moderate, wealthy, and very wealthy.

category.²¹¹ As well, while the unemployment rate for Ogbómòsò as of 2010 was 27.7 percent, at 15 percent, OSC's rate is almost half. In terms of ethnicity, the Yorùbá dominate with around 90 percent of the group claiming this heritage. Other ethnicities represented were Igbo (5 percent), Hausa-Fulani (2 percent), and the remaining split between Ijaw, Ogoni, and Berom.²¹² In terms of religious backgrounds, prior to coming to OSC, around 50 percent of members identified with a Christian tradition, 33 percent with a Muslim or Ahmadiyya tradition, and 17 percent with an AIR tradition. At the time of the survey, however, around 96 percent of those surveyed claimed to currently belong to and identify with multiple religious traditions.

The Tabernacle

The building where OSC currently meets is known as the Tabernacle. The choice of this name was explained to me by Ọbáfẹ̀mi:

What we have is in this name is a connection to an ancient story. Uh-huh. So, the story of the Israelites ... and they were told to build what? A big, large temple? No ... the Israelites were on an exodus, fleeing from Egypt for 40 years. They could not build a temple. So God instructed them to build a tabernacle. You understand, it was temporary? Uh-huh, and we find ourselves in a very similar situation. Here we are not knowing where to go, but God has provided this land as a refuge ... [however] it is only temporary and we hope one day soon to construct other, more permanent meeting places.

As I understood him, similar to the Israelites, OSC must be mobile for the time being.

Yet, they believe that one day they will construct a more permanent site.

Interestingly, outwith the co-founders, other explanations exist. The following is a brief conversation between OSC member Olafunke (O) and myself (C) regarding

²¹¹ Ibid.

²¹² Additionally, while most of OSC is made up of Nigerians, I did meet a few expatriate visitors from Ghana, Benin, and Togo.

what the name of the building means to her:

C: Can you explain what the name of this building, ‘The Tabernacle’, means?

O: Okay. To me, this building can be associated with the history of Ogbómòsólá. It is from our history.

C: Can you tell me about this history?

O: Ah! You see, eh, in Ogbómòsólá history, we have a story about our peoples having to move around during the jihad, the Muslim expansion into the lands of the Yorùbá ... the men would carry around ritual items to the different sacred places. They could not stay too long in one place. It was for temporary refuge.

C: And how does this relate to this group?

O: We are the same. We must move around ... [until] God provides some new place.

Thus, there is a varied understanding of the meaning. During my time with the group, even as the co-founders and others promoted the former story about the Israelites, I encountered a range of stories, often similar to the appropriation of a local oral tradition that Olafunke expressed above. In all accounts, however, themes of mobility and the hope for a future, more permanent site were always present.

The Tabernacle is located on the southwest edge of Ogbómòsólá, several miles off the Oyo-Ogbómòsólá Road. The road to the site is gated and guarded during events. The Tabernacle itself is simple. The foundation is made of concrete, the walls are cement, and the roof is tin—all common building materials in the region. On the front side of the building, there is a simple sign with a black background and white lettering, resembling the following aesthetic pattern:

THE OGBÓMÒSÓ SOCIETY OF CHRISLAM

ONE
GOD RELIGION PEOPLE LOVE

‘GENERATION OF UNITY’

ALL nations, tribes, peoples and tongues are
WELCOME

According to many at OSC, the black background represents the corruption of the world, while the white lettering represents God as the light of the world. References to Biblical passages such as Mathew 5:14 and John 1:5, Qur’anic passages such as Surah 24:35, or Yorùbá proverbs like *Kò sí ohun tí a ò lè fi òru se; èrù òsán là mbà* (There is nothing one cannot do in the dead of night; the light of the day alone is what one fears), are commonly used to express this understanding.

The inside of the building has space for seating up to 500 people. It features one large open space and the walls are filled with colourful banners and paintings. Some of these have explicit religious symbols, such as a cross, crescent, or charm; others are scenes from nature. There is no stage, although rows of chairs are generally placed facing the front toward a lectern. A carpeted lounge area in the back left corner is sectioned off from the rest of the space and also functions as a small library. The space all around the outside of the Tabernacle is much like a garden. Members refer to this space as the ‘Sanctuary’. Again, the idea of refuge plays into this choice of language. The space is tended regularly and is full of flowers, trees, and herbs. On the north side of the Tabernacle is a section purposed for prayer walks.

To the west is a five-acre plot for growing vegetables and fruit. After harvesting, these items are given away to those in need.

Types of Meetings

There are currently three regular types of group meetings at OSC. The largest and most important takes place weekly on Saturday at 10:00 AM and is called the 'Tabernacle Gathering'. The choice of Saturday is twofold: (1) it coincides with the day of the week that the founders experienced their visions and met together for the first time; and (2) it does not infringe upon the most important sacred days for Muslims (Friday = *Jumu'ah*) or Christians (Sunday = Sabbath). The co-founders claim that this has been their tradition from the very beginning. The second type of meeting is called 'Renewal Groups'. These generally feature 10-15 people getting together for prayer and study. The groups take place anytime from Monday to Thursday on a bi-weekly basis. All active members are required to be in a Renewal Group. The third type of meeting is called 'Expansion Groups'. These are essentially book clubs with 4-7 people in each group. Most of these groups meet at LAUTECH on a monthly or bi-monthly basis. They read widely and claim to be seeking after the knowledge and wisdom of God. A quote from former Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie I operates as the mission statement for these groups: 'Knowledge paves the way to Love, and Love in its turn fosters understanding, and leads one along the path of great common achievements'.

Organisational Structure and Protocols

As a new religious group, OSC has relatively few organisational structures in place. There are no permanent clergy. The co-founders officially hold the same

status as other members. There is a quarterly business meeting during which members are able to discuss and vote upon issues.²¹³ The vote of each member, including the co-founders, is equivalent. Every three months, a new group of ten members is voted to be part of what OSC calls the ‘The Organising Committee’. This committee handles donations and organises volunteers for the various activities of OSC. No one can serve on the committee more than once per calendar year and everyone is expected to volunteer regularly. New attendees must attend for at least one year prior to applying for membership. After one year, members vote upon their membership application during a quarterly business meeting.

One of the most important and solidified structures in place is the use of the English language in all Tabernacle Gatherings. While languages such as Yorùbá and Arabic are spoken on occasion, their use is brief and always used in correspondence with an English translation. A conversation between the co-founder, Olumide (O), and myself (C), provides insight:

C: Could you tell me about the use of English during the Tabernacle Gatherings? Why is it that OSC only uses English?

O: This is a very good question. I think in Nigeria we have to be very careful, you see, about language. With so many, many tribes as we have here in Nigeria, no single African language is enough for communication with each other ... [or] with the outside world. Here in Yorùbáland, we have benefitted from education. Education has provided us with access to language learning, like English. Most young people, you know, under the age of 30 know English very well ... I think most importantly, English has provided a way for us to be all things to all people ... to accommodate all ethnic groups and languages. If we use Yorùbá, only the Yorùbá will come. If we use the Igbo language, you see only Igbos. English though, aha! Any person from any tribe can come feeling comfortable. I think this is why. English equalises tribal languages.

C: Okay, and what would you say to the critique that you are using a colonial language? That this is just another colonial structure?

²¹³ In the case of an emergency, an emergency meeting can be called.

O: Ah, that is a very good point, but, you know a misdirected one. We are not being forced to use it. We have reclaimed English for our purposes. It is not colonial at all. We have taken English into our culture ... I use English because it provides me with power and influence; it allows our society to communicate and grow as a nation. That is why we use it.

Despite the endemic use of English in the Tabernacle Gatherings, there is also an interest in the future use of Esperanto. In fact, the flag of Esperanto hangs beside the flag of Nigeria at the back of the Tabernacle. A young man named Tola is leading this charge. 'I think we have used English to our benefit', Tola commented, 'but it is still a colonial leftover. In an effort to rise above this, eh, bondage, if you will, I am pioneering the use of Esperanto at OSC ... Esperanto has no colonial ties or aims. It is an inclusive language and I believe it could further serve our aims to be as inclusive as possible'. At the time of this interview, Tola only had a basic grasp of the language, but he hopes to continue learning and eventually teach others.

Pilgrimages

Beyond regular group meetings, pilgrimages also play a vital role at OSC. If members have the necessary resources, they are encouraged to go on distant pilgrimages to Mecca, Jerusalem, Rome, Cairo, and other important sites within the history of Christianity, Islam, and AIR. In the case of the Islamic *hajj*, OSC assists members in obtaining the requisite sponsorship from local mosques, regardless of religious background or affiliation. Beyond these distant and infrequent pilgrimages, members are also encouraged to visit AIR sites within Nigeria. For instance, most in OSC have visited *Ife* and the *Osun-Osogbo* Sacred Grove. The most important pilgrimage in the life of OSC, however, takes place annually on 1 January at *Akpadaland*, the site where the five co-founders first met. This event celebrates the

anniversary of OSC and includes a full day of praying, singing, sermons, and eating meals together.

PART III: AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF A TABERNACLE GATHERING

Introduction

As mentioned in the previous section, the largest and most important regular group meeting for OSC is called the Tabernacle Gathering. This meeting occurs every Saturday at 10:00 A.M., with attendance generally ranging from 100-150 people. As the leadership of OSC operates on a rotational basis, each meeting varies in content and form. Yet, despite the variance, there are similarities in the structural order, thematic emphases, and ritual content. This section of the report provides an ethnography of a Tabernacle Gathering that took place on Saturday, 7 July 2012.²¹⁴ On this day about 150 people attended.

Pre-Meeting Logistics

I arrived at the Tabernacle at 8:00 A.M. The Organising Committee and other volunteers are scheduled to meet at this time in order to clean the facility, arrange chairs, rehearse the musical part of the service, and pray for the meeting. As is typical in Nigeria, I was the first to arrive. The others started trickling in between 8:15 and 8:30 A.M. On this occasion, in addition to the ten member Organising Committee, six other volunteers were present. Within this group, I noted an even mix of males and females. There was no indication that either gender had more authority. Tantoluwa was the only co-founder within this group of 16. I asked him about his role that morning. ‘I am just like anyone else here’, he remarked, ‘This is my service to God. I am not above him or her [he pointed to the other volunteers]’.

²¹⁴ I recorded a number of ethnographies of Tabernacle Gatherings, but I think this particular meeting offers insight into what a typical service looks like. Additionally, the sermon this day focused on several of the central beliefs of OSC.

While the others agreed with Tantoluwa's egalitarian assessment, during my time with the group there was always at least one co-founder serving on the Organising Committee. Thus, while the co-founders in principle hold the same status as other members, there seems to be an unwritten rule that at least one co-founder is on the Organising Committee at all times.

'Dialogue in Action'

Along with another volunteer named Bolutife, I was assigned the task of arranging chairs. As we carried out what seemed to me to be a menial task, he shared with me how important he felt our working together was:

All that we do is service to God above. I know that pushing around chairs seems uneventful, but here we are, you and I, working together, sharing conversation, trying to better understand each other. An *oyinbo* and a black man, what is this? Are we so different after all my friend? No, no, not according to God. You see, any action that brings humanity together to cooperate rather than fight and quarrel is a godly action ... it goes well beyond placing chairs in a straight row. It is what happens around this task.

After Bolutife and I finished arranging the chairs, a member of the Organising Committee that morning named Erioluwa offered the following remarks about our work that morning:

This volunteering that we do is not alone. We do it together and with God. It is dialogue in action, not just empty words. We work together to enact God's plan of unity and love ... as people from different backgrounds and religions come together, they are participating in neighbourly love. All of our central beliefs, you know these, of one God, one religion, one people, and one love—these are built on active dialogue, with God and with each other.

As the musical rehearsal taking place up front was winding down, I approached the stage and asked the leader that morning, Oluwaseun, how she felt about her role in preparing for and leading the music at the Tabernacle Gathering. 'We rehearse in order to unify our voices, our souls,' she said, 'Our unison signifies our purpose as a

community to come together ... recognising God as one, that we as a people are one, even if we pretend to be divided by different backgrounds, we come from the same source'. The guitarist that morning, Paul, was standing nearby listening to Oluwaseun and I. He entered the conversation and offered his own perspective: 'Music to me has the ability to reach into anyone and grab at God's image in you ... the better our rhythm and unity as musicians, the more chance, I think, and more intense, God is able to bring us together as a community'.

'Prayer of Unity'

At around 9:30 A.M., everyone gathered near the front of the Tabernacle for what they call the 'Prayer of Unity'. In addition to the Organising Committee and volunteers, a number of others had arrived by this point and also joined in the prayer. Naturally, everyone gathered in a large circle and held hands. The prayer was performed orally and only one individual prayed at a time. However, throughout the session it was common for others to make brief oral comments (e.g. 'Amen', 'Yes, Lord', and 'Thank you, God') and perform physical expressions of agreement (e.g. squeezing hands and swaying back and forth). As well, the prayers were performed in English, with a scattering of Pidgin English or Yorùbá. With everyone bowing his or her head, Olujimi, the one who would be delivering the sermon during the meeting, prayed the following:

God, we humbly approach you today. The evidence of your glory and majesty is all around us ... teach us to better love you, to better love those around us. We are willing, oh God of Abraham, of Jesus, of Muhammad, to be your servants. That is why we come together as one family. We come together to serve. We come together as proof that peoples of all nations and tongues, peoples of this background and that background, of this tribe and that tribe, even, oh almighty God, of different religions ... God, we know the truth, that you are the only God. There are not really different religions and we have corrupted your simplistic design. These religions of Nigeria come

from the same source, we know. They are in perfect alignment and only seem different. This difference is only surface deep though because you are a God who creates with unity and peace ... we so often divide and conquer your creation. Forgive us, oh God of Abraham and Jesus and Muhammad, you are the God of the Universe. Teach us to forgive each other. Teach us to love one another as you have loved us. May we be the generation of unity. Amen.

As Olumiji finished with ‘Amen’, everyone in unison replied: ‘God is unified and we are unified for God’. This signalled the end of the prayer session and everyone subsequently greeted one another by shaking hands, hugging, and exchanging quintessential Nigerian smiles.

‘Unity Greeting’ and Dress Regulations

From 9:45 A.M. many others started to arrive at the Tabernacle. When entering the Tabernacle, they were met by what OSC calls ‘Unity Greeters’. All those attending are expected to form a queue to meet these greeters. The following represents a typical exchange, called a ‘Unity Greeting’ between the greeters (G) and those attending (A):

G: You are welcome. Peace be with you.

A: And also with you.

G: God is love and love is God. We gather here in the presence of the God of Abraham, Jesus, and Muhammad, the God of the Universe. There is only one God, only one religion, only one people, and only one love. Just as God is unified, God calls us to be unified. Amen.

A: Amen.

G: You are welcome.

Following this exchange, everyone, excluding young children, is required to wear a head covering. If an individual does not have a covering, one is provided for them. Any type is acceptable as long as the top of the head is covered. Additionally, while there are no detailed rules regarding dress, attendees are expected to be clothed in a

conservative manner. If an individual's dress is deemed inappropriate (e.g. a skirt is too short) or improper (e.g. is wearing a filthy t-shirt), a traditional shawl or wrap is provided for them. In my own experience with the group, attendees rarely needed to borrow clothing to fit these standards. A conversation I had with a member by the name of Petros offers insight into these dress regulations:

It is interesting, you see, that the way we dress is connected to both a religious matter and to deal with the human condition. First, now can you imagine the prophet Muhammad or Jesus being easily distracted by women? No, this is impossible, but even they had a human frailty. Am I right? Okay, so for us, if we dress how we do [in a conservative way] we will not be distracted so easily. Whether this is a revealing skirt or big haircut ... [or] a tight shirt on a man ... religiously, we do this to keep ourselves pure. To deal with the human condition as I said and also it is central to our goal of unity. We all do this, you see. No one is excluded ... now, if OSC was in London this would look very different. It depends on the local context, you know? We are in Ogbómòsò, so we look to our own standards for these matters.

With dress regulations sorted, attendees entered the Tabernacle and were met with an array of sights, smells, and sounds. Lit candles were placed throughout the building, accompanied by the burning of incense and a guitarist playing softly from the stage. Upon entering I encountered one of the co-founders, Tantoluwa, and asked him to explain this sensory experience:

I think what we have done here is provide a space for contemplation. To reflect on the seriousness of coming to God, but additionally to reflect on the beauty of God. God's grace and mercy, I think, are represented by these elements. But also, these are open for interpretation ... a burning candle has many interpretations, just as the smell of incense ... for me they point to God's majesty and beauty. Now, these ways are not the only ways to talk about this, of course ... the point is that we can come together in a peaceful and thoughtful environment.

Another member, Na'imah, offered the following explanation:

Oh, you see, these are very clearly used for sacred purposes ... these help us be with God. So much of the world is crazy, busy, going this place and worrying about our children and monies. You understand? Uh huh, so the candles, the incense, the music, these are all instruments of connection and unification ... to God and to each other. We are introduced to this concept of

unity, of being connected through these ways.

‘Yemaya Wudu’ Ritual

Before attendees approach the seating area, they perform a ritual known as ‘Yemaya Wudu’. Yemaya refers to the Goddess of the Ocean in Yorùbá AIR. Wudu refers to the Islamic practice of washing in preparation for prayer and worship. Within this ritual, there are two stations—one for males and one for females. Each station is uniform in style and size and features a low wooden table, approximately one meter off the floor. On top of each table is a large clay basin filled with water, as well as herbs and flowers from the garden. The concoction is prepared by a *Babalawo* before each Tabernacle Gathering. Smaller bowls are provided for accessing the water and towels are provided in order to dry off afterward. One male and one female volunteer stand next to the stations and offer advice about the ritual. They hand the small bowls to each person and instruct them to ‘baptise’ themselves and ‘pray to *Yemaya* for a blessing from the Holy Spirit’. The instructions for washing are vague and this results in varied practices. Some people scrub their hands, arms, feet, and face vigorously, while others lightly pour water over these areas. Some stand and others kneel. Some merely wash their hands or face. Some do the sign of the cross as they perform the ritual. Some stand and dance and others fall prostrate on the ground. As people completed the ritual, I asked several to explain its purpose:

Jamilah: ‘The water rids me of impure religion. We are to be unified and we do this to be a better community’.

Chibueze: ‘I take the water and wash, to wash away impurities. The water is of God and I feel refreshed afterward ... I think like repentance we need to do this every week to become clean again’.

Olayinka: ‘Water is vital and sacred; used for purifying and healing. Yemaya is able to call upon the Holy Spirit for us. The Goddess blesses us when we do this’.

Funanya: ‘This is simple because water washes away not only dirt, but more than this. This water symbolises God’s purity ... we wash with it to participate in this purity and *Yemaya* is part of helping us in this’.

Olupoju: ‘The water has more than a physical component. It is a spiritual cleansing. As we approach God this morning together, this water brings us together’.

After *Yemaya Wudu*, attendees find a seat in the Tabernacle. If the service has not yet begun, many use this time to either pray or greet each other.

Formal Welcoming

At just after 10:00 A.M., Oluwaseun, the main leader of the music that morning, stood at the podium and welcomed everyone with the following exhortation:

Hello. You are welcome. You are welcome to the Ogbómòsó Society of Chrislam. I thank God you are here today. It is a beautiful day and I welcome you into the presence of God, the God of Abraham, Jesus, Muhammad, God of the Universe. Peace be upon us. You know, there is a Yorùbá parable that says, ‘Little by little is how the pig’s nose enters the yard’. You see, we Nigerians have been led to be confused by religion for many years. Little by little, as the parable says, this has happened. Another parable from Igboland says ‘If a habit lasts more than a year, it can turn into a tradition’. This confusion has become a tradition in our land ... the truth is, God’s truth, is that the religions of Nigeria are of the same essence ... Islam and Christianity, our traditional religious beliefs ... these are the same and that is what we celebrate today. We celebrate this understanding ... we people, we divide ourselves into factions ... God says we are one. It does not matter what tribe or family you come from, what your wealth or status in your community. You are welcome. You are part of one people. Come, say the confession with me.

Unity Confession

At this point, the attendees joined Oluwaseun in publicly reciting what is known as the ‘Unity Confession’. It states:

There is no God but God and only one religion. There are many prophets and divinities but only one God. There are many cultures but only one people. There are many ways but only one love. Amen.

Time of Music, Testimony, and Reflection

Oluwaseun, accompanied by a woman playing an acoustic guitar and a young man playing a djembe, proceeded to lead the congregation in a song. As the instrumentalists began playing, Oluwaseun read the following:

The brash youth meets an ancient *Babalawo* and strikes him. He meets an old herbalist and humiliates him. He runs into a venerable Muslim priest kneeling in prayer and knocks him to the ground. *Ifá* divined for such insolent ones who boasted that they were beyond correction. Is that so indeed? Don't you know that a youth who strikes a priest of *Ifá* will not partake of this world for long? Premature is the death of the youth who strikes the devout Imam at his devotions. Speedily comes the death of maggots, speedily.²¹⁵

She then spoke to the audience, saying:

You know, this is a Yorùbá way of informing that everyone is welcome at OSC. We call this the Yorùbá Spirit of Accommodation. Amen. This is not just about tolerating, no, no, just tolerance leads to so many problems in Nigeria. We at OSC do more than this. We want to accommodate all of our religions. If you are Christian, you are welcome. If you are Muslim, you are welcome. If you follow our Traditional religion, you are welcome. We come from the same source. We find space for everyone at OSC. We are told that if we do this, we will be saved from the danger of death. That is what this proverb tells us. I ask you to sing with me now.

With that said, Oluwaseun led the audience in the following song:

One Family, One God,
Sons and Daughters of the Everlasting One.
One Family, One God,
Created in the image of God the Holy One
One Family, One God,
Companions in this life and beyond

From the clay you have made us,
Diverse and beautiful you have made us,

²¹⁵ This Yorùbá proverb has recently gained global visibility in part due to a recent work by Wole Soyinka. See: Wole Soyinka, *Of Africa* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 165.

It goes beyond the subtle differences,
We live by One Family, One God, One Love.

One Family, One God
Loving You and All in Your name.
One Family, One God,
Brought together by the Spirit of the One.
One Family, One God,
Infinite worship is Yours and Yours alone.

From the clay you have made us,
Diverse and beautiful you have made us,
It goes beyond the subtle differences,
We live by One Family, One God, One Love.

Immediately afterward, Olupoju, who was the author of the chorus, came to the podium for a time of testimony:

I wrote these lines even before I came to the Tabernacle. It is a poem, really. I think it is based on many things, but most of all on a book I read by Khalil Gibran, many of you are familiar with him. In *The Prophet*, he writes, 'You are my brother, and both of us are sons of a single, universal, and sacred spirit. You are my likeness, for we are prisoners of the same body, fashioned from the same clay. You are my companion on the byways of life, my helper in perceiving the essence of reality concealed behind the mists. You are a human being and I have loved you, my brother'. This is where it comes from and from my personal experience. Like many of you, I am frustrated by what I find in many churches ... the love of money and power. Ethnicity differences taking over and leading to hate and violence. This is what has happened in many of our houses of worship. They lack love and peace. They lack understanding of beautiful diversity. But here we celebrate both our diversity and unity. We thank God. Amen.

As Olupoju left the podium, Oluwaseun stated the following:

Here at the Ogbómòsò Society of Chrislam, there are many beliefs and interests, but we all agree there is one God, there is one People, one Religion, one love. These are what unite us. As the Qur'an says in Surah 10: 'And for every nation there is a messenger'. Revelation 7:9 reads 'All nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues'. Finally, a proverb of our own, of Yorùbá origin, tells us 'He who throws a stone in the market will hit his relative'. Whether you are African or not, Yorùbá or Hausa, or Igbo, it does not matter. You are welcome to worship with us this day. Amen, amen, amen. Let us worship the God of Abraham, Jesus, Muhammad, the God of our universe right now

together.²¹⁶

Oluwaseun then led the meeting with the following song:

Holy, Holy, Holy, God of the Universe.
Holy, Holy, Holy, we come before You.
Holy, Holy, Holy, accept our worship.
You are merciful, you are gracious, Hallelujah!

Holy, Holy, Holy, God of the Universe.
Holy, Holy, Holy, You are One.
Holy, Holy, Holy, You are God.
You are worthy, you are all-powerful, Hallelujah!

Holy, Holy, Holy, God of the Universe.
Holy, Holy, Holy, we are One People.
Holy, Holy, Holy, give us peace.
Give us harmony, give us rest, Hallelujah!

Holy, Holy, Holy, God of the Universe.
Holy, Holy, Holy, we have One Love.
Holy, Holy, Holy, loving You,
Loving all, loving freely, Hallelujah!

At the end of the song, Romoluwa came to the podium to lead a time of prayer and reflection. During this time, most in the congregation kneeled or fell prostrate.

Romoluwa prayed:

Pray with me now. Hear our prayers, oh God. You are all merciful. We are undeserving. You are infinitely good. We often fail you. You send down one hundred mercies and we repay you with evil. Forgive us. Forgive us. Give us strength for tomorrow. All of our knowledge and wealth is pitiful next to you. Let anything we know and anything we have be used for your glory and your glory alone, oh God. The God of Abraham and the Jewish peoples, the God of Jesus and our Christian brothers and sisters, the God of Muhammad, along with our Muslim sisters and brothers. God, oh God, the God of the Universe who has been among our people since the beginning. You are one. Teach us to know this as a nation, as a people. Teach us to understand that we all come from one single source. You are that source. Teach the whole world to understand that we have corrupted your source with our religions and practices and rituals. We thank you, God. We thank you, God. You have revealed yourself to us in a special way. We are your chosen people. Be with

²¹⁶ Qur'anic references at OSC generally come from: *Interpretations of the meanings of the Noble Qur'an in the English Language*, trans. Muhammad Muhsin Khan and Muhammad Taqi-ud-Din Al-Hilali (Riyadh: Dar-us-Salem Publications, 1999). The Biblical references generally come from the King James Version.

us. Protect us from all harm. We thank you, God, We thank you, God. Amen.

Following Romoluwa's prayer, the band played music lightly in the background and Oluwaseun encouraged the congregation to '... worship God in whatever way you please. Contemplate his majesty and glory'. Many remained kneeled or prostrated. Some rose up with their hands held above their heads. Some just stood or sat. Some prayed together. Whatever the manner, the congregation did so quietly, using only whispers or simply remaining silent. This period lasted for around 15 minutes, with Oluwaseun closing with 'Amen'. She then invited the congregation to sing a final song before '... our brother, *Babalawo* Fawole, will perform divination for us'. The lyrics of the song follow:

We praise you with this song (2x)
We praise you with our voices (2x)
We praise you with our words (2x)
For you alone are worthy to be praised.

Chorus: Send down a message, We are listening, We are here, We are Yours.

We praise you with this day (2x)
We praise you with this time (2x)
We praise you in this moment (2x)
For you alone are worthy to be praised.

Chorus

We praise you with our minds (2x)
We praise you with our hearts (2x)
We praise you with our actions (2x)
For you alone are worthy to be praised.

Chorus

We praise you with our sacrifice,
Our lives are yours.
We give up all that we are,
Our lives are yours.

Chorus

Chrislamic Divination

Following the song, *Babalawo* Fawole came forward to perform what they call the ‘Chrislamic divination’ or ‘divination of Chrislam’, which includes a typical *Ifá* divination, but is performed with additional references to Jesus and Muhammad.

While at the lectern he offered an explanation:

We follow God in any way possible at OSC. OSC is a place for God to speak and to guide us. We do not deny that God works in all of our traditions. Whether Christian, Muslim, Traditional religion. Now, I lead us in divination of Chrislam.

I was asked not to document the actual divination. Members at OSC do not believe that it should be published or else it might bring a curse. I can say that the ritual included *Babalawo* Fawole using palm nuts and an *opele* [*Ifá* divination chain] and he recited *Odu* [*Ifá* literary corpus]. Also of interest is that the divination was corporate, and was performed and directed at the entire audience. During the ritual, the *Babalawo* regularly invoked the names of Jesus and Muhammad. Attendees responded throughout by making the sign of the cross, falling prostrate, and several performed the Islamic *salat*. At the end of the divination, *Babalawo* Fawole suggested changes and disciplines that the members at OSC needed to undertake. I asked an OSC member, Shola, later that day about the Chrislamic divination. He offered the following insightful perspective into this practice:

Chrislam is basically just a combination of ways to get in touch with God and with our ancestors. The Chrislamic divination calls upon multiple sources of authority to accomplish this task ... what outsiders may see as different or even contradictory traditions, we see continuity and uniformity. We see inclusion, you see, so we include and attempt to recover this essence. Sometimes this means creating new traditions, but even this newness is rooted in respect for very old traditions.

Olujimi's Sermon: 'Our Common Heritage'

As the divination concluded, Olujimi came to the podium, bringing with him a Bible, a Qur'an, and *Odu Ifá*. He began with the following prayer:

Dear God, you alone are God. We want to learn, so teach us. We want to serve you and our communities. Teach us what you would have us do. Teach us who you would have us be. God, oh God of love and peace and patience and goodness, hear our prayer. Whether Muslim, or Christian, or Traditionalist, today, speak to everyone here in this Tabernacle. We come together in unity and peace. Bless us for these deeds. Grant us the ability to reach out to our community in love and faithfulness, disregarding our lives in your service. Through this time of teaching and learning, may we ask for a special measure of your Spirit working inside of us? Be with us now. We lift it up to you. Teach us, oh God of Abraham, Jesus, Muhammad, you are the God of the Universe. Amen.

What followed was a 45-minute sermon, including oral readings by volunteers selected by Olujimi. The theme of the sermon was 'Our Common Heritage'. The following is a selection from his introductory remarks:

'... we often hear that we are blasphemers ... that we are part of some cult. What does that word mean, anyway? If anything, we are only guilty of loving God and our neighbours. But this is what service and sacrifice to God looks like at times. Those in your community may want to harm you, and for what? Because you implement a holistic religious life? Eh? I think so ... what we do and believe can be difficult for many in our community ... what we do is not to just pull together Christianity, Islam, and our Traditional Religions, but more than this. We seek truth wherever there is truth. Whether that be in any religious tradition or non-religious tradition. God's truth is God's truth and wherever we find it, this does not matter. Do you agree? [many in the congregation nod and many say 'amen']

At this point, Olujimi asked for three young volunteers to come to the podium and conduct a short reading. Quickly, three teenage girls raised their hands and Olujimi called them up to the podium. They were each asked to read aloud the following texts:

Qur'an 2:42: 'And mix not truth with falsehood, nor conceal the truth'.

John 8:32: 'And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free'.

Psalm 85:11: ‘Truth shall spring out of the earth; and righteousness shall look down from heaven’.

Yorùbá Proverb: ‘Truth arrives at the market and finds not a single buyer; however, lies are bought with ready cash’.

Yorùbá Proverb: ‘All we can see is shadows, not clarity; but clarity will come, God of all openness’.

Olujimi thanked his volunteers and they sat back down in the congregation. Olujimi proceeded with the following remarks:

You see, we are to seek after truth, wherever it is found. I have never been a Muslim, but I read the Qur’an because there is truth to be found. And even though I was born into Christianity, I know that there are many falsehoods to be found in the teachings of man. And for many, this is too difficult. Another Yorùbá Proverb says, ‘Truth is bitter; falsehood is like a meat stew’.

Discovering the common heritage and purpose of the religions of Nigeria has its consequences. Many of you have been beaten and ostracised. Many of you have lost jobs and homes. And yet, as the book of Psalms tells us, ‘Truth shall spring up out of the earth!’ There is no stopping it. Our proverb says that same, that ‘clarity will come’. I believe it has come to this group. I believe that while we of course do not have complete clarity, God has revealed to us truth. Today, I want to focus on the truth of our common heritage, that is the theme today.

The main body of the sermon was arranged into four parts, with each part exploring one of ‘God’s Truths’ (i.e. One God, One Religion, One People, and One Love). As Olujimi pointed out, ‘... we often focus on specific issues, but today, I want us to reorient ourselves within our broader vision and beliefs’. The following is a selection from the first part, ‘One God’:

The first of God’s Truth is that of ‘One God’ ... we like to call this ‘Pure African Monotheism’.²¹⁷ God has always been one in Africa, but this was made to be something else with colonialism ... this concept of ‘One God’, we find this in the Jewish Scriptures. See for instance, Isaiah 44:6: ‘Thus saith the Lord the King of Israel, and his redeemer the Lord of hosts; I am the first, and I am the last; and beside me there is no God’. One God. The same is in Christianity, in Mark 12:29, saying ‘Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord’. Again, one God ... this talk about the Trinity in Christianity has led many astray ... we find even Jesus saying in John 10:30 that, ‘I and God

²¹⁷ ‘Pure African Monotheism’ is explored further in Part IV of this chapter.

are one'. In the Qur'ān, from 112:1: 'He is Allah, who is One'. *Allah* simply meaning 'God', so God is one. Even in the Muslim confession of faith, the *shahada*, we see that Muslims must confess that, 'There is no God but God' ... finally, in our own Yorùbá traditions, we have this same concept of one God, the creator God. In Yorùbá cosmology, *Olòrún*, or *Olódùmarè*, is the creator or sky God. There are many other powers below *Olòrún*, but there is no doubt that God has unity and that *Olòrún* is the same God mentioned in the above Scriptures ... we too have been endowed through our heritage with this wisdom. God has always been among us. Those from the East and the West have corrupted this truth, but we at OSC are reclaiming this simplistic understanding of God across Christianity, Islam, and our own African traditions.

The following is a selection from the second part, 'One Religion':

The second of God's Truths is that while we have been deceived to believe that there are many religions in Nigeria, all of these have a common essence and are sourced from the same place. Across Christianity, Islam, Judaism, and African Traditionalism, just as we worship the same God, we also are part of 'One Religion'. This makes sense doesn't it? That if we worship the same God, we worship within the same religion ... we often use this quote from the poet Khalil Gibran, but it rings of truth. He says: 'I love you when you bow in your mosque, kneel in your temple, pray in your church. For you and I are sons of one religion, and it is the spirit'. It does not matter where you worship, whether in a mosque or church. We are all part of the same religion ... the divisions and denominations are created by humanity, not God. Humanity has corrupted the unity of religion ... OSC is dedicated to reclaiming God's Truth on this matter.

The following is a selection from the third part, 'One People':

Okay, now the third principle of God's Truth is we are 'One People'. In Nigeria, they say we have more than 600 or 700 different people groups. These are different ethnicities and languages. There are of course thousands more across our world. Some are black, white, different colours of the wheel. We speak of races and ethnicities and the ways that we are different from each other. Nations are divided with this in mind, you see. In Nigeria though, we do not have this, but we still dissect our society into different parts ... these differences are superficial. Even that we have males and females is superficial. We are all created in the image of God. We are all human. The differences should be seen as beautiful and a reflection of wonderful diversity in our world. As the Qur'an 49:13 says, 'O mankind! We have created you from a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know one another'. Not that we should kill each other and defame each other. This is what we have in the society in Nigeria. In the book of Genesis, it says in 1:27: 'So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them'. What can we say to this? I love this quote from Bahá'u'lláh who says, 'It is not for him to pride himself who

loveth his own country, but rather for him who loveth the whole world. The earth is but one country, and mankind its citizens'. In reality, we do not exist as one, but the truth, God's Truth, is that we are one single people. We come from the same course, just as our religion. We come from God. We were created by God, all of us. Whether you are black or white, Yorùbá or Igbo, Hausa, or come from Nigeria or Ghana, the West or the East, the North or the South, this is inconsequential ... in reality, our world is very small and we are learning this more everyday. Here at OSC, we are intentional in our attempts to speak this truth and be welcoming to everyone. This is what our society needs.

The following is a selection from the fourth part, 'One Love':

'... now we come to the fourth principle of God's Truth ... 'One Love'. The unity of this truth is not difficult to show to you. Love of God and neighbour is at the heart of all of our religious traditions. Qur'an 3:31 speaks of this love of God, saying: 'If you love Allah then follow me, Allah will love you and forgive you of your sins'. Of loving one's neighbour, Muhammad said, 'None of you has faith until you love for your neighbour what you love for yourself'. In the Bible, in both the Old and New Testaments, this same trend continues. In Mark 12, it tells us to 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength, and to love your neighbour as yourself'. These are given as the greatest commands, above all others ... in our Yorùbá tradition, we say, 'The person who gathers eggs to eat does not know that the chicken's orifice hurts'. This funny proverb teaches us to care for others. To show concern and love for more than ourselves ... the love that I speak of relates to all of the other truths. It is what brings it all together and provides a practical lens through which to live. If you want to know how to live, ask yourself, does this action or thought promote the love of God? Does it promote the love of others around me? It is this simple.

Closing Song, Offering and Closing Prayer

Following these words, Olujimi left the podium. Oluwaseun and the band returned to the front to lead the congregation in a final song. Oluwaseun announced that they would be taking the offering at this time. She explained:

Here at OSC, we have two opportunities to give an offering. The first is to contribute to OSC operations. We only collect enough to run OSC and nothing more.²¹⁸ Not a single person receives a salary for their work here. The monies are only used for building operations. This is the first basket that will come by. Okay, so the second opportunity you have is to give to our

²¹⁸ If OSC has enough money for operations for the month, they do not collect this first offering.

community work. We look for ways to provide for the poor in our society. That is what these monies are used for. The more we collect, the more we can do with this. That is the second basket.

Following these words, Oluwaseun led the congregation in the following song as ushers collected the offerings:

Oh God of Abraham, Jesus, Muhammad,
Oh God of Africa, of the Universe!
We give you our hearts, We give you our praise,
We worship you today and forevermore.

Chorus

For you are the same, you are One.
You have revealed yourself to us.
There is no other one, you are One.
Oh God, reveal yourself to us.

Oh God Almighty and Powerful,
You are the Ancient of Days.
We give you our hearts, We give you our praise,
We worship you today and forevermore.

Chorus

The ocean cries out, the seas they roar,
The trees rise up, oh God, we see you.
The grasses grow green, the flowers they bloom,
The waterfall falls, oh God, we see you.

Chorus (2x)

With the instruments still playing softly in the background, Olujimi came back to the lectern. He closed with the following prayer:

God, we beseech you in this hour to be with us as we go. Let these words today penetrate us with your mercy and grace. Yes, God, let us be instruments for your glory. You, oh God of Abraham, Jesus, of Muhammad, Africa, and of the Universe, all our praise is due to you. You are one. And we praise you as one people, with one religion, and with one love, the love of you, oh God, and of our neighbour. Teach us to love better, to find ways to reach out to those around us. Even as we worship in separate places of worship, keep us united and let your holiness succeed in changing this generation. Even as those in this society war against us. Even as this nation is plagued by violence and killing. Even as our own brothers and sisters plot against us. God, we know you have already succeeded. God, we ask for the

peace that only you can bring. Grant us your peace, grant us your peace, your harmony, your unity. Amen.

This prayer signalled the end of the meeting. At this time attendees greeted one another and the volunteers that day started setting up for a meal that would be served immediately after.

Breaking of the Fast

At the first weekend of every month, members at OSC are expected to take part in a fast from noon on Friday to noon on Saturday. The end coincides with the end of the Tabernacle Gathering, so everyone is invited to share in the breaking of the fast by sharing a meal together. On this particular day, around 75 people stayed for the meal, which lasted around 90 minutes.

PART IV: CENTRAL RELIGIOUS BELIEFS AT OSC

Introduction

Even for a relatively small group such as OSC, it would be impossible to provide an exhaustive account of their wide-ranging and variable beliefs. Instead, the following section presents the most significant and common beliefs of the group. While these beliefs have not been fully systematised, the ‘divine revelation’ of what they term as ‘God’s Truth’ provides a comprehensive cosmological framework and *modus operandi* for guiding beliefs and ritual practice. ‘God’s Truth’, as mentioned previously, includes four primary components: One God, One Religion, One People, and One Love.

One God

The first component of ‘God’s Truth’ is the concept of ‘One God’. Simply put, members of OSC profess to be monotheistic (i.e. believe there is only one God). At OSC this is often called ‘Pure African Monotheism’. This phrase signifies several things: (1) there is only one God; (2) pre-colonial Africa was monotheistic; and (3) this belief in only one God is pure and is divinely inspired. A conversation between a member, Emeka (E), and myself (C) provides further insight:

C: How would you describe your belief about God?

E: Now, we call this ‘Pure African Monotheism’. You have heard us say? Uh huh, I will explain it to you. This is one of God’s Truth’s and was revealed to us in 2005. It is very easy to understand. God is God. There is only one God. There is no other God. You see? Very simple. So, this has always been the case in Africa ... this was not the first time God revealed this Truth. Before outsiders came into these lands, Africans believed this truth. You did not bring us this truth. God has always been among us.

C: Okay and what about the ‘pure’ part?

E: Pure African Monotheism has not been corrupted. It is from God. It has not been made dirty with humanity's influences ... it is pure because it is divinely inspired from God.

Another member, Ishola, gives the following explanation:

African religion has always been monotheistic. This is so obvious to us Africans. The supreme being is at the heart of our religion. What the white people came in and called idols were not idols. They were misunderstood. These objects were created by man, yes, but they mark God's visible presence in the world ... you have to agree that this is no different than the cross of Jesus in a church, or the Qur'an to Muslims.

Rather than creating anything novel or being influenced by non-African sources, the group believes they are reclaiming a long-standing tradition of monotheism in Africa. This is often referenced by the group with the phrase 'You have always been among us', which is in the following OSC song:

God is one. One is our God.
All praise belongs to you.
God is all. All is God.
Our praises come from you.

You have always been among us.
You will never forsake us.
You are God.

God is peace. Peace is God.
All peace comes from you.
God is love. Love is God.
All peace comes from you.

You have always been among us.
You will never forsake us.
You are God.

This phrase is a regular fixture during songs, prayers, and sermons. While there is general agreement at OSC on God being 'one', and having a pre-colonial presence in Africa, there is less agreement on what God is like. I asked several members, 'What is God like?', and here is a selection of their responses:

Chima: 'God is everything. God is in you and in me ... working inside of us.

I look around and I see God in everything’.

Inioluwa: ‘Do you know God? Ah, that is a trick. God is unknowable. God is everywhere, but [you] cannot see. God remains hidden’.

Asikooluwaloju: ‘[God] is you and God is me. There is no boundary, you understand? God just is’.

Funanya: ‘God is supreme ... [God] has always been here among us. God is love and peace and joy. All of these ... God comforts’.

One of the themes members at OSC most wanted to discuss was the role of Jesus, Muhammad, and AIR gods or divinities. The following is a conversation between Bako (B) and myself (C) on this theme:

C: Tell me about how Jesus, Muhammad, and African gods or divinities fit into this idea of ‘one God’?

B: You know, God is able to be revealed in an endless number of manifestations. Whether acting through Muhammad (pbuh) or Jesus (pbuh) or the Holy Spirit, even Mary ... God was revealed to my people the Yorùbá many millennia ago ... our divinities are not God, no, they were acting for God.

C: So, let me ask this question. Do you believe that Jesus is God?

B: You know, I also see myself as a Muslim. I come here on Saturday, even during the week ... I am at the mosque on Friday. But I have opened my eyes to the fact of Jesus. Jesus is God ... this should not keep me from being a good Muslim though.

C: What about Muhammad?

B: Muhammad (pbuh) never claimed to be God, but he is very important, very important prophet. He is the messenger of God ... [he] brought the Qur’an from God, so he is not God.

The issue of whether Jesus is God is further explored in the following conversation between Okiki (O) and myself (C):

C: Can you explain to me how Jesus fits into the idea of ‘one God’?

O: Hmmm, this is very difficult, very mysterious. I will try my best. How I see it is that ... Jesus was God in human form. This is ... different than God speaking through someone. Jesus came down to our earth as God ...

Muhammad is not God. Muhammad is a prophet ... God spoke through Muhammad.

C: And what about African gods and divinities? From traditional religion here?

O: Ahh. These are the same as Muhammad ... God manifests in different ways and forms and speaks through divinities and humans.

C: But they are not God?

O: No, only God is God. But God can be revealed through objects and people.

In my experience, the overwhelming majority of members at OSC believe that Jesus is God. I asked Qbáfěmi, one of the co-founders, whether this was a necessary belief. He responded:

I think what has happened is that people search for answers. Even a Muslim who comes to us is trying to open up himself to a new way of thinking. He may have been taught Jesus is a prophet, just a prophet like Mohammad ... we try to challenge all of our assumptions ... we have some who do not believe that Jesus is God. That is fine. We believe in one God and beyond that there is no coercion, you understand? If you are a polytheist, like a Buddhist or a Hindu, an idol worshipper, then we may have a problem, but the Buddhist and Hindu is still welcome ... [welcome to] explore and try to understand God with us ... [but] of course they cannot be a member.

Qbáfěmi's response highlights a significant point. OSC considers religions like Buddhism and Hinduism polytheistic religions. AIR is not considered polytheistic in its proper form. Furthermore, while so-called polytheists are able to attend OSC, they are not able to become a member.

Also of importance to note here is the way in which God is referred to. While titles such as 'Almighty', 'Merciful', and 'All-Powerful', are acceptable, OSC encourages its members not to refer to God with anthropomorphic terms, such as 'He', or 'She', 'Father' or 'Mother'. Even when reading texts from the Bible or Qur'an, the readings are often, but not always adapted. For instance, 'He is our God', would become 'God is our God', and 'God the Father' could be adapted to 'God the

Supreme Caretaker'. Romoluwa, an OSC member, gave me her perspective on this guideline: 'this is not required, but encouraged ... God is certainly not male or female like us. Why should we give language to God that is misleading?'

One Religion

The second component of 'God's Truth' is the concept of 'One Religion', The idea is that Christianity, Islam, and AIR are compatible and have the same essence. To express this, a witty proverb is often used by members at OSC: 'Islam, Christianity, African Traditional Religion: three sides of the same coin'. When I asked several members, 'What does 'One Religion' mean?', I received the following responses:

Ositadimma: These monotheistic religions are of the same essence. What I mean by this, I will tell you. They are from the same source. They have the same qualities and characteristics. For instance, you look at our teachings and they are very similar ... love God and love people, really this is what it is. You look at our sacred books and they are the same. It is the same story ... God's story.

Ginika: I will give you an example from Christianity and our Traditional religions. In Yorùbáland, we say that when the bigger man conquers the smaller man, the bigger man is shamed. In Christianity, this is the same. It is shameful for the bigger man to take advantage of a widow or orphan ... another example from Islam. In the Qur'an, man is told to love God. In the Bible, it is the same ... these are all one religion with different faces.

Olutumibi: Uh huh, this is a good question. One religion means that Christianity, Islam, even our religions [AIR] are united. We have now realised that these are all the same. This is what we teach ... [however] humanity has corrupted religion and turned them into many religions. We at OSC seek to reunite them as one. God wants all of us to worship together. Side by side, yes? Our group works toward this goal.

Olutumibi raises an important point about what members at OSC typically believe about religions as they exist today: they have been corrupted by humanity. This is the reason why they may look different and may even contradict each other. A local

poet and member of OSC, Taiwo, highlights this perceived corruption in a poem he wrote for a Tabernacle Gathering at OSC. Here is a section of it:

Religion is the work of the creation,
in order to borrow and beg, then steal.

Religion is the work of the creation,
to be mightier and drugged with zeal.

Religion is the work of the creation,
whether in Africa, the West, or the East

Religion is the work of the creation,
and we all share this mark of the beast.

Taiwo's poem is based on a line from Surah 2:213: 'Mankind was of one religion before their deviation'. After Taiwo read the poem at the Tabernacle Gathering, I made it a point to ask him after the meeting about its meaning. He responded:

I am of the mind that religion is always corrupted. Religion is merely a human attempt to connect with God ... the Bible has been corrupted, so too has the Qur'an. Anyone who tells you otherwise is not being honest with the evidence ... the poem speaks about two things really. The first is that we have corrupted religion because we are selfish. All of us are selfish. All over the world. This is a universal truth, if you know what I mean. But, but, this does not mean we are at [a] total loss. We are all attempting to get at God, to understand God ... our group has been blessed and chosen to have a renewed connection with God. Truths that were lost have now been reclaimed and we find ourselves reconnecting with God in a way that is pure and uncorrupted. God is reaching out to us in our time.

In addition to Sura 2:213, I witnessed a variety of sources being used to speak about the 'One Religion' concept. The following references provide some idea of the range of sources used during Tabernacle Gatherings:

Surah 5:69: 'Indeed, those who have believed [in Prophet Muhammad] and those [before Him] who were Jews or Sabeans or Christians - those [among them] who believed in Allah and the Last Day and did righteousness - no fear will there be concerning them, nor will they grieve'.

Yorùbá Proverb: 'They say 'I will not worship God or Allah or Jesus'. That person will not be able to worship even a palm kernel'.

Khalil Gibran: 'I love you when you bow in your mosque, kneel in your temple, pray in your church. For you and I are sons of one religion, and it is the spirit'.

Bahá'u'lláh: 'O ye that dwell on earth! The religion of God is for love and unity; make it not the cause of enmity or dissension'.

James 1:27: 'Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world'.

Interestingly, while the Bible, the Qur'an, and AIR proverbs are most often and prominently used by OSC at group meetings, there is also an intermittent use of other sources. In my conversations with members at OSC, I often asked, 'How do you determine what sources and references to use at OSC?' The following represent the range of responses I received to this question:

Inioluwa: 'We often say that all truth is God's truth. Truth can be found in very odd places. What we do is analyse these sayings and words to see. This is not so hard ... [we] pray for guidance'.

Mojisola: 'Do you like it? Eh, it is very, very interesting what we do. I think we are able to see what others cannot see. If a saying is true in, eh, eh, China, in a Chinese book, what [is] stopping us from using [it]? Is it true? Does it speak to our community? Will it help us understand God? These are the questions we should be asking in our churches and mosques. Why should we feel restricted? God has no restriction'.

Romoluwa: 'This is us reaching for God and finding people that have understood God ... this is not always agreeable. We do have discussions and disputations ... we like to say that we are on a journey, not that we are done with the journey'.

One People

The third component of 'God's Truth' is the concept of 'One People'. The idea is that God views people equally, regardless of religion, gender, class, ethnicity, race, colour, nation, clan, tribe, etc. In turn, OSC believes that humanity should view itself and others in the same way. As the sign of OSC points out: 'ALL nations,

tribes, peoples, and tongues ARE WELCOME'. The emphasis being on words 'all are welcome'. OSC claims this belief is manifested through the following practices: (1) intentionally welcoming all ethnic and religious groups; (2) intentionally welcoming all classes of people; (3) males and females are able to participate in all aspects of the community; and (4) all members are equal. Within the context of Tabernacle Gatherings, the following references were used to promote this idea:

Galatians 3:28: 'There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus'.

Igbo Proverb: 'Akîdî says that it does not know the boundary of the land [the point being that humanity should not discriminate]'.²¹⁹

Khalil Gibran: 'Human beings separate into factions and tribes and adhere to countries and regions whereas I see my essence as foreign to any one land and alien to any single people. The entire earth is my homeland and the human family is my clan. For I have found human beings to be weak, and it is small-minded for them to divide themselves up; the earth is cramped, so that only ignorance leads people to partition it into realms and principalities'.

Bahá'u'lláh: 'The tabernacle of unity hath been raised; regard ye not one another as strangers. Ye are the fruits of one tree, and the leaves of one branch'.

Malcolm X: 'We are brothers, We are a family of God. Not one of us is better than the other in His [God's] eyes. [God] loves us both. The future can only be won against the 'Evil One' by all of us standing strong together'.

Haile Selassie: 'Until the philosophy which holds one race superior and another inferior is finally and permanently discredited and abandoned, everywhere is war and until there are no longer first-class and second-class citizens of any nation, until the color of a man's skin is of no more significance than the color of his eyes. And until the basic human rights are equally guaranteed to all without regard to race, there is war. And until that day, the dream of lasting peace, world citizenship, rule of international morality, will remain but a fleeting illusion to be pursued, but never attained ... now everywhere is war'.

²¹⁹ Akîdî is a type of bean.

One Love

The fourth part of ‘God’s Truth’ is the concept of ‘One Love’. It is claimed that within the religious traditions of Christianity, Islam, and AIR, love is the central and unifying theme. According to many at OSC, the love of God and neighbour are interdependent and form the basic ethical and moral structure for the group. If it passes the test of loving God and loving neighbour, then OSC considers it to be part of what they call ‘Pure African Love’. When referring to the love of God in Tabernacle Gatherings, the following texts are most commonly referenced:

Deuteronomy 6:5: ‘And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might’.

Matthew 22:37: ‘Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind’.

Qur’ān 3:31: ‘If you love Allah then follow me, Allah will love you and forgive you of your sins’.

Yorùbá Proverb: ‘One does not trade with God and lose’.²²⁰

Similarly, the following texts are the most commonly referenced when demonstrating the tradition of loving one’s neighbour across Christianity, Islam, and AIR:

Leviticus 19:18: ‘Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself’.

Matthew 22:37 – 40: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself’.

Qur’an Surah 49:13: ‘O mankind! We have created you from a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know one another’.

²²⁰ The way OSC uses this proverb is to say that when God is respected, loved, and included, no venture can fail.

Yorùbá Proverb: 'The blemish of the yam is the blemish of the knife'.²²¹

In my conversations with members at OSC, I often asked, 'What does 'One Love' mean to you?' The following represent the range of responses I received to this question:

Na'imah: 'One love is from God. It is the only kind of love ... this love allows OSC to exist. If we did not have this love from God, we could not come together as Traditionalists and Muslims and Christians. This would be impossible'.

Bolutife: 'One love is everything, man. This is it. If we don't have God's love, we are done ... I think love is the true source of all of these religions. All of them speak about love. We just divide them up for power, don't we? That's what it really is ... but love like the kind we have at OSC cuts through all that power stuff. It makes it weak and powerless'.

Adisa: 'This means that there is only one love, God's love. It is this simple really. We talk about human love, but this is not true love. The only love that is real is God's love'.

Folami: 'This is God's love. God's love saves us and teaches us to ... love others too. We can't do this as well maybe, but this is what we try ... even people of other religions, we must accommodate everyone. This is what this teaches us'.

²²¹ The original context of this proverb is that when you disgrace others, you are really disgracing yourself. At OSC, however, they use it to mean that when you fail to love others, you fail to love yourself, who are part of God's creation. When you love others, you are able to love all of creation.

PART V: NEGOTIATING RELIGIOUS BELONGING AND IDENTITY AT OSC

Introduction

According to the survey of active membership at OSC I conducted in July 2012, around 96 percent of members claim to belong to and identify with multiple religious groups and traditions. While some members have forged new religious networks since joining OSC, most simply retain the networks they had prior to joining. At the same time, however, a majority of members at OSC indicated that they surreptitiously guard parts of their belongings and identities due to what they often term, ‘religious persecution’. The following section presents a selection of conversations I had with OSC members regarding how they negotiate their multiple religious belongings and identities in the midst of a legitimate fear of being marginalised. It includes member accounts from Ayokunle, Monifa, Bolaji, Opeyemi, Tula, Romoluwa, Jimoh, and Grace.

‘Religious Persecution’

By early 2006, OSC was experiencing regular growth, but along with this growth came what many say is ‘religious persecution’. One of the co-founders, Ayokunle, provided the following perspective:

In our first year, I believe God gave us protection. We had no attacks or anything upon our group. God knew that we needed this. We might have disbanded, you know, without this peaceful year. But as we grew stronger in our faith, so too did our responsibilities grow ... We were first attacked with threats, you understand? ... one of the people we had invited into our group did not like what we were doing. Upon our next meeting, she brought others from her church to debate with us. We were welcome to the debate and we discussed many things, but when they found us resolute in our convictions, they claimed that God would strike us down for our heretical beliefs. This is what they told us.

The exchange did not, however, immediately result in any physical conflicts, but group members began to question their security as a result. According to the co-founders, OSC members have experienced a range of different types of religious persecution. I questioned a number of members about their experiences. Here is an exchange that took place between Monifa (M) and myself (C):

C: Have you experienced religious persecution?

M: Oh yes, we have had many persecutions. Every month we have these.

C: Could you tell me about religious persecution? What is it?

M: Uh huh. Now, you see, we are persecuted because of our religion. We believe there is only one religion. Islam, Christianity, Traditional religions, these are all the same. Others in Ogbómòsò do not believe this is right. So, they threaten us. Threaten to kill us or imprison us. They call us heretics. They say we are destroying Nigeria.

C: Has anyone carried out these threats? Or have they remained just threats?

M: Oh yes, many times. They have destroyed our property ... [they] send youths to vandalise ... I know of many who have been put in prison. Can you believe it? We are a secular nation and we put our citizens in prison for what they believe. What is this? Uh. No, this cannot be.

C: Who are 'they'? The people you are saying that carry out these threats.

M: Ah, these are people in Ogbómòsò who want to harm us ... they come from different groups, but many of them are Muslims and Christians. They think we do not deserve to exist.

This conversation intrigued me and I became interested in finding those who had experienced the extreme response of being put in prison for their affiliation with OSC. During my time with the group I found many who spoke about this happening, but only one man, Bolaji, who claimed to be imprisoned for this reason. Bolaji described to me how in 2009, his former neighbour, a police officer, discovered he was part of OSC. Bolaji recalled:

This man, my neighbour was very unhappy with me ... he said I was part of a cult, the Chrislamic cult ... he claimed what I was doing was illegal and that he would personally shut us down. He would not let me speak or defend myself. Instead, he phoned other officers and they beat me and took me into prison ... [I] was there for two days ... They did not give me any food or water ... I was told to never go back and they let me go.

While the number of imprisonments may be embellished, I discovered over twenty claims of property vandalism related to being part of OSC. Even the meeting places of OSC have had to be moved on occasion as a result of 'religious persecution'. The following is an exchange between Opeyemi (O) and myself (C) that documents one of these cases:

C: You mentioned religious persecution just now. Can you tell me a bit more about that?

O: Well, this has been going on for longer than I have been around.

C: That's fine. Tell me about what you have personally experienced.

O: Hmmm ... I have been coming here from 2007 ... the first time [of persecution] was the year before. My family came for a Tabernacle Gathering ... youths had painted with black over our doors and signs. We no longer keep our sign up during the week. Too many times this has happened ... [also in 2007] we were renting a building for our meetings ... the owner made us leave ... he said he did not know what group we were, but he knew, you see, there was pressure on him from the community to make us leave.

I later sought out and spoke with the owner of this property, Adebayo, and he confirmed Opeyemi's claim. He admitted: 'This Chrislam group was renting my property and many people in Ogbómòsò did not like this, not at all ... my other businesses were being affected by this, you understand?' I asked Adebayo whether he had a problem with the group and he responded: 'No, I think they are a very good group, good for Ogbómòsò and this country ... I do not agree with them, yet they are not harming others. They are not going around preaching hate or violence ... God is with them'.

After moving from Adebayo's building, the group relocated briefly to a new property. This property was owned by Tula, a member of OSC. The following is a conversation between Tula (T) and myself (C) regarding what happened after the group relocated:

C: I was informed that you owned the property where the group met briefly at in 2007. Could you tell me a bit about why the group left that property?

T: Yes, I owned that property. It was a small dirt building, not a nice building ... we were forced to move there until we could find a better place. But we were there for maybe two, maybe three months. There were some people in the community, those surrounding it [the building], that became very suspicious of us. They went to the police to shut us out, to get us out ... the police came but did nothing. Some days later, in the night, youths came and destroyed it. They burned it, set it on fire.

C: Did you inform the police?

T: Yes, well, you see in Nigeria, the police are not your friend ... I went to them, but they did nothing. Nothing. Can you imagine? They would not even report it. No paperwork. They told me to go away, get out old man.

Beyond stories of vandalism, arson, illegal evictions, and imprisonment, other specific claims of persecution include physical abuse, verbal abuse, familial excommunication, social excommunication, bribery, and job loss. I recorded that 32 people from OSC have openly revealed their affiliation with OSC and 27 reported that they were persecuted in some way as a result. The following is an exchange between Romoluwa (R) and myself (C) that gives insight into many of these issues:

C: Could you tell me a bit about your experience of being persecuted?

R: Okay, what do you want to know?

C: What persecution have you personally experienced? Tell me your story.

R: Uh huh, I see. My story is very bad. My family are Muslims. Someone told them that I was part of this blaspheming cult. Do you understand?

C: What did they mean by blaspheming cult?

R: Yes, they say we are blasphemers ... [because] we include Christianity and Traditional religion in our beliefs ... my father forbade me from ever going back ... they found out that I was still going and my father beat me. He yelled at me and cursed me ... he would not let me leave my home. He beat me many times ... [he] broke my wrist and my eyes were sealed shut. I left secretly and now live with friends. I have been excommunicated from my family and many friends. I had to leave my job because I worked for my uncle ... I am still angry at them all ... [I feel] abandoned, but I know God is with me.

Stories of bribery were very common. This is highlighted in the following exchange between Jimoh (J) and myself (C):

J: My father offered me bribes to come back to Christianity. I told him I hadn't left Christianity, but he wouldn't listen.

C: What were these bribes?

J: Money usually, or jobs. Even cars and *okadas* ... he would leave money on my desk, saying it was for something, but I knew what it was for. I never took it. I put it back on the [kitchen] table.

C: Why didn't you take it?

J: My father was trying to tempt me with money to reverse my beliefs. I was already beyond that. It wasn't even difficult.

C: How is your relationship with your father now?

J: We respect each other. I still go to church and he likes that ... he thinks I will really come back someday. He doesn't really ask about what we do, you know. There is respect, but there is also this distance between us and our family never speaks about it ... certainly my father has not told his brothers or other family ... one of his brothers is a pastor. He would not be happy with me if he found out.

While Jimoh's belonging to OSC has caused some level of tension with his family, he has not been willing to reveal this information with many of his family and friends. Indeed, many times, rather than being an open topic of conversation, even when conflict emerges, it remains hidden within families and tight social networks. This makes these phenomena difficult to track and uncover.

Those who do reveal their belonging to OSC openly are highly likely to be

marginalised in some way. My conversations with group members revealed that some individuals had left OSC as a result of this fear. It is difficult to know how many, but it appears between 10-20 individuals have left the group for this reason. While working on a separate case study, I came across one individual, Grace, who claimed to have been part of the group in 2010, but left when she became fearful and paranoid. Grace was hesitant to discuss this initially. I met her at a Baptist church while conducting interviews with people who had converted from Islam to Christianity. She was curious about my project and I gave her my contact information. She called me months later and said she would like to discuss an issue related to Chrislam. It was an informal conversation, so I did not record it, but she revealed that she lived in constant fear while she was attending services at OSC. She said that she became paranoid and thought that members of her church and police officers were targeting her. She feared for her life, so she broke off her connection and has not been back as a result. Despite retaining a private religious identity that draws upon multiple traditions, Grace chose to separate from OSC rather than live in fear as a result of her public belonging.

CHAPTER 4

MULTIPLE RELIGIOUS BELONGING AND IDENTITY AT THE OGBÓMÒSÓ *EGÚNGÚN* FESTIVAL

Egúngún e nle o o rami o o. Èmí o mona kan eyi ti nba gba Orí Egúngún. Ase.

Translation: Ancestors, I am greeting you, my friends. When I do not know which road to follow, I will turn to the wisdom of the Ancestors. May it be so.²²²

— Yorùbá invocation for greeting *Egúngún* dancers

Introduction

As is typical across Yorùbáland, religious festivals are an important and regular part of community life in Ogbómòsò. From Easter to Christmas, *Eid al-Fitr* to *Eid-ul-Adha*, and the indigenous festivals of *Ole*, *Ilus*, and *Oro*, such events offer participants opportunities to solidify social and religious bonds, while also commemorating, celebrating, and reenacting important rituals and historic moments. One of the most popular festivals in Ogbómòsò is the *Egúngún* festival.²²³ It is held annually for two weeks from July-August and is the most well attended indigenous festival in Ogbómòsò.²²⁴ While the content and purpose of each festival varies and is dependent on evolving local distinctions, a central unifying theme and practice are the ritual masquerade performances dedicated to ancestor veneration. As Rosalind I.

²²² The English translation is provided by: Indianapolis Museum of Art, ‘Egungun Masquerade Garment,’ <http://www.imamuseum.org/collections/artwork/egungun-masquerade-costume> (accessed 3 December 2014).

²²³ The term, *Egúngún*, is a plural Yoruba word meaning ‘ancestral spirits masquerading.’ See: Toyin Falola and Ann Genova, *Historical Dictionary of Nigeria* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2009), 112-13. While the *Egúngún* typically takes place at a festival, it can also occur at funerals anytime of the year.

²²⁴ Other prominent indigenous festivals in Ogbómòsò include *Ole*, *Ilus*, and *Oro*.

J. Hackett comments in *Art and Religion in Africa*, ‘the most dramatic representation of Yorùbá beliefs concerning the afterlife is found in the form of *Egungun* masqueraders. *Egungun* masks are considered to be representations of ancestral spirits’.²²⁵ Yet, *Egúngún* festivals are also corporate events that provide a political platform, entertainment, and communal bonding opportunities, with varying degrees of religious significance for each individual.

Of particular importance for this chapter is that although the Ogbómòsò *Egúngún* festival has historic origins in AIR, those who identify as Muslim or Christian now make up a large number of the participants. Thus, the festival sets the stage for an annual encounter of individuals and groups from a wide spectrum of religious traditions. While much has been written on the content of the festival itself, from artistic²²⁶, touristic²²⁷, and more comprehensive historical and social scientific

²²⁵ Rosalind I. J. Hackett, *Art and Religion in Africa* (New York and London: Cassell, 1998), 181.

²²⁶ Deborah Bell, *Mask Makers and Their Craft: An Illustrated Worldwide Study* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2010), 19ff. Among the most original and critical sources on *Egúngún* from an artistic perspective comes from the journal, *African Arts*. The following are among the most important articles to be featured in the last several decades. Joel Adedeji, ‘Traditional Yoruba Theater,’ *African Arts* 3.1 (1969): 60-63. Marilyn Hammersley Houlberg, ‘Egungun Masquerades of the Remo Yoruba,’ *African Arts* 11.3 (1978): 20-27. Marc Schiltz, ‘Egungun Masquerades in Iganna,’ *African Arts* 11.3 (1978): 48-55. John Pemberton III, ‘Egungun Masquerades of the Igbomina Yoruba,’ *African Arts* 11.3 (1978): 40-47. Norma H. Wolff, ‘Egungun Costuming in Abeokuta,’ *African Arts* 15.3 (1982): 66-70. Justine M. Cordwell, ‘The Art and Aesthetics of the Yoruba,’ *African Arts* 16.2 (1983): 56-59. Will Rea, ‘Making History: The Modernity of Masquerade in Ikole Ekiti,’ *African Arts* 41.4 (2008): 10-25.

²²⁷ Oxford Business Group, *The Report: Nigeria 2010* (London: Oxford Business Group, 2010), 243ff. D. O. Makinde, ‘Potentialities of the *Egúngún* Festival as a Tool for Tourism Development in Ogbomoso, Nigeria,’ in *Management of Natural Resources, Sustainable Development and Ecological Hazards III*, eds. C. A. Brebbia and S. S. Zubir (Southampton, UK: WIT Press, 2011).

accounts²²⁸, this case study is concerned not with the content, but rather with the contemporary participants of the Ogbómòsò *Egúngún* festival and how these participants may contribute to answering the primary research question of this thesis: how has interreligious encounter in Ogbómòsò created multiple religious belongings and identities among individuals and groups? Additionally, the related questions of ‘why do individuals have multiple religious belongings and identities?’, ‘how do individuals negotiate belonging to and identifying with multiple religious traditions?’, and ‘how has interreligious encounter impacted each religious tradition?’ are also explored.

When I first heard about the multireligious composition of festivals like *Egúngún* in 2009, it caught my attention. I suspected that such a milieu would provide fertile ground to locate potential interviewees with dynamic and multiple religious belongings and identities. This suspicion was rooted in the assumption that if I were to meet these individuals at other religious sites, for instance, at a church or mosque, they would be less willing to open up about certain aspects of their religious life. I continued to investigate this suspicion, but found little in the existing literature. As a result, in both 2011 and 2012, I took part in the Ogbómòsò *Egúngún* festival as a participant observer. During the festival those years, I met and identified

²²⁸ Hackett, *Art and Religion in Africa*, 176ff. Margaret Thompson Drewal, *Yoruba Ritual: Performers, Play, Agency* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1992). David Kerr, *African Popular Theatre: From Pre-Colonial Times to the Present Day* (Oxford: James Currey Publishers, 1995). William Russell Bascom, *Sixteen Cowries: Yoruba Divination from Africa to the New World* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1993). Chief Oludare Olajubu and J. R. O. Ojo, ‘Some Aspects of Oyo Yoruba Masquerades,’ *Africa* 47.3 (1977): 253-75. Joel Adedeji, ‘The Origin and Form of the Yoruba Masque Theatre,’ *Cahiers d’Études Africaines* 12.46 (1972): 254-276. Abdul-Rasheed Na’Allah, ‘The Origin of Egungun: A Critical Literary Appraisal,’ *African Study Monographs* 17.2 (1996): 59-68. Samuel Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas: From the Earliest Times to the Beginning of the British Protectorate* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 29ff. W. A. Hart, ‘A West African Masquerade in 1815,’ *Journal of Religion in Africa* 23.2 (1993): 136-146. Eli Bentor, ‘Remember Six Feet Deep’: Masks and the Exculpation of/from Death in Aro Masquerade,’ *Journal of Religion in Africa* 24.4 (1994): 323-338.

approximately 50 potential interviewees. Beyond the common bond of being a participant at the festival, which provides a comparative structure to the case study, I identified each of the potential interviewees as living with multiple religious belongings and identities. For additional focus and comparison, each of the interviewees also needed to be a youth (between 18-35 years of age), self-identify as Yorùbá, and have lived most of their lives in Ogbómòsò. I had a gender criterion in mind as well and intended to interview a roughly equal number of males and females. Lastly, I sought to be inclusive of a range of different types of experiences, particularly in regard to religion.²²⁹ From the approximately 50 potential interviewees, I completed the full interview process with 12 individuals: Agbo, Olamilekan, Zaria, Monifa, Afolabi, Oni, Abdullah, Aisha, Ayo, Ezinas, David, and Şadéfúnmiolúwa.²³⁰ As mentioned in Chapter Two, their names have been anonymised with pseudonyms due to safety concerns. In the following chapter, I present a narrative account of each case based on the conversations and semi-structured research interviews I conducted with each participant.²³¹ In every case I have attempted to provide as much interview and ethnographic data as space will allow. These accounts are by no means exhaustive, but instead focus on each participant's religious belonging and identity throughout key points in their life.

²²⁹ In other words, I sought out individuals with distinct religious experiences taking into account different ways of belonging to and identifying as Christian, Muslim, or AIR.

²³⁰ I started the interview process with six other participants, but decided they did not meet the stated criterion.

²³¹ In every case I attempted to build a relationship with the participant before I conducted any interviews.

12 INDIVIDUAL CASES FROM THE OGBÓMÒSÓ EGÚNGÚN FESTIVAL

Agbo

Agbo is an outgoing Yorùbá man and street trader in his mid-thirties whom I met during the 2011 Ogbómòsò *Egúngún* Festival. He was born in Ogbómòsò, but left to study in Lagos when he was 19 years of age. He has a university degree in business and is fond of telling of the many opportunities he would have had if he had chosen to stay in Lagos. He considers himself to be poor, but his economic standard of living is supplemented by support from extended family and helps to provide for his basic needs. His connection to his family brought him home in his late twenties and he has been living in Ogbómòsò ever since. After meeting Agbo in 2011, we have kept in contact by email and met again several times in early 2012. The following narrative is based on a series of conversations and semi-structured interviews I conducted with Agbo in 2011 and 2012. It reveals the case of a man who was born into a multireligious family and now belongs to and identifies with multiple religious traditions and groups.

As Agbo describes it, his religious upbringing was complicated, yet at the same time it was not an uncommon upbringing for the Ogbómòsò area:

My father was Muslim. My mother, she was a born again Catholic and took her faith very seriously. So did my father, of course ... now, my grandparents, they were like many during their time, steadfast in their African traditions to their death when I was fourteen years old. I grew up not only around, but even within these different religions. It was very complicated, but at the same time, very common.

Agbo, like many throughout Yorùbáland, grew up in a multireligious family. He describes this as being quite normal and routine. For Abgo this included not only

attending events, but also openly participating:

You know, I would go with my father to mosque on Friday's. I would say the prayers in the Muslim way, praying to *Allah* and reading the Qur'an. My family would also fast during Ramadan and celebrate *Eid al-Fitr*. Of course, even today when you have Muslim friends, even if you are not yourself a Muslim, you may fast and certainly celebrate all together when the fast is broken. It becomes in many ways a community celebration like Christmas or Easter ... I never missed a church service with my mother. I would get dressed up in my suit and attended Sunday school even. I sang the songs and read the Bible as I was told. When I was 12, I was baptised and became 'born-again' like my mother. My father came to the service and no one asked any questions about his presence. He was welcome there and was invited by the pastor to say a few words. I will always remember that he was thankful for the church. He said *adupé, adupé*, which you know means, 'we thank God', in Yorùbá. He was thanking God as I was baptized as a Christian. Some of my grandparents were also there that day. They were joyous and happy for me. Even later that year I remember going to the *Egúngún* as a family. There was no tension. After I was baptised I continued to practise as a Muslim as well.

As Agbo grew older, however, and left Ogbómòsò for university in Lagos, he started to have serious questions about his religious background. At university he encountered people who challenged his complicated religiousness for the first time. He was chastised and called a heretic by other Muslims and Christians for belonging to and identifying with multiple religious traditions. As Agbo recalls:

My family never really talked about these traditions being contradictory when I was growing up. They were seen to be all part of the same, uh, tradition. As if the God of the Bible was the same God as *Olòrún* and the same as *Allah*. But at university this all changed. I was challenged for my views and I did not know how to respond.

Agbo went through a period of time when he stopped attending any religious events. He still identified as being religious, but he was confused and frustrated, both at his parents and those who challenged his past. He mostly kept quiet about his struggles until he was invited and started attending a university student group:

A friend of mine invited me, you see, to this African consciousness group. A pan-African society. I don't want to say the name. They were committed to reclaiming African heritage. We would read books and poetry. We had

famous African writers come and give speeches and implore us to stand up as Africans ... for me this ignited a desire and I started visiting a traditional priest when I was back in Ogbómòsò visiting. I grew up around him and he knew my parents very well. He was a family friend. I shared with him my troubles and he was very wise in responding ... he spoke about how the Yorùbá should be open to all traditions, that it was intrinsic to the Yorùbá to be open and accommodating toward everyone. He was aware of my religious past and assured me that my story was truly good and showed how the Yorùbá are able to cut down barriers and use different traditions for good, for easing tensions and showing how we are all reaching out to God, but just in different ways.

According to Agbo, this period of seeking counsel lasted for about a year. He met with the AIR priest on five or six occasions. He also continued to attend events at the African consciousness group, even after he graduated from university. In his mid-twenties, Agbo once again began attending religious events and services. During this time, he viewed himself as a religious explorer, rather than having any concrete religious belonging or identity:

I was floating between groups and traditions. My friends from university were a diverse lot and came from so many different backgrounds. I explored all of them and greatly enjoyed the experiences. As I explored, I found God in all of them. As the priest had told me, we are all reaching out to God and I found God reaching out to us in these different religions.

When Agbo heard that his father was becoming ill, he left a good paying job in Lagos and moved back to Ogbómòsò. Upon returning, he quickly returned to a similar religious routine he had growing up:

You know when I came back to Ogbómòsò it was a joyous time. A true blessing to be with my family and with the people of Ogbómòsò ... When my father was well enough, we would go to mosque together and read the Qur'an together. My mother and myself went to church together and events like the *Egúngún* were central to our community life ... I have my own family today and I raise my children to respect all faiths, all religions. They can choose which path to take.

When I asked about which religious traditions and groups he now belongs to and identifies with, Agbo had this to say:

I refer to myself as a born again African. This is a funny term, no? Well, what I mean by it is this: I am African and as a Yorùbá person there is no separating religion. To be African and Yorùbá is to be religious. Now, I belong to my community and believe that God is in all of our traditions. So yes, I belong to a church and a mosque and I see a traditional priest ... because of our history, to be Yorùbá is to be open to God in his fullness ... I now realise that my upbringing was not a curse, no, no, but an opportunity to experience the fullness of God.

I was fortunate enough to spend time with Agbo attending various religious events in 2011 and 2012. We met at the 2011 Ogbomoso Egungun Festival and enjoyed several days together. According to Agbo, *Egúngún* attendance is on the rise despite efforts to curb participation:

You know there are some in Ogbómòsò who want to stop these traditions. They are like those I met in Lagos who challenged my background. They say, 'You cannot participate in *Egúngún*, or you are a bad Christian, a bad Muslim'. This is not uncommon, but the younger generation is not listening. In fact, the younger generation, the youths, they see right through this. The *Egúngún* speaks to our heritage, our ancestors ... we commemorate and honour our ancestors, you see. The missionaries and Arabs tried to dispel these practices, but they persist and are growing as we wake up and are reclaiming our history and culture. Every year there are more people attending ... many attend without the blessing of their pastor. They come because they want to connect with their community. So you see Muslims, Christians, all coming together in this festival to celebrate life and our common bonds.

Agbo and I also went together to the Ogbómòsò Central Mosque for *Jumu'ah*. He participated while I waited in the back foyer. I watched as Agbo and many others prayed together. Afterward we shared a meal with several of his friends. We talked openly about Agbo's multiple religious belongings and identities. Unexpectedly, each of them also shared their own story. While they belong to a mosque and identify as Muslim, their religious life is also dynamic and includes multiple belongings and identities. For instance, they have attended Pentecostal revivals in the past and often see a local AIR priest for medicinal and divination purposes. Agbo's friend, Mahmud, shared with us that he continues to participate across multiple

religious traditions:

I was raised as a Muslim and will always be a Muslim. But to be Muslim does not mean that I am blind to claiming *Allah* in my own traditions. As a Yorùbá, my ancestors are part of who I am. So yes, I go to *Egúngún* and I celebrate. Islam does not restrict my celebration, my family rights ... we are fond in Ogbómòsó of saying that *Allah* was among us even before we had the Qur'an.

I also had the privilege of attending a Catholic church where Agbo attends. He informed me that the priest was aware of his religious life and history. We were able to meet with the priest after the service. While he preferred to keep his comments anonymous, he allowed me to record our conversation. It was fascinating as the priest shared his own perspective on religion in Ogbómòsó:

Ogbómòsó, like much of Yorùbáland, is very religious. We have Christians, Catholics like in this church, and Muslims. We also have our Yorùbá traditions. These are not as prominent as they once were, okay, yet they are ingrained in every Yorùbá person. I use our traditions to explain the Catholic faith, you see? People relate to these traditions because they know them, they trust them. In Yorùbáland, we say that to be accommodating is to be godly. This is what we believe. So we are accommodating to these religions.

He also shared his insight into how the *Egúngún* festival relates to Catholicism:

Ah, yes, this is very important. The *Egúngún* honours our ancestors. These ancestors are specific to the Yorùbá, okay, even to Ogbómòsó. This is based on kinship, on lineage, you understand? So we celebrate each year and receive blessings and guidance from our ancestors ... you know, in Catholicism, we have the veneration of the saints. This is really a form of spiritual ancestor celebration as we look to the past and recognise those who have gone before us in death. We celebrate their lives each year on different days and pray to them, asking for guidance, for blessing ... I have no problem with Yorùbá festivals. For instance, *Egúngún* is a celebration of our African heritage and kinship. To be Catholic one must not think that this is somehow off limits. *Egúngún* is part of our history and we should be sure to make it part of our future. My religion has nothing to say of my participating in my community festival.

Attending these events and meeting Agbo's friends was an education in itself. While Agbo has experienced conflict related to his religious belonging and identity occasionally, he claims this is rare in Ogbómòsó. He believes that even though there

are religious leaders who preach against having multiple religious belongings and identities, most in Ogbómòsò are not only respectful toward this religious lifestyle, but also engage in a similar lifestyle on some level. As Agbo remarked on our final meeting together: ‘My story may not be universal, but it is everywhere to be found here in Ogbómòsò. Go down one street and you will find a dozen of the same story’.

Olamilekan

Olamilekan (Lekan for short) is a Yorùbá man and local business owner in his early thirties whom I met during the 2012 Ogbómòsò *Egúngún* Festival. He was born in Ogbómòsò and has lived there his entire life, except for a brief stint in London as a child. He has a university degree in agribusiness and considers himself to have an economically high standard of living. Lekan is unmarried and without children. After meeting Lekan in 2012, we have kept in touch by email and phone. The following narrative is based on a series of conversations and semi-structured interviews I conducted with Lekan in 2012. It reveals the case of a man who was raised in a Christian (Anglican) family, but in his early twenties began to gravitate toward AIR.

According to Lekan, his religious upbringing was typical of living in the Ogbómòsò area:

My parents and grandparents were Anglican until their deaths. We were always at church, several times per week. This is what we do in Ogbómòsò. We are very committed to our religion. We are some of the most religious peoples in the world. Sometimes we would go to other churches when friends were getting baptised or for some festive event ... usually Baptist churches ... we went to some Pentecostal revivals I can remember, but my parents were not very fond of some practices. But this was very normal to do, to go to other churches. Now my family would not go to traditional priests or festivals. They believed these to be pagan and heretical to the Christian teachings, but I knew many people who were Christian and Traditionalist. They carried charms with them to church that the [AIR] priest gave them and

many went to festivals like here at *Egúngún*. This was normal behaviour.

When Lekan was sixteen, he began going to church for a weeknight service with a Pentecostal friend. As he describes it, attending this service opened him up to experiencing God in an entirely different way:

At the Anglican church, we would sing and maybe dance a little. Yet, it was reverent, you understand? Nothing too excitable. Now, the Pentecostal church, this was a Redeemed Church, you know it? Yes, it was a very, very different story. There was tongue speaking and healings. I myself had seen these before on television, but never in person, you see? Uh huh, so I was very interested in these practices ... it was exciting to be there with my friend and I believe that the Spirit of God was working on my heart. My faith before those days was weak and confused. God was preparing my heart for his fullness. I wasn't ready before that. Of course, I continued to belong to the Anglican church. But it was in the Pentecostal church that I found God at work and I experienced God differently than I had before.

Within a few years Lekan had stopped attending the Anglican church. He relates this decision to his father's death. He felt that with his passing came the chance to grow up and make his own decisions. While his mother was not pleased with the decision, she did not put up any protest. It was also around this time that Lekan began taking classes at the Ladoke Akintola University of Technology (LAUTECH) in Ogbómòsò. He enrolled in mechanical engineering initially, but switched early on when he became intrigued by environmental responsibility to agribusiness. It was this gravitation to the environment that led Lekan to reconsider his religious journey to date:

I had been taking elective classes in different sciences. Agriculture was one of those and it included a section on environmental responsibility. This was very interesting and the professor used African values to talk about the ethics of such a responsibility. I thought, uh huh, this is what I am missing. You know we often look to the West for solutions, but as I started searching I found much in our own traditions ... the Pentecostal church I attended was using African concerns and African values to promote spiritual growth. This combination of influences led me to start questioning my religious journey.

During this period of questioning, one of Lekan's professors pointed him toward a

local AIR *Babalawo*:

I met with this man, this *Babalawo*. He was very old and was living in this horrible wooden house that was falling down. He asked me what was troubling me just like the Anglican priest would ask me when I was a child. I told him that I didn't know who I was anymore. I told him that I felt like our African traditions had been ripped out of us and we were following some other path. He looked at me and nodded ... he performed a divination in the tradition of *Ifá*. I would not tell you exactly what was interpreted, but I found confirmation that I should keep searching and seek out blessing from my ancestors.

For Lekan, the issue of ancestors became central in his religious quest. While he was aware that others venerated, praised, and received blessings from their ancestors, it was never part of his religious experience. Lekan decided to speak to his mother about their lineage and he was surprised at how open she was to the conversation. She shared with him that she grew up going to *Egúngún* and other AIR events.

Lekan was also surprised to learn that his parents occasionally visited a *Babalawo*:

My mother told me how my father and her had continued visiting a *Babalawo* to seek guidance. I never knew this ... apparently they felt guilty about this practice, but still did it anyway. She told me that she communicates with our ancestor spirits ... she never goes to *Egúngún* because it is a public event and she does not want to disappoint others ... some feel that the *Egúngún* goes against Christian teaching, you see? Uh huh. Okay, but I now learned that my parents had continued these traditions without my knowing ... we often think that our parents and grandparents gave up these practices and with it our history and heritage. Sometimes this is true. More times though I think they are doing it in secret, without others knowing because they see the importance.

As Lekan recalls, this meeting with his mother was critical in his religious journey. While he was willing to make the transition from an Anglican church to a Pentecostal church, he was seriously concerned with how his family might receive the news that he was interested in AIR. With his mother's quiet blessing, he dedicated himself to learning everything he could about Yorùbá history and their religious traditions:

What I found was convincing because I was surprised at how well the Yorùbá system fits within the Christian system. The *Òrìṣà*, for instance, are similar to interpretations of angels and demons in Christian teachings. The *Òrìṣà* are manifestations of God and you have that in Christianity. This could be Jesus, who was God, but also had a physical presence. Jesus is really just a manifestation of God, who we call *Olódùmarè*. But so are we. We are made in the image of God, of *Olódùmarè*—the same is true in Christianity. This image continues into death and in Christianity we call the dead ‘saints’ and in Yorùbá religion we call them ‘ancestors’ ... do we worship our ancestors? I think this word worship does not work well. You know, the Catholics especially are accused of this as well—of worshipping saints like the Virgin Mary ... what I believe is that it comes down to respect. We respect our ancestors because they are wise give us insight and guidance ... they mediate our requests to God just like saints.

Today, Lekan continues to belong to and identify as both an adherent of Christianity and AIR. He does not see these traditions as being contradictory:

You ask me where I belong and how I identify religiously? Yes, I am still a Christian. I go to church and identify as a Christian. I believe that Jesus is God and is our redeemer. He is the saviour of the world. I totally and completely believe this. Now, I am also an African Traditionalist. I follow the Yorùbá system of *Òrìṣà*. I go to my *Babalawo* often and seek guidance. I attend events like *Egúngún* and the *Osun Osogbo* festival. When I am sick I ask my pastor to pray for me, but I also go to herbalists. I believe in our local wisdom for healing. The same goes for the development of what we in Yorùbáland call our *Iwa*. This is our character and who we are in our community. I believe both the Bible and our Yorùbá traditions and proverbs help me to become a better man of God ... there is a fullness to combining these systems. They are, I believe, seamless and provide Africans access to God on our own terms and in our own understanding.

While Lekan is dedicated to the Yorùbá ‘spirit of accommodation’, he realises that some in Yorùbáland are opposed to his approach:

There are some—especially leaders in churches in Ogbómòsó who frown upon this religious mixing. They want the boundaries to be upheld and to have an exclusive access to spiritual truth and God. I think that the Yorùbá being tolerant has actually resulted in a bit of a problem. We have let in other traditions that are exclusionary and want to get rid of our traditional religion ... the answer that I and many are coming to is that there is another way. Christianity and Islam can be accommodating toward Yorùbá religion. As I have demonstrated, these religions can coexist peacefully. Many that are my age or younger are starting to understand that we must preserve our heritage. We are starting to take back our history, but of course we are doing this within these other systems. Islam and Christianity are here to stay, which is

wonderful because they have so much to offer in wisdom and development of character. But we must be careful going forward to retain our own traditions.

During the 2012 Ogbómòsò *Egúngún* Festival, Lekan and I travelled around the city together participating in different events. He took the festival very seriously, while also enjoying the artistic and social elements. In one particular conversation, we discussed the large population of Baptists in the area and how some pastors have discouraged their members from attending AIR festivals like *Egúngún*:

The Baptists have been especially critical of *Egúngún*. They do not like it and they say so from the pulpit. The Baptist preachers tell their members that they will lose their membership if they are caught at *Egúngún*. Can you imagine? What we have here is a misunderstanding. They see *Egúngún* as being some kind of devil inspired experience, but they are the people who have never been. They are going off of rumours ... but many, many Baptists go to *Egúngún* and many go to see *Babalawo*. They just don't tell their pastor about it! Now, these are not all Traditionalists. If I celebrate Ramadan with my friends, does this make me Muslim? If a Muslim joins in a Christmas feast does this make them Christian? No, of course not. Festivals promote community and bond us together.

Lekan's experience reveals not only a family, but also a community that is often surreptitiously involved in multiple religious traditions. It also provides insight into how Christianity is viewed by some as compatible with AIR. In Lekan's experience, many in Ogbómòsò believe this and belong to and identify on some level with both religious traditions. He hopes that some of this secrecy can be mitigated in the future by providing the public with better education about AIR.

Zaria

Zaria is a Yorùbá woman and university student in her early twenties whom I met at the 2012 Ogbómòsò *Egúngún* Festival. She was born in Ogbómòsò and has lived there her entire life. She is studying for a degree in Biochemistry at Ladoké Akintola University of Technology (LAUTECH) and has a part-time job at a nearby

clothing shop. She considers herself to be poor, but her economic standard of living is supplemented by her family and helps to provide for her basic needs and beyond. After meeting Zaria in 2012, we have kept in contact by email and phone. The following narrative is based on a series of conversations and semi-structured interviews I conducted with Zaria in 2012. It reveals the case of a young woman who identifies as Muslim, but also believes in the power of AIR traditions, rituals, and medicines.

As Zaria describes it, her religious upbringing was similar to other Muslim families in the Ogbómòsò area:

I have been a Muslim as long as I can remember. I confessed at a very young age and my parents enrolled me in Arabic classes from the start. By the time I was twelve, I had read the entire Qur'an in Arabic. This is uncommon, as most Muslims do not know Arabic here. They memorise a few lines and that is it ... my parents were always devoted in their faith. My father went on *hajj* when I was in primary school with his father ... my mother was strict in her religion. She expected our family to take Islam very seriously. Our world revolved around our faith and our community. Of course, we lived next to Christians and Traditionalists also who were in our community and everyone was friends with each other. There were never any problems between us.

Zaria's religious experience was altered significantly when she became very ill at the age of 15. Her parents took her to a hospital where she was diagnosed with malaria. During the coming days she took malaria medication, but her situation worsened. They took her back to the hospital and they realised they had misdiagnosed Zaria's condition, but could not figure out what was wrong with her. Her parents were terrified that their daughter might die and they asked around their neighbourhood for advice. A close family friend suggested that they visit a local *Babalawo* who was renowned as an herbalist and was recognised for his success as an *Awo Olodu* (type of diviner devoted to *Ifá*):

I had never known my family to be involved with traditional religion. We

never went to the festivals, but we had friends who participated ... when I was 15 my illness presented a dilemma to my parents and they were advised by a close friend to visit a *Babalawo*. I remember them discussing what that might mean. They prayed and prayed for a solution. I remember they decided against informing our Muslim spiritual leader because he might disapprove. I was so very ill that I did not protest. I was strong in my Muslim faith, yet I was afraid of death and had heard of the power of traditional priests. My parents came to discuss this with me and they came to the conclusion that seeing a priest was not out of sync with Islam or the will of *Allah*. So it was my illness that brought about our first experience with traditional Yoruba religion.

At the meeting with the *Babalawo*, Zaria and her family were surprised at how open he was to their troubles and experience:

The priest wanted to hear about our troubles. We told him that we were Muslim and had prayed and went to the hospital, but nothing seemed to work. He told us how *Orunmilá* had granted our people the mysteries of *Olódùmarè*, who is God almighty, the creator and the same as *Allah* in the Quran. These mysteries contained the knowledge and wisdom that would heal me. He said we had no reason to be ashamed of visiting him—that our traditions are linked to the Abrahamic religions ... during the session he prayed to *Èsù* to mediate between us and the *Òrìṣà*. *Èsù* has the power to increase the power of the medicines ... I remember when he was preparing the herbal concoction he used the name *Osain* who is in charge of traditional herbalism. So I took the herbs and I was immediately healed. I had no pain or soreness in me ... this was surprising to my family and we were shaken from the experience. I was walking on my own for the first time in so many weeks. The *Babalawo* then performed a divination of blessing and destiny. He used an *opele* [*Ifá* divination chain] along with the *Odù Ifá* texts. This is sacred to me, but I can tell you that I knew my time of trouble was not over. It was divined that more troubles were coming and my family needed to trust in our traditional wisdom to get through it.

As Zaria recalls, exactly one year after she was healed, her mother was struck with a similar illness. However, instead of taking her to the hospital, they took her straight to the *Babalawo*. Unfortunately, he was away from Ogbómòsò and would not return for two days. However, due to Zaria's divination the year before, the family believed it was best to wait for him to return:

We did not go to the hospital because we did not believe it would help my mother. I went to the hospital and I was misdiagnosed, but the *Babalawo* healed me completely. We trusted in this and believed that the two-day wait

was a test ... my mother's condition worsened, but after two days the *Babalawo* came to our home. We had not told him to come while he was away, but he still came ... once again, like me, my mother was healed and we continued going back to him [the *Babalawo*]. If we did not believe before, we believed at that moment that *Allah* was working for our benefit in our own traditions.

After these two events, Zaria and her family began visiting the *Babalawo* on a regular basis, but only surreptitiously. They were afraid that some people in their community, and especially the Imam at their local mosque, would disapprove. From Zaria's perspective, this created an identity crisis:

We had never stopped being Muslim. We were always Muslim and continue to be. Now, some in our community believe that to be Muslim one cannot participate in traditional rituals. They believe these rituals go against the teachings in the Quran ... for many years this meant that we only go to the *Babalawo* in secret, in private, you see, and would not tell even other family. For me this was difficult, very difficult because I started to question my own identity as a Muslim. I started to think about the possibility they were right about it. Our *Babalawo* was very good to us though and counseled our family on how to handle this trouble ... he divined to us that we would be lights in our community and work to heal wounds between different groups in Yorùbáland. We have accepted this and now work carefully to tell others about our story and the power of *Ifá*.

One of the ways in which Zaria and her family have become more open about their religious life is by openly attending the Ogbómòsó *Egúngún* festival each year. The festival has provided an avenue to participate in an event that many in Ogbómòsó consider to be of historical and communal importance. As Zaria sees it:

Egúngún is a wonderful event because it is not only a religious event. It is a true festival with celebrating and dancing and eating together. It is a community event. The whole community is invited to attend and many Muslims and Christians come ... some people come secretly though. They are afraid of how others may view them, but we come openly ... for me the *Egúngún* reconnects me with my ancestral heritage, you understand? Just as I venerate the prophets of Islam, like Muhammad (pbuh) or Jesus (pbuh), we have our own Yorùbá prophets. Why should we not celebrate them and pray to them, just like in Islam and Christianity? There is nothing in these religions that keep us from venerating our ancestors ... at the *Egúngún*, I feel like I am participating in my own history. It is not an Arab or Western creation. No. *Egúngún* is Yorùbá and I am Yorùbá. So anyone who is Yorùbá

and in fact anyone from anywhere is able to participate. But we as Yorùbá use it as a way to remember our past, come together as a community, and look forward to our future ... our future is one that I hope includes a complete and open embrace of *Egúngún* and other traditional events.

While Zaria openly attends the Ogbómòsò *Egúngún* festival each year, there are many other ways that her religious belonging and identity is hidden from others in the community. For instance, many of Zaria's friends and family are unaware of certain aspects of her religious life:

I have friends who I have never spoken about such things. They would be after me telling me that I am a bad Muslim and that I am following the wrong path ... they think I was simply healed by normal, western medicine, so they don't know the real story ... I know that for many, being a Muslim means staying away from traditional religion, but for me, I see truth within our traditions and believe that Islam is not contradictory. I tell some people when I sense they are open to my story, but keep quiet around others ... in Ogbómòsò there is still some danger of getting into trouble for mixing religious traditions. This is against the Yorùbá way though because the Yorùbá tradition is meant to be open to truth wherever you find it. We have this saying here that says: 'If your *Òrìṣà* does not listen to you when you praise it, or does not help you when you hold it up, then you must throw it away'. Both Islam and traditional religion have worked for me and my family. I am both Muslim and a Traditionalist. I am both and both embody truth. Why would I throw either away?

At the time of the 2012 Ogbómòsò *Egúngún* Festival, during which much of this conversation took place, Zaria noted that neither she nor her family had experienced any marginalisation for their religious practices and beliefs. However, in February 2014 I received an email from Zaria that she had told a cousin from Ìbàdàn and that he was furious. In the coming months, Zaria informed me that this cousin had come to Ogbómòsò and confronted their family. He threatened to tell the clerics at their local mosque and warned them they risked going to hell for their actions. Some days after this confrontation, their home was vandalised during the night. As Zaria recalls:

I think it was probably youths that were paid off by our cousin. He was trying to scare us and get us to see his way. We asked him, but he denied that it was him ... our house was painted and a few items were broken, but nothing

valuable ... they drew big 'X's' with the paint and sketched out this phrase ... 'Return to Islam' and put the confession of faith on our door, you know, this *shahādah* ... they were quiet and we didn't even realise what had happened until the next morning.

In the months since this event, Zaria and her family have been more careful about whom they share the fullness of their religious life and story with. Zaria expressed how frustrating the situation is, but she is more aware than ever of the religious tension that exists in Yorùbáland. Yet, even in the midst of tension, Zaria recognises that the multireligious composition of Ogbómòsò also provides a fertile context for religious experimentation and reinvention: 'We have many different faiths and traditions all vying for a seat at the table. This creates tension like anywhere. Sometimes this is public and sometimes not ... it also creates an interesting and complicated religious life that creates new ways of being religious, much of this exists below the surface like in my case ... you just have to know where and how to look for it'.

Monifa

Monifa is a Yorùbá woman and university student in her mid-twenties whom I met at the 2011 Ogbómòsò *Egúngún* Festival. She was born nearby in Osun State, but has lived in Ogbómòsò since she was thirteen years old. She is currently finishing up her degree in African Church Music from the Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary (NBTS) in Ogbómòsò. While working on her degree, she also works at a nearby Baptist church in their music programme. She considers herself to have an economically moderate standard of living. After meeting Monifa in 2011, we met together many times and have stayed in touch by email and phone. The following narrative is based on a series of conversations and semi-structured

interviews I conducted with Monifa in 2011 and 2012. It reveals the case of a young woman who grew up as a Christian (Baptist) around multiple religious traditions and now belongs to and identifies with multiple Christian and AIR groups and traditions.

From Monifa's perspective, her religious upbringing was normal considering the context of Yorùbáland:

I knew that some disapproved of indigenous practices for instance and I knew about the history of missionaries basically forcing people to convert, but I never applied this to my own experience. You see my parents were followers of *Ifá* ... they were indigenous worshippers and they participated in the Yoruba traditional events. But for me, now my auntie was staying with us from a very young age ... my auntie would bring me to church with her ... it was much more exciting at the time compared to some dirty traditional hut. I liked the music and dancing and my parents encouraged me in this. They liked that the church provided community and strong moral foundations for youths. They never had any protest ... when I was eight years old I was baptised in our town in Osun State at a Baptist church ... I never really connected with the religion of my parents growing up. I knew they prayed and to me they seemed to be just as Christian as anyone I knew at church.

When Monifa was 13 years old she moved with her family to Ogbómòsò. While the move itself was only around 70 miles away, the new Baptist church she began attending with her auntie was quite different:

They would openly preach against traditional religion, the religion of our forefathers. It was seen to be a pest that wouldn't go away and that ate away at the spiritual flesh of Christians. Instead of recognising the wisdom to be found in Yorùbá proverbs, they were spoken against as misleading and a crutch for the weak ... they preached that the only proverbs we needed were the Proverbs, as in the book of Proverbs, and the only wisdom we needed was in the Bible ... I remember talking to my parents about what the preacher was saying and they would just ask questions. They were letting me figure it out on my own. My old church would often use Yorùbá proverbs on Sunday mornings and point to Yorùbá principles that relate to Biblical ones. This new message was confusing to me, but I kept attending because I liked the people and friends I had there. It was a wonderful community even if I might have disagreed or felt confused by some of the teachings. This is important to point out because a church is not just its pastor or priest. You can't judge a church just by what the leaders are saying. Many people disagree or don't understand some teachings, but they choose to stay for a lot of different reasons.

While Monifa continued to attend the Baptist church with her auntie, when she was around 16 years of age she also began attending other Christian services and events with her friends. In particular, she became attracted to Pentecostal churches like the Redeemed Christian Church of God:

You know in Ogbómòsó we may be members of one church, but we go to many churches. It is not uncommon to go to church on Sunday, then a Bible study on Tuesday, a revival on Wednesday, and a prayer service on Friday. They say if you are not in church at least two or three times a week then you are not taking your faith seriously enough ... I enjoyed the Pentecostal churches, especially the Redeemed church, because of the connection I felt with God through the music and the dancing.

When Monifa was 19 years of age she enrolled at the University of Ìbàdàn. She studied there for two years and during that time she became involved with a church called 'The African Spiritualist Church'. Monifa was particularly attracted to this church due to the way Christianity was rooted in an African approach:

The African Spiritualist Church is what they called it. The Church was Pentecostal and the focus was primarily on the Spirit of God and receiving the fire of the Holy Spirit, along with spirit filled gifts ... I was gifted with tongues and received visions from God for the first time in my life ... what was unique to me was the way that the church spoke about Christianity. The pastor believed that Christianity represented a new way of following our Yorùbá religion and traditions. This appealed to me because of my parents and the way they were open to me being Christian. The pastor taught that nothing was new under the sun and that the Christian God is the same as *Olódùmarè*. He even used *Olódùmarè* as the word for God ... He spoke about Jesus as our greatest ancestor and how we share in his blood through his sacrifice and through his bond with humanity. We are kin of Jesus ... even the *Òrìṣà*'s can be seen as similar as angels or saints in Christianity. These are merely refractions of *Olòrún* who is the ruler of the heavens in Yorùbá tradition. Basically, Yorùbá religion is a forerunner of Christianity and they come from the same source of wisdom and knowledge.

After two years at the University of Ìbàdàn, Monifa returned to Ogbómòsó. She had been unsure what degree she wanted to pursue, so she felt it best to take a break and figure it out before going forward. She relates this move to a religious experience at the African Spiritualist Church she was attending:

I was already thinking about moving back to Ogbómòsò. I was unhappy with not having an aim in my studies—I was floundering without direction. At my church one day, not a Sunday, this was a prayer service on a Friday I believe, yes, I fell into a trance. I was praying and singing, crying out to God for guidance and blessing and my body became very heavy, but my mind and spirit felt light and separated from my body. There was light all around and ... God then revealed to me a vision and in the vision I was chosen to be a light to the Baptists. I was shown to be a bridge between the Traditionalist communities and the Baptists. Now because Ogbómòsò is so important for the Baptists, I knew that God wanted me to move home ... this was confirmation of what I was already feeling for some time before that night.

Upon moving back to Ogbómòsò, Monifa returned to the Baptist church she had once attended with her auntie. She knew that she would once again encounter teachings and beliefs that she disagreed with, but she planned to transform the church as an insider. This same approach led her to enrol at NBTS as a music student. As Monifa describes it:

So many in Nigeria, we disregard what we do not know ... the religious people we are the worst at this. Not wanting to be around those who disagree with us. But if we do this we can never help each other ... I went back to the Baptists not because I agree with them, but for the people. I care about them and I am willing to put aside my beliefs at times and bear up under the difficulty of a different approach in order to influence them from inside their own church.

While she claims to have been largely accepted by her former church, Monifa's experience at NBTS has been more mixed. Yet, when visiting other Baptist churches in the area, many laypeople have been open to her perspective on the relationship between Christianity and AIR:

I knew there would be some bit of difficulty at the seminary. My religious experience is preached directly against there, so I have to be careful sharing my full story ... I mostly have spoken about my past as an example of a friend ... I tell them I knew this friend who had this past and see how they respond ... some if they found out would seek to get me removed from the seminary. Eventually I have told some of my closest friends at the seminary ... its interesting that it is in the [Baptist] churches that I have visited that many have a similar story to me. They also struggle to be open with even their friends and families like me ... most commonly people visit diviners and herbalists and as Christians they participate in multiple denominations ...

they often identify with different parts of each denomination like I do.

Beyond reconnecting to her Baptist roots, when Monifa returned to Ogbómòsò she also became more involved in AIR rituals and events such as the *Egúngún* Festival.

This decision was heavily influenced by her experience at the African Spiritualist Church in Ìbàdàn, as well as her relationship with her parents. As Monifa recalls:

Like I said, I came home from Ìbàdàn and was convinced I had been called by God to be this bridge between Christian and Traditional communities. My church in Ìbàdàn opened me up to thinking about religion in a whole new way ... I became convinced that the Christian God is the same as the Nigerian God and the Christian angels and saints the same as Nigerian, what we call smaller gods ... I told my parents about this new understanding and my parents, they related to me very well. Even though they do not go to any church or pastor, they consider themselves to be Christian because of these connections I noted earlier ... they have helped me understand this way of thinking and have been very encouraging toward me and my calling ... one of the biggest changes was that I started going to see an *Ifá* diviner and *Babalawo* and going to festivals, like *Egúngún* ... I go to the diviner for guidance and blessing. I see some diviners as being anointed by God, the same as pastors or priests or even imams. Not all of them though. Of course some of them are out to take advantage ... the *Egúngún* festival has become one of my favorite times of the year because it reminds us of our past and guides us into our future ... we have been so silly to disregard our ancestors like many do today, but some of that is changing ... our ancestors are like Jesus and the saints, like Mary or the Apostles. We can pray to them for direction and wisdom. They work as mediators between us and God. I go to *Egúngún* to take advantage of this mediation and to request prayer for our community and world.

In early 2012 I met with Monifa again to discuss her religious life. In particular, I was curious to know how she identified and what groups she considered herself to belong to. She responded as follows:

I am so many things and belong to so many things. We as humans are such complex beings, so what else can you expect? No one can be just one thing because we are influenced by everything around us ... this is not a bad thing, it just is ... I would say I identify as a Christian, but also as a Baptist and a Spiritualist ... I believe strongly in the power of the Holy Spirit. In a way, I belong to all of these as well, of course some would disagree if they knew about me ... I can identify as a Traditionalist as well and this grounds my experience of Christianity and how I view the Bible and my relationship with God and my ancestors ... one doesn't belong to a church as a Traditionalist,

but I would say I belong to the teachings of my *Ifá* diviner and *Babalawo*, just like one would to a priest or pastor.

Monifa's experience reveals how Ogbómòsò's multireligious composition can be found even within a single family. Multiple religious influences throughout her life have led to a complex and fluid religious identity and belonging. Additionally, Monifa admits that while Yorùbáland is largely peaceful on the surface, this is in part due to surreptitious beliefs and behaviours. As these conversations make clear, she is convinced that she must tread lightly in order to avoid potential consequences.

Afolabi

Afolabi is a Yorùbá man and business owner in his early thirties whom I met at the 2012 Ogbómòsò *Egúngún* Festival. He was born in Ogbómòsò and has lived there his entire life. He is also married and has three children. He considers himself to have an economically high standard of living. After meeting Afolabi in 2012, we met together two other times and have stayed in contact by email and phone. The following narrative is based on a series of conversations and semi-structured interviews I conducted with Afolabi in 2012. It reveals the case of a young man who grew up in an AIR family. After an experience at a Pentecostal revival, he appropriated elements of Christianity (such as the salvific character of Jesus) into his practice of AIR and now claims to be a follower of Jesus, but does not belong to any church or identify as Christian.

According to Afolabi, his religious upbringing was quite untypical for the Ogbómòsò area:

I grew up at a time when everyone was converting to Christianity. All of my friends at school went to church or were Muslim, but I was a rare one to only follow traditional religion ... my mother and father were devout in their practice of *Ifá*. They would tell me that our traditions and cultures were

enough and that if you take the new religions, then you take their way of life. They were hesitant because they did not want to give up so much, to give away their way of life, you see ... we were one of the few families who stayed in our ways. All around us people were changing and adapting to new circumstances, but we stayed true to our history and heritage.

As Afolabi recalls, he would regularly take part in divination rituals and attend festivals throughout southwest Nigeria. Of particular importance to his family was the Ogbómòsò *Egúngún* Festival:

The *Egúngún* is very important to my family. We see that our ancestors are the key to us having a good life. So we speak to them and honour them at the *Egúngún* ... at the festival all of our family would come together, even those Muslims and Christians ... [although] some of them refused to attend in later years. It is a family event and our ancestors are pleased when more of the family is present ... [the festival] is also a cultural event, you see, where we relive our history and culture. This is very important for understanding where we come from and who we are as a people, the Yorùbá, and as Africans ... without the *Egúngún* people will slowly forget ... people forget what makes them Yorùbá or African.

The community did not always accept Afolabi's commitment to AIR, however. He was criticised at times and many attempted to convince him to give up AIR and follow Christianity or Islam. Afolabi recounted one moment in particular that occurred at his school when he was 15 years of age:

At school there were rumours going around about my family and our religious practices. They said we were cult worshippers. They said that I followed a blood religion, a religion that required blood, even human blood to appease our ancestors. These false rumours were meant to put fear in me and cause a weakness in my devotion ... these people did not want to understand our religion. They used fear as a means of power. This is the same as the colonial powers. This is the problem with these foreign religions. They are not often rooted in African concerns and African understandings.

Despite these tensions, Afolabi was interested in these 'foreign religions' and in particular, Christianity. By the time he entered university, he began attending Christian events intermittently. As Afolabi admits, this was without the knowledge of his parents:

No, no, I could not inform my parents at the time. They would not have been proud of me ... my parents are from an old way of thinking. They would be disappointed that I was giving up our traditions, so I kept it from them ... you know, in Ogbómòsò, this is common to us. There is tension just below the surface that no one will want to discuss, but it is there and it causes hidden agendas and activities. We act like we are a big family, the Yorùbá, but this is not really the case so much. We lie to make it so.

Afolabi was particularly intrigued by the Pentecostal revivals he attended. According to him, while they were Christian in origin, the events were rooted in African traditions and practices:

I remember the first [Pentecostal] revival I attended, uh huh. It was my first year of university and I felt bad for deceiving my parents, but I went anyway ... I had to discover for myself what this Jesus was all about ... so I found that the way the Pentecostals practised their worship was not so unlike our traditional ways. Dancing in a trance way, you see, and speaking with the tongues of the spirits, uh huh. So these were not unfamiliar to me as a Traditionalist. We have forms of these in our history, you see? So to me, the Pentecostals really come out of the foundation of our religions [AIR].

Even as he attended Christian events, he continued to belong to and identify primarily with AIR. While the story of Jesus fascinated him and compelled him to keep attending, he never felt the need to convert to Christianity:

I never left my religion. I still practise my religion ... all throughout my youth people would tell me about Jesus. They would say how everyone needs Jesus, he is the saviour of man ... now I was experiencing Jesus, but as a Traditionalist. Why would I convert to Christianity if I can have Jesus in my own religion? Christianity has its own culture and history that is different from my own. Jesus has no boundaries like this, you know? Jesus can be found in any religion.

Yet, while Afolabi claims to have never switched religions, when he was twenty-two years of age he recalls having experienced a miraculous event at a Pentecostal revival:

I had gone to my *Babalawo* some days before ... it was a stressful time in my life with my job and school. I was seeking direction, you see? So this *Babalawo* read the divinations and one phrase struck me. It let me know that Jesus was in our history, he is our greatest ancestor ... that very same week, I can remember, I went to this spirit church, a Pentecostal church. It was there

I encountered Jesus in the flesh. Can you believe it? Jesus appeared to me as I was dancing and singing. He said to me, 'Take me back' ... this lasted only seconds and it was over. So, I asked myself, what does this mean, take me back? I went back to the same *Babalawo* and requested a divination, uh huh, to confirm this question ... he read aloud the wisdom and I was struck. This reading too confirmed that Jesus too is our greatest ancestor.

Soon after this encounter with Jesus, Afolabi stopped attending Pentecostal events.

As he puts it, 'There was no longer any need. Jesus is not unique to Christianity.'

Today, Afolabi sees Jesus as the centre of AIR. While the name 'Jesus' is not used historically, he believes those following AIR should reinterpret their traditions and practices with Jesus as the centre of the story. For instance, as Afolabi explained:

You see, I will talk about the Yoruba because that is what I know, but it is true for all African religions [AIR]. Our religion came before Christianity. It is a foreteller. Now, we use words to describe the supernatural just like in Christianity. For gods or deities, we call these *Òrìṣà's*. These are angels and demons in Christianity ... for saints we call these *egun*. These are the spirits of the departed who watch over us in life. As I see it, Jesus is the greatest *egun*. I honour Jesus because he watches over me, over all of us ... Jesus, I see him, as like *Orunmilá*. *Orunmilá* gave us wisdom through the *Ifa* wisdom. It is our gospel, but it is incomplete without seeing *Orunmilá* as Jesus. This is what I gained during my time with the Pentecostals ... some say that *Orunmilá* is even the son of *Olòrún*. This would be like Jesus being the son of God the Father. This is how I see it.

While attending the 2012 Ogbómòsò *Egúngún* Festival, I spent several days with Afolabi. During that time, he expanded upon his belief of Jesus as the greatest ancestor and told me how this impacted his religious practice:

What Jesus as our greatest ancestor means, yes, I will tell you. Jesus is not limited to any religion or people group. If Jesus is not my ancestor, I cannot pray to him for blessing, for protection, or for salvation, right? I have no business doing so. But if Jesus is my ancestor, then I can and I must. Jesus has no ethnicity or race. He is not European or American or African. The salvation he offers is for the entire human race ... this was talked about in the Bible, but people ignore it. In Galatians [3:28] it speaks about how no race, ethnicity, status, or gender keeps one outside of the gospel. The same goes for religion. There is nothing new about Christianity except for Jesus ... the same God in our religions [AIR] is the one in Christianity. Again, in the book of Acts [14:17] it says that 'God did not leave himself without a witness.' What Christianity has offered us is Jesus, but we can take Jesus, but keep

practising our religions [AIR].

Soon after the 2012 festival, I met with Afolabi again to discuss his religious life. In particular, I was curious to know how he identified and what groups he considered himself to belong to. He responded as follows:

Well, I am an African Traditionalist, as you know. This means that I follow religions that were born in the soil of Africa. Now, I see myself as belonging to *Ifá*, which is of Yorùbá origin. I myself am Yorùbá, so this is what I follow. *Ifá* contains the wisdom of God, but it is not the only wisdom ... Jesus [as] taught in the Bible is also important to me. I am not a Christian like other Christians, but I would say that I follow Jesus. Jesus fits into our traditions as I have told you, so there is no need for me to go to church ... I do not belong to any church. They teach non-African ways at some churches and I am African. I cannot belong to a religion that teaches me to give away my African identity. The same goes for Islam. Islam is an Arab religion. I am not Arab, so why would I be in Islam? No, these religions have some wisdom, but we take this wisdom and use it for African purposes.

According to Afolabi, his inclusion of Jesus within AIR causes problems on occasion. He claims to have had his house vandalised several times and is regularly accused of causing problems in the community:

Some in Ogbómòsò do not feel the way that I do, although many are fine. There are some who will remain nameless here that believe it is impossible to combine Jesus with our religions [AIR]. Some of them preach against me and say that I am trying to trick people, that I have been tricked by the devil himself ... Ogbómòsò, as I told you, is not as clean as it may appear. We do well in lying to ourselves, but this keeps many things hidden ... I have even been vandalised [referring to his property] many times for my beliefs. They will say I am causing problems and pay youths to scare me into converting. It seems that our traditions are at risk of survival because of foreign religions.

Afolabi's experience reveals how the encounter of Christianity with AIR in Ogbómòsò has produced complex religious belongings and identities. While he has identified and belonged to AIR throughout his life, his participation in Pentecostal events at university was formative and led to the inclusion of the character of Jesus within his religious beliefs and practices. Additionally, these conversations reveal some of the tension that exists between religious groups in Ogbómòsò.

Oni

Oni is a Yorùbá woman, mother of three, and a business owner in her early thirties. We met at the 2011 Ogbómòsò *Egúngún* Festival. She was born in Lagos, but her parents were originally from Ogbómòsò and they moved back when she was five years of age. She has lived in Ogbómòsò ever since. She owns a clothing store with her husband, Ibrahim. She considers herself to have an economically moderate standard of living. After meeting Oni in 2011 we have met together several times and have stayed in touch by email. The following narrative is based on a series of conversations and semi-structured interviews I conducted with Oni in 2011 and 2012. It reveals the case of a woman who was raised by a Muslim father and a Christian mother and how she now views herself as a bridge between these two religious traditions.

According to Oni, her religious upbringing was typical of living in the Ogbómòsò area:

We are all very religious in Ogbómòsò. To be religious is very normal for us ... my father is Muslim and my mother is Christian. This too is very normal for us. We in Ogbómòsò often have people from many religions in a single family. You may have an Uncle that is Christian and a father that follows our traditional religions [AIR] ... In Ogbómòsò we call this our triple heritage ... finding many religions in one family, in one compound or set of houses, this happens all over the city.

Interestingly, Oni's parents decided to raise their sons as Muslims and their daughters as Christians. According to Oni, this is also very common and she claims to have had many friends who shared a similar experience:

In my own family, my brothers went with my father [to mosque] ... my sister and I went to church with my mother. At a young age I did not question this because there were so many men at the mosque and rarely a girl. It seemed like a place for men ... [at] the church there were men, but many more women. We felt comfortable there and we liked the exciting environment ... I know many friends who were also raised in this way, with the men going to

mosque and the women to church. I think this is what often happens.

Her brothers, however, were often begging to attend church. Oni and her sisters would tell their brothers stories of the singing, dancing, and games they played at church. According to Oni, they felt they were being punished. Eventually, their father relented and allowed them to start attending church under the condition that they also go to mosque on Friday:

This funny thing happened with my brothers. I have two of them. They so wanted to go to church, okay, and they begged my father to let them. They complained that the mosque was so boring and not a place for children, uh huh, that the churches were fun and exciting ... they even said they felt like they were being punished because they could not go to church. Can you believe it? So my father finally allowed them to attend church, but they had to also go to mosque every Friday ... there were many who felt this way ... my brothers were not the only Muslim boys going to church.

When I asked Oni how she felt about her brothers attending both church and mosque, she commented:

This is not too strange in Ogbómòsó. Like I said there were others and even the pastor knew about them ... we saw Christianity and Islam in almost the same way. Even if church was a more exciting environment, I had no prejudice against Islam. They come from the same tradition and we believed both Muslims and Christians followed the same God.

During her time at university, Oni's religious upbringing and beliefs were questioned and criticised on a number of occasions. She recalls one experience vividly:

My friends and I were at this [Christian] event on campus. It was put together by a university club. There was a normal format with singing and a sermon ... [the event] was part of a revival that lasted for five days ... at the last night there was a prayer session for a very long time. It was during that time my friends confronted me. They criticised my Christian faith, saying that they were afraid I was going to hell for having a Muslim father ... I was furious and I told them to tell me line by line what was wrong with my faith. They questioned my belief that Muslims worship the same God. I told them to prove to me that they didn't. They said nothing, but that remained difficult on our friendship.

During another occasion, Oni claims to have been accused of 'confusing up

religions' from a woman she barely knew:

Ah, there was this woman, I was still in university, and she came to me. She was a Muslim, I could tell by her dress. She says, you are confusing up religions [*sic*] and causing problems for all of us here in Ogbómòsò. I asked, why, why are you saying this to me ... this woman, I did not even know her ... we met once or twice before, okay? This woman she said that having many religions in one family was a disgrace and caused confusion for children like me ... [she said] that we did not have our head on right because we could not decide which religion to follow.

According to Oni, the tense relationship between religious groups in Ogbómòsò is due to a power struggle over resources. She also believes this tension has been rising in recent years as there have been fewer and fewer AIR followers:

Now, I will tell you I believe it is all about resources. These can be human or material resources. Religious groups need these to operate and expand and for very long in Nigeria, they found these through converting the Traditionalists ... of course this could only last for so long and they are now turning to converting each other. There are not many Traditionalists left, you see? This is causing tension in Ogbómòsò, but not like in the North, what you see there is different ... our tension in Ogbómòsò still exists and my experiences are like many others in the area.

While Oni was still in university she met and married a fellow student, Ibrahim. Ibrahim is a Muslim and was raised under similar circumstances with a Christian mother and a Muslim father. This shared experience bonded them together as friends and within six months they were married. According to Oni, their marriage is intended to assist in 'bridging the divide' between religious groups in Ogbómòsò:

It is no coincidence that we got married. Our backgrounds were so very similar to each other and we believe God brought us together for a purpose. Like our parents who came before us, we have a unique marriage of religion ... me from Christianity and Ibrahim a Muslim. So our marriage that God put together for a purpose, this purpose is in bridging the divide between our communities, between Muslims and Christians especially ... with so much violence and loss of life at the hands of the religious in Nigeria, there needs to be a change ... our marriage is part of that change.

Despite this hope of change, Oni and Ibrahim claim to have been marginalised for their interreligious marriage on occasion. As Oni recalled:

Yes, we have been cast off and isolated at times. Some in our community do not understand what we are doing in our marriage. Some think I have been forced to marry Ibrahim ... many women in my church have offered to pay to get me out of my marriage because they think I don't have any choice in the matter. This is not the case. No, and Ibrahim has been harassed by other Muslims for having a Christian wife. They say he is a bad Muslim because he does not make me convert and raise our children as Muslim ... the Christians they go after him for stealing a Christian woman. One of them marked up our car with a rock ... [but] nothing serious has happened to us. This is the price we pay for our marriage.

In recent years, Oni and her family have also been attending the Ogbómòsò *Egúngún*

Festival. While Oni had never attended before, Ibrahim's family did on occasion.

The decision to attend is also based upon the hope of 'bridging the divide'. As Oni puts it:

We have thrown away so much of what makes the Yorùbá great. This is part of our problem and what causes so many problems in Nigeria ... this is partly the fault of the British colonisers, but it is also our fault too. We traded everything with the British, including our religion and history and it was thrown away in the process ... there are families like us that are trying to recover this history. That doesn't mean we have to practise and become Traditionalists. No, this is not it. It means we recover what makes us Yorùbá and then try and establish new ways of living and being religious based on what we now know.

For Oni, the *Egúngún* festival is open to all of the religious groups in Ogbómòsò. It is not only for those who consider themselves to belong to or identify as AIR. As she has come to understand in recent years, ancestor veneration should be part of both Christian and Muslim belief and practise:

Our *Egúngún* festival is a celebration of our ancestors and our future. We venerate our ancestors because they have established the path before us ... we do it to thank them and ask for their wisdom going forward into the future. They serve as an in-between God and us. When I pray to my ancestors, do you think I confuse them with God? No, this is silly nonsense. When a Catholic prays to a saint, are they mistaking the saint for God? Or ... yes, a Muslim who prays to Muhammad, is Muhammad God? No, those who know us best and are the wisest among us should be appealed to in times of blessing and crises ... I believe all religious groups in Ogbómòsò should take part in this event [the *Egúngún* festival].

In a follow-up meeting after the 2011 Ogbómòsò *Egúngún* Festival, Oni and I met together to discuss her current religious life. In particular, I was curious to learn how she identified and what groups she considered herself to belong to. She responded as follows:

Ahh, you are asking how I see myself? Yes? Okay, this is not an easy question to answer. First, I can say that I am a Christian. I have been a Christian for my whole life ... I belong to my church, I regularly attend meetings, you see? But it is not that simple, as you know. My husband, Ibrahim, is a Muslim, and one of our children goes to mosque with him. Our other two children go to church with me. My husband's faith is part of me. I respect him and believe that we worship the same God, so part of me relates to Islam. There are so many common, eh, ideas between Islam and Christianity, though they are also different ... I am not a Muslim, but I have a relationship with Islam. Does that make sense? It is part of me through my husband and my father ... I am also not a Traditionalist, I do not follow *Ifá* or any *Òrìṣà*, okay? But I have a relationship with our traditional religions and culture. I believe that our religions [AIR] were right about our ancestors and the respect we should give them ... I am many things, but these are all part of the Yorùbá way of being inclusive and seeking after divine wisdom.

Oni's experience reveals how a multireligious family manages to negotiate life in Ogbómòsò. While this experience has been mostly peaceful, there have been times of tension and even conflict. Regardless, in Oni and Ibrahim's case, they have continued the multireligious composition of their family by choosing to marry outside of their own primary religious belonging and identity. However, as my conversation with Oni about her religious belonging and identity made clear, her Christian belonging and identity is part of a larger and complex web of relationships with other religious traditions.

Abdullah

Abdullah is a Yorùbá man and farmer in his late twenties whom I met at the 2011 Ogbómòsò *Egúngún* Festival. He was born in Ogbómòsò and has lived there his entire life. He has completed his secondary school education and taken some

university courses in agricultural science. He works on a large farm as an assistant manager, but does not own any land himself. He considers himself to have an economically low standard of living. After meeting Abdullah in 2011, we met together many times and have stayed in touch by email and phone. The following narrative is based on a series of conversations and semi-structured interviews I conducted with Abdullah in 2011 and 2012. It reveals the case of a young man who grew up in a Muslim family, but now belongs to and identifies with Christianity and AIR.

According to Abdullah, his religious upbringing was typical of living in the Ogbómòsò area:

My family, we were Muslim, like many in Ogbómòsò and in this part of Nigeria. You know, there are many Muslims in this area, so it was accepted. My grandparents were also Muslim. We were told they left their religion [AIR] when they were younger ... my parents never knew any other religion, you see?

Abdullah was aware of other religious groups in the area, but never remembers asking questions about them until he was older. As Abdullah recounted:

In the past we always got along. Muslims and Christians would go to school together with no problem at all. The Traditionalists even. Our family was Muslim, but many families were of many faiths. I can recall Muslims marrying Christians and no one asked any questions ... I did not think to ask questions about Christians or our Yorùbá traditions [AIR]. We were taught that others also followed God. They just did it their own way, but not that this was the wrong way, you know?

Abdullah's family never attended the Ogbómòsò *Egúngún* Festival, however, because they believed that ancestor veneration was *ḥarām*, or sinful. His parents even threatened to keep their children home from school in order to avoid the festival:

The *Egúngún* takes place all over the city and is difficult to stay away from ... completely ... many Muslims continued to go to the festival and my

parents were concerned that we would sneak away from school and join in the festival. They would say we'll keep you at home if you go to *Egúngún* ... they believed that *Egúngún* was *ḥarām*, I think because of the focus on ancestors. They did not believe that good Muslims would be going to these festivals.

When Abdullah was in high school and around 16 years of age, he remembers being intrigued by other religious groups. Many of his friends at school were Christian and they would tell him about their supernatural experiences at church. The stories included healings, speaking in tongues, prophecies, and even people being raised from the dead. Abdullah was amazed by these stories, but he did not dare to ask his parents about Christianity. Instead, he talked to his siblings and especially his older brother:

I was afraid to question my parents. They were very devout in their faith and my questions would have seemed like doubt to them ... my parents were strict with us [children] and we never wanted to disappoint. My father especially could become very angry over religious or political matters ... we [siblings] knew to stay away from conversations that would make him angry ... but we did talk about those stories with each other. I have an older brother that would tell me about how he went to church when he was at university. This made me want to find out for myself if the stories were true.

Abdullah decided not to attend university and instead took technical courses in agricultural science. He noticed how many university graduates in Nigeria did not have a job and he believed that learning technical skills was a safer bet. When he began working and taking courses, he moved out of his parents' home and into a flat with a co-worker. This co-worker identified as a 'Pentecostal Catholic' and they often discussed their religious experiences together:

When I left my parents, I felt some, what you might say, uh, independence, yes. I knew that I finally had the chance to look into other religions and ... to explore my curiosities, you know? I was staying with a co-worker and he was a Christian ... actually he called himself Pentecostal Catholic. I had never heard of this, so this was interesting, very interesting to me ... he told me about some miracles he had witnessed at church ... these were the same as the stories from my school days. And he invited me to go to church with him.

I was still going to mosque with my father on Friday. So I saw him on Friday, said my prayers and went to church on Sunday. I did not tell him anything about it at the time.

The church his co-worker took him to was a Pentecostal church. His co-worker had grown up as a Catholic and still went to confession at a Catholic church, but attended this Pentecostal church each Sunday. According to Abdullah, he experienced a conversion to Christianity that day:

I was afraid to go to this church, but I felt that I must. I had to find out for myself ... we sat near the back because I was uncomfortable. My friend was singing and dancing, but I did not join in ... it was during the sermon that I heard the gospel for the first time ... at least it was the first time I was open to it ... I heard about how Jesus had died for my sins and that as sinners we needed grace and a saviour who was Jesus. We did not have this in Islam and this made sense to me. I had this guilt come over me, you know, and what did I do? The preacher called for us to come forward, those who wanted to repent of our sins, so I came forward. I repented and said prayers to Jesus for the first time. It was a conversion, uh huh. I was leaving behind my way of sin and turning to Jesus to be saved.

Following this conversion to Christianity, Abdullah did not inform his family for over two years. During this time he continued to go to mosque with his father and kept up a religious pretence with most of his friends. Thus, he publicly belonged to a mosque during this time, but surreptitiously went to church and began identifying as Christian. As Abdullah recounts, this was a difficult experience:

Once again I was afraid. I could not tell hardly anyone ... my co-worker and some of my new friends at church, they knew, but no one else. This church was small and no one knew my family ... I told the pastor about my parents, but I did not tell him I was still going to mosque. He would have been angry just like my parents. He said I should be careful when telling them, but I felt trapped. I was convinced that Christianity was true, but I was trapped in a lie and I became depressed even. It was very bad, but I was afraid of my father. I thought he might beat me, or even kill me. I was afraid for my life.

When Abdullah had saved up enough money to be financially independent from his family, he decided to share the news that he was no longer Muslim and had embraced Christianity. He believed this financial independence would allow him to

leave Ogbómòsó if he felt threatened:

I was saving money and when I had enough I brought my Christian friends to meet my parents at their house. I brought them for protection in case my father turned angry ... I told my father that I had went to a church and he immediately started yelling at me. He asked my friends to leave, but they would not ... I told my father about my Christianity and how I no longer believed in Islam. My mother was weeping on the side I remember. She left the room. Now, my father had become very quiet indeed. He looked at me with angry eyes and said I was no longer his son. He said that God had abandoned me and that I would go to hell for my sins ... I was crying, but I stayed strong. I just walked out the door with my friends.

During the following months, Abdullah had no direct contact with his parents. His father forbade his siblings and other family members from contacting him, but his older brother disobeyed. Many of his former friends who were Muslim also stopped talking to him. Before doing so, they would often criticise his switch to Christianity and tell him he was bound for hell. Interestingly, it was during those months that Abdullah was invited to the Ogbómòsó *Egúngún* Festival. He was feeling angry with his family and decided to attend. At the festival, Abdullah claims to once again have had a conversion experience:

The *Egúngún* conversion was very different than my Christian conversion. At the church, the pastor was telling me how I should feel and respond. It was emotional, but I was mostly thinking about how I was missing something in Islam ... [at] *Egúngún* I was seeing a performance, but I was not being preached to. There was something beautiful about the experience. The costumes and the dancing made me feel, I want to say at home in my skin. I felt like I was becoming African for the first time in my life. Like I was converting to being myself, an African, if that makes sense, but not giving up my Christian faith ... I asked my friends that day about what I was seeing and they told me about how ancestors watch over us and protect us. They guide us, but they require our attention. I became convinced this was true and I attended every other day at the festival.

Following the festival, Abdullah went to see his mother in secret. He told her about his experience at the festival and how he believed God was working in his life. His mother was frustrated at him, but not angry. She said she wished he would return to

his previous way of life, but still loved him. His father later found out about the secret visit and sent his older brother to Abdullah with a message:

My brother came to me and said that my father would kill me if I visited my mother again. She had told him about the *Egúngún* and he was even more angry than before ... I have not been with my parents since that day. I see them from a distance maybe, but that is it. All of my friends from before also left me. I have been cast aside from my family and friends, but I have a spiritual family and many friends now. It is difficult, but I feel it is what I must do. I have no other choice.

In a follow-up meeting after the 2011 Ogbómòsò *Egúngún* Festival, Abdullah and I met together to discuss his current religious life. In particular, I was curious to learn how he identified and what groups he considered himself to belong to. He responded as follows:

I say I am a Christian and an African. These are both religious terms, you know? First, I am a Christian because of my belief in Jesus Christ. I do belong to my church. I am a member there. This is where most of my community is and we help each other live a life of faith and perseverance ... I do not claim to be a Traditionalist, but an Africanist, maybe. You know, I go to *Egúngún* every year and I see a Traditional priest or herbalist now and again, but I do not follow everything ... I believe in the Yorùbá wisdom and praying to ancestors, but that is it.

Abdullah's experience reveals how religious switching in Ogbómòsò can have consequences. He felt compelled to live a surreptitious religious life around his family and friends for over two years. The revelation of his religious switching resulted in being ostracised from most of his former community. Abdullah's story also provides concrete evidence of religious switches that have produced multiple religious belongings and identities.

Aisha

Aisha is a Yorùbá woman and nurse in her early thirties whom I met at the 2011 Ogbómòsò *Egúngún* Festival. She was born in Lagos and moved to Ogbómòsò

when she was seven years of age. She has a nursing degree from the School of Nursing and Midwifery at Bowen University. She is also married and has three children. She considers herself to have an economically moderate standard of living. After meeting Aisha in 2011, we have met together twice and stayed in touch by email. The following narrative is based on a series of conversations and semi-structured interviews I conducted with Aisha in 2011 and 2012. It reveals the case of a woman who grew up in a Muslim family, but now belongs to and identifies as Pentecostal and AIR.

According to Aisha, her religious upbringing involved two major stages due to her parents converting from Islam to Christianity when she was ten years of age.

During most of this time, her family lived in Lagos:

Before I was ten, we were a Muslim family, you see, uh huh. We went to mosque, but of course the girls we stayed at home most of the time. The men would go, my father and brothers ... I remember celebrating [Muslim] festivals in Lagos where we lived, but I was very young back then. I do not remember many of those times ... I was a Muslim because of my family. What else was I to do? In Nigeria, you should know, when you live with your parents, you do as they do ... you know, even my name is Muslim. I keep it because it is my name. What can I do?

Upon moving to Ogbómòsò, Aisha recalls that their neighbourhood looked much different than in Lagos. In particular, it had a multireligious composition, while their neighbourhood in Lagos was primarily Muslim:

We moved to Ogbómòsò for my father's work, okay? He was offered this job at LAUTECH. You know it? Yes, so we had no family in Ogbómòsò. None. Okay, and Ogbómòsò looked so different from in Lagos. Lagos was big and dirty and Ogbómòsò was much quieter and peaceful ... where we lived in Lagos was all Muslims ... Ogbómòsò there were many different religions all living together, all together like on one street, you see? All over the city it was this way ... we were Muslims and no one harassed us ... [but] the Christians were very upfront with the gospel. They would come around our house and ask to speak to us about Jesus. The same happened at my school, it was a Christian school.

When Aisha was ten years of age, her father came home from work with an announcement. His announcement was a conversion from Islam to Christianity. The friend from work who had been influential in his decision also accompanied her father. As Aisha recalls of the event:

My father came into our home with a friend ... this was very odd, uh huh. He never came with anyone after his work ... he told us that he had experienced the love and salvation that is only possible through Jesus Christ. Islam was no longer the truth and the family would be required to go to church now ... there was no choice for us, or our mother. It's not possible to say, no. We had to obey my father.

Her father's conversion signalled an abrupt change in their family's life. Some of their family in Lagos refused to speak with them after that day. Her father's brother came to the house and threatened to take away Aisha, her siblings, and her mother. This remained merely a threat, but it was frightening for her nonetheless. Aisha also began attending a local Baptist church with her family. She recalls the strangeness of those first times she went to church:

I had never been to church before, so it was very strange to me. Everything was new. I cannot remember exactly, but we were very out of place. The Christians wore different clothes and we did not know any of the songs. It was very difficult being comfortable there ... I was still young and confused. Why were we going to this place? My mother would keep us quiet and my father came saying to us, hey, why don't you do what you are told?

Over time, however, Aisha adjusted to the new environment. She made new friends and even embraced Christianity by getting baptised at church. The threats from their extended family also dissipated over time. According to Aisha:

I was only ten when my father converted from Islam. I missed my friends more than I missed the religion ... to me it was almost the same, except at the church we would sing and there were more children ... church provided a fun environment for children, not like at mosques. I became a Christian and was baptised at our church ... a few of our family in Lagos started to visit us too. This was maybe a year, or more after it [father's conversion] happened. Most of them we do not talk to still. They believe we have betrayed them. They believe we are apostates and should be cast out of their community ... this is

so we may repent and come back to Islam. They shame us to bring us back.

When Aisha was 16, her family's life was drastically altered when her father was killed in a roadway accident. This tragic event led to an economic crisis in her family, which included selling their home and moving in with friends:

You know, this was very, very difficult for us. My father was the one bringing money into the family. Uh huh, so without my father we were without money ... my mother, she would be crying at night. My sisters, we could hear her and we were afraid ... our house was sold and this meant we all lived in a single room. Can you imagine? All of us together. This is what it was like.

It was this economic crisis that Aisha believes led her mother to marry again within a year of her father's death. Her mother's new husband was Pentecostal and he required Aisha and her siblings to attend church with him:

As my father before him, he gave us no choice. We had to go every Sunday and even during the week. We went to church with him, but we were not Pentecostal. We despised him for bringing us ... you know the Baptists do not think positive of the Pentecostals? Yes, the Baptists taught us that Pentecostals caused problems and profited from the poor ... this is what we knew of the Pentecostals.

Yet, this resistance lasted only a short while. Aisha began to listen to the sermons, learn the words to the songs, and join in the dancing. Little by little, over the course of several months, she began to like the Pentecostal church. According to Aisha, this change resulted due to God working 'on her heart' and her 'trusting God to bless her family.' This promise of blessing by God, both materially and spiritually, was central to the teaching of her new church and Aisha claims to have witnessed the results of this blessing first-hand:

You know, God began to work on my heart and I started to trust him ... what I mean is God was helping me deal with the changes of this new life. I would pray and feel that God was near and was going to take care of me, my family, our troubles ... the pastor asked us to pray for blessing, so I did. He asked us to pray for all types of blessings, for money, for jobs, for houses ... also for spiritual wisdom and gifts. This is what I did. I prayed to God with the heart

that he had touched. I tell you within hours we were blessed by God. We were rewarded for our trials ... my mother received an inheritance and we moved into a new house. My mother's leg was healed ... so many things began to happen and I was gifted with tongues, you know? ... the gift of tongues convinced me that I could be Pentecostal. I could not deny God's good work in me after that.

When Aisha was 20 years of age, she enrolled in university and started working on her nursing degree. A lot of her friends at university were also Pentecostals. They would often attend events at each other's churches such as revivals and healing services. At some of these events, she met Pentecostals who also participated in AIR to varying degrees. Some would attend festivals like *Egúngún*. Some would visit *Babalawos* or herbalists for physical and spiritual needs. Some would visit sacred sites in Yorùbáland like the Osun-Osogbo Sacred Grove. This participation was largely accepted among her new Pentecostal friends, although they often kept this part of their life secret from their pastor and even their family. Aisha admits being intrigued by AIR and was excited when her friend invited her to visit an *Iyanifa* [female Yorùbá priestess] with her:

As someone born as Muslim and then Baptist and Pentecostal, I am interested in finding truth and what works. Why isn't God present in our traditions? In this Yorùbá faith? This is what I asked myself? ... I was curious because, if you know this would work, then why not? I can be a Yorùbá Pentecostal ... I went to *Iyanifa* and we paid for the divination. She read my *Odu* and she read one that I believed to be a prophecy. Now, I cannot tell you, but this prophecy came true ... our Yorùbá religion [AIR] works if you try it. It is older than even Islam, than Christianity. We use it to guide us and why not? What is wrong with using our own wisdom to guide us?

In a follow-up meeting after the 2011 Ogbómòsò *Egúngún* Festival, Aisha and I met together to discuss her current religious life. In particular, I was curious to learn how she identified and what groups she considered herself to belong to. She responded as follows:

Oh, that is a difficult one ... you know in Yorùbáland, we say that we are

accommodating to religions. You have heard this, yes? So we accommodate them and make them all equal some times. This is me. I do what works. If a religion is not practical, if it doesn't work, tell me why would I follow it? No, this would be impossible ... Of course I am Pentecostal. I go to my Pentecostal church, two, three times every week. But you know I see *Iyanifa* sometimes. I go to *Egúngún*. We were there together, yes? So I am an African Pentecostal, maybe? A bit of everything ... I have charms. These protect me. They were blessed by *Iyanifa* and I carry them with me ... you know part of me is still Baptist, still Muslim. These are part of me. Why should I deny it? God knows my heart. God is everywhere to me. This is what I know ... some go after me for this. Some say that I am a hypocrite and I do not trust in Jesus enough. No, this is not it. Jesus is in all of everything, you see? We can use Jesus in all things, even charms.

Aisha's experience reveals the various reasons and ways that religious conversions and denominational switches can occur. For Aisha, her experience is very much tied to her family. Sometimes this resulted in Aisha belonging to a religious group without identifying with that group. Additionally, her experience points to the fluidity of belonging and identity throughout a lifetime. Interestingly, Aisha is self-aware that remnants of her previous belongings and identities remain with her to some degree. Lastly, Aisha's story provides evidence of the conflict that can result from religious conversions. In this case, much of Aisha's family continues to remain separated as a result of her father's conversion.

Ayo

Ayo is a Yorùbá man and mobile phone salesman in his mid-twenties whom I met at the 2012 Ogbómòsò *Egúngún* Festival. He was born nearby in Oyo town and moved with his parents to Ogbómòsò when he was nine years of age. Ayo has a secondary school education and has taken a few university courses. He hopes to save up enough money to get a degree in economics and finance. He considers himself to have an economically low standard of living. After meeting Ayo in 2012, we have met together several times and kept in touch by phone. The following narrative is

based on a series of conversations and semi-structured interviews I conducted with Ayo in 2012. It reveals the case of a young man who grew up in a Catholic family that often attended Pentecostal events. He now belongs to and identifies as Catholic and also participates in Pentecostal and AIR events.

According to Ayo, his religious upbringing was typical for both Oyo town and Ogbómòsò and included living among other religious groups:

In Oyo town my family existed on the same compound as Muslims. We were all together, us as Catholics, right, then we had these others, the Pentecostal types, this is what we had ... the same in Ogbómòsò, yes, all of us together and no one had any problem. Everyone lived together ... there was conflict, okay, but we dealt with it, man. It is not like today in the north. Yorùbáland is not heaven, okay, but we try our best and we live together ... I think because we are the same, we are all Yorùbá here, most of us. It does not make sense to make war with one's family, does it? In the north they make war against other tribes, the Hausa verses Igbo, you know? They fight because they do not share their blood.

For Ayo, he recalls his Catholic faith playing a prominent role in his family's life.

His family would attend services at their church at least twice per week and much of Ayo's social life revolved around their church community. When his mother lost her job and their family experienced several years of economic hardship, Ayo remembers how active and generous their church was in assisting with food, childcare, and finances. As Ayo relates:

Us Catholics took care of each other. If you needed something, it would be provided by a member just like that ... I was proud to be Catholic and I liked going to church. It was an event that you didn't want to miss. It's still like this in Nigeria. Cause church is important here and it keeps people on a godly path, you know? ... my friends were from church and school, see my school was part of the church, in one big compound.

While Ayo and his family attended a Catholic church weekly, they would also participate in other religious events in the area. These included revivals, prayer nights, and healing services led by Pentecostal groups. As Ayo made clear, he

remembers that many Catholics from his church would also participate in events put on by other non-Catholic churches:

I tell you in Nigeria we are very religious. We would flock to almost any church or religious event ... I think for us Catholics, we noticed how much power the Pentecostal pastors possessed. They were healing people and casting out demons. Oh yes, and speaking in strange tongues. This made us think, huh, what is this going on? So we would go their revivals and take part ... some [Catholics] would then say they were Pentecostals, that they had changed religions, or they were Catholic Pentecostals ... most of us stayed in the Catholic church though.

When I asked Ayo about whether he identified as Pentecostal and he had this to say:

No, I am a Catholic. I don't think by going to a [Pentecostal] revival this makes me Pentecostal. No, because you see, I am at the Catholic church on Sundays and even during the week ... I visit the Pentecostals because they are my brothers, my sisters in Christ. We can worship together and share in the experience of worshipping God together, right? But this does not make me Pentecostal.

In addition to attending the 2012 Ogbómòsò *Egúngún* Festival together, Ayo also invited me to go with him to a healing service at a local Pentecostal church. There were several hundred people in attendance and Ayo knew many of them. He introduced me to several people who felt it necessary to let me know they were Catholic like Ayo. During the service, which consisted of over 90 minutes of singing, dancing, and praying, Ayo was very involved. He knew the words to the songs, danced with the best of them, and claimed to speak in tongues. At the end of the service, the pastor called for people to come forward and respond to the message in repentance. Ayo went forward and prayed with a volunteer. After the service we shared a meal with several of his friends. I asked Ayo about why he thought Catholics participated in Pentecostal events like the one we had attended that night:

This is interesting, you know. Our churches are different from the Pentecostal ones. We are much more traditional. This is a good thing, you know. Uh huh. We have a long history, a heritage that the Pentecostals don't have ... the Pentecostals, they experiment with God, but us Catholics only do things that

we know will secure us our salvation. Not the Pentecostals though. They are more willing to test the boundaries. This is what makes them powerful and we can take part in this power ... of course they can also be very, very dangerous and take advantage of poor people sometimes ... as long as we end up back in the [Catholic] church though we are Catholics.

After having met with Ayo several times, I was surprised to discover another layer to his religious life. When he was 19 years of age, Ayo had been invited by a friend to what he called an 'Africanist meeting'. The meeting was unofficially connected to local universities and those in attendance were mostly male youths in their twenties and thirties. It was set up like a seminar and the central focus of the meeting was to encourage those attending to 'reclaim the African heritage'. For Ayo, attending this meeting led to his involvement in the Ogbómòsò *Egúngún* Festival:

I learned about the glorious history of the Yorùbá. How we have been in these lands for thousands of years ... there is a Yorùbá story that puts the beginning of humans here in Yorùbáland, in Ifè, you know it? Yes, we are not new here ... during the colonialism times we let the British take our identity and history. They replaced it with European ways. This is not good. We are Africans and we need to reclaim the African heritage ... after this [meeting] I became involved in the *Egúngún* here in Ogbómòsò.

According to Ayo, *Egúngún* should be viewed as a cultural, historical, and religious event. He attends in an effort to promote the Yorùbá heritage, which includes all of these factors. However, while he believes in and participates in the veneration of ancestors, he does not feel this qualifies him as AIR. Indeed, he relates the Catholic practice of venerating saints to ancestor veneration within AIR:

Going to *Egúngún* is not just a Traditionalist [AIR] way anymore. Christians, Catholics, Muslims, all of them go ... for me as a Catholic this is not different from how we venerate saints. You know in Catholic history there are people, they live a great life, they deserve to be respected. They help teach us how to live our life better ... yes, we pray to them for guidance, to help us through our troubles ... the same with Traditional religion [AIR], okay? We do not worship our ancestors. This is not understood correctly. No, the colonial people, they would demonise our religion by saying these false things ... it is all about respect, you understand? We Yorùbá have respect for our ancestors and *Egúngún* shows this respect.

During this conversation, I asked Ayo to further elaborate on what ‘Africanists’ believe in and the impact they are having in promoting the Yorùbá heritage:

There are many of us Africanists ... this means that Africans, we should unify together and protect ourselves. We are in this together and if one of us falls, all of us feel this. We need to be conscious of our history and ideals. We Africanists, we focus on African problems, African solutions, you see? We don't need to be reliant or dependent on outsiders ... No, for too long they have stolen and criticised us for our way of life. This was in an effort to beat us down, to put us in slavery and take our resources from under us ... now we are fighting back to protect the African heritage ... this is not a religious group, but religion is part of us. You cannot separate religion from what we are doing ... our group is small, we are growing and the *Egúngún* is growing here in Ogbómòsò ... Africanists are all over, in our music and art, many academics too. We know that government support is getting better, so we are hopeful for the future.

After the 2012 Ogbómòsò *Egúngún* Festival, Ayo and I met together to discuss his current religious life. In particular, I was curious to learn how he identified and what groups he considered himself to belong to. He responded as follows:

Okay, well I am Catholic, of course. I have belonged to my church since I was only nine. I know everyone there very well. I feel I will always be Catholic. It would be impossible to change. Being Catholic is the most important to me ... I am like a Pentecostal sometimes, or I act like a Pentecostal, but I do not belong to those Pentecostal churches ... I would not say I am a Catholic Pentecostal like some. No, I am just Catholic ... I am an Africanist, yes, but this is not the same as being Catholic ... I am not a Traditionalist like you may think. You see, to be a Traditionalist, a person must see a traditional priest. I do not do this. I have never been to them before ... the *Egúngún* is not against me as a Catholic. It is part of being Catholic. I can be Catholic and go to *Egúngún* as Catholic.

Ayo's experience reveals the complexity that exists in defining religious belonging and identity. According to Ayo, he is Catholic and regularly attends his Catholic church. He claims that his Catholic belonging and identity is of most importance to him. However, he also participates in both Pentecostal and AIR events on occasion. As I confirmed in my visit with Ayo to a Pentecostal church, many other Catholics do the same. Yet, for Ayo this participation does not mean that he belongs to or

identifies as Pentecostal or AIR. Instead, as he sees it, these activities fit within his belonging and identity as a Catholic.

Ezinas

Ezinas is a Yorùbá woman and mother of two in her mid-twenties whom I met at the 2011 Ogbómòsò *Egúngún* Festival. She was born in Ogbómòsò and has lived there her entire life except for a brief time in Ìbàdàn. Her time away from Ogbómòsò was critical, however, for her religious life. Ezinas has completed her secondary school education and has plans to go to university at some point in the future for business management. She considers herself to have an economically low standard of living. After meeting Ezinas in 2011, we met together several times and have kept in touch by phone. The following narrative is based on a series of conversations and semi-structured interviews I conducted with Ezinas in 2011 and 2012. It reveals the case of a young woman who grew up in a family with multiple religious belongings and identities. While her own religious belongings and identities have changed in emphasis, she continues to belong to and identify with both Islam and AIR.

According to Ezinas her religious upbringing was confusing at times. While her parents primarily identified as Muslim, they rarely went to any mosque. They often prayed at home, but they were not strict about practising the obligatory *Ṣalāt*. While many Muslims abstained from alcohol and cigarettes, her father often indulged. Her mother came from a Christian family, but was required to convert to Islam when she married Ezinas' father. Despite this conversion, Ezinas is not convinced her mother was a 'good Muslim.' As she recalls:

My parents were not out in public with their religion. They claimed to be

Muslim, but did not go to mosque. Even on Friday my father would continue working. He would maybe say a prayer, but quickly ... we were not alone. In Ogbómòsó we see to it to mind our business at home. Some of our neighbours who were Muslim would drink and smoke with my father. They did not do this to be flashy. They liked to smoke and drink and they did this at home ... my mother became Muslim when she married my father. She came from a Christian family ... she had to convert to become Muslim when she married ... she was not a good Muslim though. I don't think she believed. That is what I think. She married into a religion.

In addition to this self-identification with Islam, her parents also participated in AIR activities and events. These included festival participation like the Ogbómòsó *Egúngún* Festival, as well as visiting AIR herbalists, diviners, shrines, carrying 'charms', and keeping an ancestor shrine in their home. Ezinas remembers AIR as playing a larger role in her family's life, despite always introducing themselves as Muslim:

My family was Muslim, yes. Not only Muslim though. No. We also followed our traditional religion. This was everyday, you see? We had to pray to our ancestors everyday ... my father had us [children] carry charms, if you know it, these pieces of juju that the whites called it. Uh huh. And everyday we had to pray to this shrine in our home. This was for communicating with our ancestors and we would clean it and prepare food and herbs to keep our ancestors healthy ... when I grew older I started to find this strange. I would tell friends at school about my family and our religion and they said we were bad Muslims ... [but] there were other families like mine in Ogbómòsó. It is very common to mix these religions, even with Christianity.

As Ezinas grew older, she became more confused about her own religious life. While she continued to take part in both Muslim and AIR activities and events, some of her Muslim schoolmates questioned whether she was a 'true Muslim'. While this was hurtful, she admits that she also wondered the same:

These girls at my school, they told me, you are not a true Muslim. You do not follow what the Qur'an says. No, you do not know *Allah* ... ah, and I could not say anything. I thought they may be right ... I went home and told my mum. She said, no, this is nonsense. Those girls are just making troubles for you ... I was so confused as you can imagine. I was only 11, maybe 12, yes. Some girls would not come to our house. They said, we are afraid that it is cursed, that you have dead people living there ... they were talking about our

ancestor shrine, you see? Yes, and they were scared our ancestors might come alive ... it was very strange them talking this way and I was so confused.

When Ezinas was 14 years of age, her father took an opportunity to work in Ghana.

During this time, her mother brought Ezinas and her siblings to live with other family in Ìbàdàn. As Ezinas would come to discover, this part of their family was stricter in their practise of Islam:

They prayed when they were supposed to. Five times everyday we had to. We would all go to the mosque on Friday. Even if you were sick they say you should go be with good Muslims ... they told us about *shari'a* and how good Muslims should want *shari'a* in Nigeria ... they found out that we carried charms and they said we must burn them. My uncle took them away and made us go through *tawba* [repentance] and pray special prayers ... he thought we may be possessed by witchcraft, the *Jinn* [the devil] was inside us because of our charms ... we did as he said, but my mother still brought us to shrines in secret. We would go to the market and sneak away to visit a shrine. She told us it was important we say nothing to our family. If we did not pray to our ancestors, it would be very bad for us.

Despite her mother's best efforts, Ezinas was powerfully influenced by her time in Ìbàdàn. She began to feel guilty about going to the shrines. She also began to embrace the stricter practise of Islam. Yet, she felt she could not tell her mother. She was afraid her mother might take her back to Ogbómòsó. Thus, she kept secrets from her mother about her changing views of AIR and from her family in Ìbàdàn about her continued visitation of AIR shrines:

I was between these worlds, you see. What could I do? I was young and powerless. I secretly agreed with my Ìbàdàn family about many, many things. I could not tell them. We would be forced to leave to Ogbómòsó right away. No, no, I kept quiet, but I no longer practised with my heart at the shrines ... I no longer believed in the power of my ancestors for that time. I thought that Islam was against our religions [AIR].

According to Ezinas, this period of existing 'between these worlds' lasted for over a year. Her father's job in Ghana came to an end and with his return they moved back to Ogbómòsó. Her father noticed the difference in Ezinas and confronted her. She

revealed that she had been questioning their family's religious practises and was now attracted to a stricter style of Islam. She requested to return to live with the family in Ìbàdàn, but her father refused this request. Instead, he challenged her to present the ways in which she thought Islam and AIR contradicted one another. Ezinas attempted to present her reasons, but admits that she had a difficult time. Ultimately, her father's challenge made her rethink her experience in Ìbàdàn:

I would tell my father one thing and he would come back with another. You see, he had a reason for all of my contradictions ... anything I found in Islam, he found in our religions [AIR]. Like *jannah* [paradise] in Islam is like *Òrun* [heaven] for us Yorùbá. Even the prophets, my father said the *orisas* are our African prophets ... I felt very stupid because of this. My family in Ìbàdàn were convincing, but I did not think my reasons through ... there can be a prejudice against our own religion [AIR]. Why is this? Uh, because we have been taught by you *oyibos* [white men] to fear African ways. This was my Ìbàdàn family. This is not right ... we should wake up to know we can practise these other religions [Islam and Christianity] in an African way. We Africans have had our brains washed, but no longer.

Shortly after her father's return, Ezinas turned 16 years of age. Her father suggested she go away with an *Iyanifa* for a rite of passage journey. The journey would last one week and they would visit sacred sites across Yorùbáland. As Ezinas recalls, this journey was formative in establishing her religious identity:

Before this journey I was not my own person. My identity, you know, was attached to my parents, or my Ìbàdàn family for some time. This is how it is for youths in Nigeria ... the *Iyanifa* taught me to think like an African woman with my own identity. I was becoming an African woman. Not in an instant. But becoming one ... I knew that I could be Muslim and Traditionalist. I should not be ashamed of my family and our practises. Those Muslims who fail to pray to their ancestors should be ashamed. They have lost who they are ... [their] African identity has been crushed by foreigners who say that we are demon worshippers and do not know God. Many in Nigeria have switched to foreign ways. They neglect our own ways ... this is shameful and is the reason why we have so many, many problems in Nigeria.

After the 2011 Ogbómòsò *Egúngún* Festival, Ezinas and I met together to discuss her current religious life. In particular, I was curious to learn how she identified and

what groups she considered herself to belong to. She responded as follows:

I have told you about my past, my history, yes? I have journeyed through many ways and practises. I think we Yorùbá should be open to God in every way ... I am not a Christian, okay, and yet I can see God in the Christian religion. Why do I think this way, I will tell you. God is not human like us. God is not limited to any religion. You know, it is funny we see God as a man. He cannot be a man. God is not like us. How can God be like us? ... I am a Muslim and I go to mosque more than my parents. I like it because there are friends who go with me. I am more public with my Muslim religion ... I am proud to be Traditionalist too. This does not come second to my Muslim religion. I know my ancestors are proud of me and I thank them everyday ... this is what *Egúngún* is about. We need to look to our past to find out future, okay? Our ancestors guide us to make the right choices. We look to them for inspiration, wise counsel. Our priests and priestesses also counsel us in this ... I go to *Iyanifa*, yes. This priestess is like my imam, my pastor, you see?

Ezinas's experience reveals the fluidity of religious belonging and identity throughout one's lifetime. While this section presents some of the influences and formative moments in her religious life, in the lived world they are infinitely complex. Still, when viewed from a macro perspective, Ezinas's religious belonging and identity has fluctuated between and around the religious traditions of Islam and AIR. Some of this fluctuation was due to Ezinas and others around her contesting what an authentic or 'good Muslim' looked like. Additionally, her story highlights the surreptitious nature of belonging and identity for some. Public and private belongings and identities are not necessarily the same and can be difficult to uncover.

David

David is an energetic, 19 year old Yorùbá man and university student whom I met during the 2011 Ogbómòsò *Egúngún* Festival. He was born in Lagos, but moved to Ogbómòsò when he was seven years of age. He is working on a degree in web design and programming. He often visits family in Lagos and enjoys life in a bigger

city. He plans to move to Lagos once he completes his degree to find work. He considers himself to be economically poor, but is supported by his family while he completes his degree. After meeting David in 2011, we met together several times in 2012 and have kept in contact by email and phone. The following narrative is based on a series of conversations and semi-structured interviews I conducted with David in 2011 and 2012. It reveals the case of a young man who was born into a multireligious family and now belongs to and identifies as Christian and AIR.

According to David, his religious upbringing was similar to other families in the Ogbómòsò area:

This was everywhere and it still is. Families with more than one religion are what the Yorùbá are all about. I think we may be famous for it even ... other regions in Nigeria are not like this ... for me, my story is interesting because there are so many different religions ... in my family, we have Muslim, Baptist, Pentecostal ... Catholic, you know Traditionalists ... this is how we live, man. All in one family ... a lot of other families in Ogbómòsò are like us too.

Of particular importance is that David's mother and father came from different religious traditions. His mother was Muslim, while his father was Catholic. When they were married they retained their separate religious belonging and identity. She would go to mosque and he would go to church, both independent of each other. When they began having children they would each bring the children with them. As David recalls of this experience:

My brothers and sisters, we would go with them, with my mother and my father... there are five of us ... so they had us being both Muslim and Catholic ... this means we prayed at both places. In the Muslim way. In the Christian way. Yes, we knew how to be both ... there were other children in this predicament, can I say, who were like us. No one asked any questions, I think because we were young.

As the children grew older, however, David's mother and father made the decision to only take them to the Catholic church. From what David understands, this was for

several reasons:

No, this could not last. One day we stopped going to the mosque ... this was not of our choice. In Nigeria, you know, you must obey your parents. Otherwise there will be consequences ... I think because in Nigeria, my father was the big man of the house. This is one thing. You can agree it would look bad if his children followed a different religion ... [additionally] our church was a place for children. They had many programmes suited to us. I think the, eh, mosque was not good for us. Yes, and of course, too, I think my mother wanted us to be Christian. She was, how can I say, frustrated, yes I think, with her Muslim family.

The latter comment regarding David's mother being frustrated with her Muslim family stemmed from a dispute that took place between David's father and his brother-in-law. The argument centred on recent violence that had taken place between Muslims and Christians in northern Nigeria. On this particular occasion, a group of self-identified Muslims had slaughtered a mostly Christian village resulting in mass casualties. From the brother-in-law's perspective the attack was deserved due to previous attacks on Muslim villages. David's father, however, disagreed and the discussion took a turn for the worse. According to David, the brother-in-law implied that he would have carried out the attacks himself if given the chance. Furthermore, he would not hesitate to kill another Christian in Ogbómòsò if it came to it, including David's father. This dispute turned into a longstanding row within the family. While David was only ten years of age at the time, he claims to remember the experience well. Regardless of what may or may not have happened, it undoubtedly influenced his view of Muslims and Islam:

I knew this was not right that my own family would turn against us over religion. We are all Yorùbá and this uncle of mine was willing to give us up. He was willing to even kill us, you understand, kill my father for his religion ... I was young, yes, yet I remember this ... this is when I first learned Muslims were sanctioned by the Qur'an to kill others for not being Muslim. I learned this not from others, but from what my own uncle, my blood, a Yorùbá man, right ... he was willing to take a life in the name of Islam.

In the aftermath of this experience, David says he started taking church and Christianity more seriously. The familial row had shaken him and he made the decision to be baptised and confirmed as a Catholic. Around the same time David's mother also started attending church with the rest of the family. For several years she attended both church and mosque services. When David was 15 years of age, his mother publicly converted to Catholicism. This event once again stirred up serious tension within the family. Her father announced that she was no longer his daughter and was to be shunned by the rest of the family. Her brother repeated the threats that he would kill David's father. While the death threats have never resulted in any physical altercation, the experience has had a profound impact on David and how he views Islam in Yorùbáland:

This made me question religion here in Yorùbáland. These ideas that we can all get along together in peace. Rubbish. Not with Islam ... Islam is different from Christianity because it is okay to use force, to use violence against non-Muslims. This is not the case with Christianity, is it? ... We Yorùbá have opened ourselves up to oppression. That is our problem. We let anything and anyone into Yorùbáland ... Islam needs to adopt the Yorùbá thinking, that others are valuable, yes, and do not need to die because someone leaves the religion ... we have freedom of religion here. This is not new. The Yorùbá thinking is inclusive and I think only Christianity fits into this as well.

As for David's own religious life, in recent years he has become more involved with his church and a university Catholic group. From David's perspective, given the challenges of university and teenage life, these connections assist in creating a personal environment for success and keep him morally and ethically upright:

People at university know I am Catholic. I cannot go off with girl after girl and keep my reputation as a follower of Jesus. If I do that they will reject me ... I see my Catholic friends as helping keep me straight. There are so many ways in Nigeria to get in trouble, you know? Being a Catholic keeps me personally successful in my studies and relationships. I need this accountability. We all do or we can give up so easily on our own.

When I met David in 2011 he was attending his first Ogbómòsò *Egúngún* Festival. While he had viewed it from a distance in previous years when commuting around the city, he had never intentionally attended. When I asked why he was there he replied, ‘Why not? I’m interested in my people, the Yorùbá.’ As we spoke I learned that a university class he had taken on modern African history sparked this interest. As he later told me:

Being educated is the key to breaking off the chains of oppression ... [the class] taught me the facts of history and I can now use those facts to critique where we are and how we got here. I am not interested in living in the past, but about correcting the future ... I was never at *Egúngún* before because I was more interested in western culture. I wanted to be like you *oyibos* ... [but] we have such a rich culture here that needs to be explored and promoted. We Nigerians are still too concerned about what the rest of the world thinks and we need to stop this. We need to think for us and celebrate our own culture before any others.

I had the privilege of spending a couple of days with David at the 2012 Ogbómòsò *Egúngún* Festival. In the follow up to the 2011 festival, David had become more involved in drumming up support and attendance. He informed me he had personally invited over 100 people and handed out fliers to many more. When I asked about the religious components to the festival, David responded:

I don’t come here to be a religious type. This is not what it’s about, not for me anyway. Some do though and that is wonderful. They come to show respect to their family religion ... *Egúngún* does not require ... specific religions. Religion is only part of this festival and any religious person can attend ... for me personally I can come as a Catholic and Yorùbá man and give respect to my ancestors ... if I talk to my ancestors does this not make me a Traditionalist? No, I am still Catholic ... just like the Yorùbá thinking, you know, *Egúngún* festival is open to all.

With the 2012 Ogbómòsò *Egúngún* Festival over, David and I met together to share a meal and discuss his current religious life. In particular, I was curious to learn how he identified and what groups he considered himself to belong to. He responded as follows:

I am a Catholic Christian and I go to a Catholic church ... some Catholics don't see other denominations as Christian. As I see it, we are all Christians, but the Catholic Church has a stronger history. It is connected directly, unbroken, to Jesus and the Apostles and this is important for Christianity ... Pentecostals do not have this. Pentecostals are focused on the Holy Spirit, which is not a bad thing, don't confuse me, it's that they don't have the history ... I do not identify as a Traditionalist. I see my involvement at *Egúngún* as more of a celebration of my Yorùbá identity, not being religious ... those religious components at *Egúngún* can even be viewed as me being a Yorùbá Catholic. They do not contradict each other ... I should tell you that even in church, our priest talks about the ancestors. Yes, this is not unusual. Ancestors may be like in our Christian purgatory, this place before heaven and we can still talk to them ... we do not know this and we try to understand it, but it is very, very difficult. Who is to say that ancestors do not exist? Can you prove such a thing? ... I pray to my ancestors as a Catholic, not as a Traditionalist. I even do this away from *Egúngún*. My family, when we pray, we will say something about our ancestors. There is no problem with this.

David's story reveals how personal religious belonging and identity are. Public attendance is not necessarily reflected in how individuals personally view their own belonging and identity. This is apparent in his attendance at the Ogbómòsò *Egúngún* Festival as a Yorùbá Catholic, not a Traditionalist. Additionally, the tension experienced by David's family demonstrates the powerful role religion can play in Ogbómòsò. While it can provide community stability, it can also provide a reason for community discord. The result in David's case is a family torn apart by religious events in northern Nigeria and his mother's later conversion to Christianity. Subsequently, David now views his former association with Islam as a child with disdain and is vocal regarding his criticism of Islam in Yorùbáland.

Şadéfúnmiolúwa

Şadéfúnmiolúwa (Şadé for short) is a quiet, Yorùbá woman and mother of three in her early thirties whom I met during the 2012 Ogbómòsò *Egúngún* Festival. She was born in Ogbómòsò and has lived there her entire life. While she is a full-time mother, she also works part-time as a secretary for a government office. She

says this helps to supplement her husband's income. She has a secondary school education, but would like to take university courses if she had the time and money. She considers herself to have an economically low to middle standard of living, but is hopeful that her husband will find a higher paying job soon. After meeting Şadé in 2011, we met together two further times and have kept in contact by phone. The following narrative is based on a series of conversations and semi-structured interviews I conducted with Şadé in 2012. It reveals the case of a woman who grew up in a Christian (Baptist) family that also participated in AIR. When she was in her early twenties she converted to Islam while also further embracing her AIR belonging and identity.

According to Şadé, her religious upbringing in Ogbómòsó was similar to many other families in the area:

We were a very religious family. We could be at [our Baptist] church three or more times in a week ... in Nigeria we like to say that we are the most religious in the world. I think this may be true. We have churches on every street you see. Everyone is religious that you meet ... we were also religious in the home. My father would lead us in [Bible] study and we could sing songs in the night. Even in the morning we had to say prayers together, my brother and sisters ... we could not leave until we said our prayers ... all families would go to church ... there were many Muslims and some Traditional[ists] too. Everyone had a religion and practised it freely.

Beyond the Baptist church she attended, her family was also surreptitiously involved in a number of AIR activities. While many in their family and neighbourhood were aware, they kept this secret from most of their Baptist church and friends. Şadé says this was because their pastor and most people who attended the church looked down upon any participation in AIR. AIR was viewed with suspicion and was believed to be antithetical to Christianity. For Şadé instead of being burdensome or confusing, she enjoyed the family secret and was fond of going to church and AIR sites and

activities:

My parents would tell us [siblings] to fib to our friends about our whereabouts. We would say we'd gone away to see some friends or family, but we were really visiting some shrine, you see? ... I liked this. We would go to interesting places and meet interesting people. It felt like we were doing something wrong, okay, not in a bad way, just breaking some rule ... the Traditional ceremonies were not fun like church, okay, not like the music and dancing ... the festivals I liked very much. We could run about and eat sweeties and have fizzy drinks ... it was even better than church.

Festivals like the Ogbómòsò *Egúngún* were important in Şadé's family. At the time, the pastor at their Baptist church did not actively look down upon attending *Egúngún*, so they were able to attend openly. From what Şadé recalls, there were many people from their Baptist church who also attended:

This has become a major problem for the Baptists. You know many Baptist pastors they tell their members that if they go to *Egúngún*, uh huh, they can no longer be a member at their church. Some pastors go to *Egúngún* to try to catch their members in the act ... we did not have this, so many people [from our Baptist church] would go to *Egúngún*. This was no problem, not like we have today.

When Şadé was around 15 years of age, she recalls experiencing a dilemma regarding her religious belonging and identity. She questioned whether or not it made sense to be both Baptist and AIR. This dilemma was brought about by a sermon at her Baptist church:

I can still remember this sermon, it was from the book of, eh, Revelation ... now, the pastor said you must be either in or out of the church. There is no in between. He said God does not allow the lukewarm to enter the kingdom of God ... I started to think, huh, is this me? Am I not fully one or the other ... my parents calmed me down after. They said slow down now, this is not you ... okay, I said, and I went on and believed again that I was okay.

As Şadé turned 18 a few years later, she experienced a major transition in her religious life. A man named Kehinde courted her for marriage. Kehinde was a Muslim and when they were married, Şadé was no longer able to go to church. While she was neither required to convert to Islam, nor give up her Christian

identity, all Christian practises were to be conducted within the confines of their home. As Şadé recalls:

My husband is a gentle and kind man. He did not force me to get rid of my faith when we were married. Many women must give up their faith when married, this was not me ... my faith in Jesus (pbuh) was too strong and I married a kind man, this was good ... I was taught to pray as a Muslim, but remained as a Christian, you see? I have always been Christian, also in the difficult times. I cannot give up my faith.

While Şadé claims to have never given up her Christian identity, upon being married her public belonging to Christianity ceased. She was encouraged, although not forced to start attending *Jumu'ah*. She went sometimes, but when she prayed she would 'think only about Jesus.' As Şadé describes:

It was not so difficult. The mosque became my new church. I could go and make new friends. Everyone was so friendly to me. They were excited that I had become Muslim ... I did not tell them the truth. I would pray and think only about Jesus (pbuh). This was not a big sin in Islam, to think about Jesus (pbuh), okay, I tell you I would pray to Jesus (pbuh) as my saviour, as God ... Muslims do not agree with this.

Over a period of several years, Şadé says she 'gradually became also a Muslim.' According to her, this meant that she kept her Christian identity, while also becoming Muslim. She is careful not to describe this as a conversion. As she understands it, a conversion would mean repenting and leaving behind her old religion. In Şadé's own words:

I would not say I converted to Islam. Eh, I did not leave Christianity; I did not have to repent of anything. I became also a Muslim. That's it. Kehinde, my husband, also knew this. This was no secret to him ... the others I did not tell ... when I say the *shahādah*, you know this is our faith confession, uh huh, okay I still believe in Jesus (pbuh) as God. I can pray to Jesus (pbuh) as we say, as *Allah*, this is just God. This is no problem for me.

When I asked Şadé about Jesus' roles in the Bible versus the Qur'an, she was quick to respond:

No contradiction. No problem ... these are holy texts and they point us to

God, yes? I do not argue with what is said. Sometimes information is not shared between them, okay, like two different stories. So Jesus (pbuh) in Qur'an looks maybe conflicting than in a Bible ... this is not understood by many people, so they think there is so many problems. These violence between, eh, Muslims and Christians, this is nonsense. We have no reason to fight, to kill each other.

As for Şadé's participation in AIR activities, these were allowed to continue. Her husband, Kehinde, came from a family who were involved occasionally in AIR. They would attend some AIR festival events and consult with diviners intermittently. Thus, while her public Christian identity was largely suppressed, Şadé was able to keep her AIR belonging and identity intact without hindrance. According to Şadé, the difference is that AIR is not a threat to Islam:

I can be a Traditionalist and a Muslim, or a Christian. This is no problem in Yorùbáland ... we are able to cope with our Yorùbá traditions and these other religions ... the Yorùbá religion, people see this as shrinking, it's getting smaller ... though many people still are Traditionalists, yes, okay, they are, they do so as Muslims and Christians. This is the problem. Christianity can be seen as a threat to Islam. Christians will try to convert Muslims ... Traditionalists do not have this.

After the 2012 Ogbómòsó *Egúngún* Festival, Şadé and I met together to discuss her current religious life. In particular, I was curious to learn how she identified and what groups she considered herself to belong to. She responded as follows:

Well, you know my story ... I am part of everything here in Ogbómòsó. I see myself being a follower of God more than anything. God can come in many different ways and this is why we have these, all of these religions ... I was taught by my parents to see God in many different ways. There is no restriction to God, okay, this is how it is. Us, we Yorùbá have known this, we have followed all of these different gods ... in every community, a different god ... I do not believe I am something more than another, my Christian faith is not bigger than being Muslim for me ... I cannot go to church, I am still a Christian. It is in my heart. I still read the Bible, you see ... this is not unusual in Ogbómòsó. We from Ogbómòsó can be part of many religions all at once. This is no problem.

Şadé's experience reveals how individuals can adapt and form new religious belongings and identities, while also retaining parts of their former life. As her story

demonstrates, it is a process of both preservation and reinvention. The role of marriage in this process has been critical for Şadé and required an ability to operate privately as a Christian. Lastly, the issue of conversion is highlighted and problematised by Şadé herself. As an individual with multiple religious belongings and identities, each part of which is never static, the term lacks the ability to accurately describe the changes that occur when she has adopted new religious traditions.

CHAPTER 5: CROSS-CASE STUDY ANALYSIS AND SUMMARY

Introduction

This chapter is dedicated to a cross-case study analysis and summary. It attempts to briefly delineate potential trends and structures related to issues of multiple religious belonging and identity in Ogbómòsò. It is important to reiterate, however, that this study has not attempted to measure frequency, but rather the existence of phenomena. The central question of this thesis, ‘how has interreligious encounter in Ogbómòsò created multiple religious belongings and identities among individuals and groups?’ will be addressed. Additionally, contributions are made to the following related questions: ‘why do individuals have multiple belongings and identities?’, ‘how do individuals negotiate belonging to and identifying with multiple religious traditions?’, and ‘how has interreligious encounter impacted each religious tradition?’

Types of Multiple Religious Belongings and Identities

In the case study from Chapter Three, interreligious encounter has created a unique environment for groups like OSC to emerge. On a group level, OSC was born out of a dynamic appropriation and (re)-construction of multiple religious traditions, resulting in a fascinating multireligious *bricolage*. I use the French term ‘*bricolage*’ as a helpful descriptor.²³² With origins in artistic ‘tinkering’ to construct makeshift handiwork, *bricolage* is now used in a wide number of fields to describe a construction or reconstruction made of whatever materials are at hand. Relatedly, the

²³² I choose not to use ‘syncretism’ to describe OSC for two primary reasons: (1) I believe *bricolage* is more accurate, as it does not necessarily insinuate combining or amalgamating; and (2) syncretism has developed theological baggage that causes unfortunate interference with its use.

bricoleur is the constructor. In this case, the co-founders of OSC were initially the *bricoleurs*, but now also all members of OSC contribute. Within cultural studies, French anthropologist and ethnologist Claude Lévi-Strauss was the first to use the term in his 1962 work, *La Pensée Sauvage*. In describing mythical cultural patterns, Lévi-Strauss distinguished between the work of the *bricoleur*, which is makeshift, and the work of the *ingénieur* (engineer), which is precise and calculated. This distinction and terminology is highly applicable to OSC. At the same time, however, there are limitations to using *bricolage* and *bricoleurs* for an analytical framework. As Jacques Derrida points out, ‘If one calls *bricolage* the necessity of borrowing one's concept from the text of a heritage which is more or less coherent or ruined, it must be said that every discourse is *bricoleur* [and every *bricolage* is discourse]’.²³³ Relating this discussion to the description of religious groups and movements, *bricoleurs* constructing *bricolages* can be argued as commonplace. Yet, even so, there are undoubtedly varying degrees of *bricolage* and OSC undoubtedly fits into a pattern of exceptionality. Relatedly, as OSC further institutionalises, the terms *bricolage* and *bricoleurs* may no longer apply, as the process might turn the *bricoleurs* into *ingénieurs*.²³⁴

In terms of the types of multiple religious belongings and identities that have been created at OSC on an individual level, dynamic examples abound. In quantitative terms, around 96 percent of members at OSC claim to have multiple

²³³ Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 285.

²³⁴ Another term that is helpful in this context is ‘cultural hybridity’. Within religious studies scholarship, this term has been recently popularised by James Cox. See: James L. Cox, *The Invention of God in Indigenous Societies* (Acumen: New York, 2014), 144ff. Despite its helpfulness, however, the term tends to focus on how cultural encounters of various types produce something new, which is not necessarily the case with *bricolage*. As Cox states: ‘Metaphorically, cultural hybridity symbolizes how two vibrant yet distinct sources, when brought together and fused, produce a dynamic, new organism’ (144).

religious belongings and identities. The structure of this on an individual level is complex, as each case presents a slightly different combination of relationships with Christianity, Islam, and AIR.

In the case study from Chapter Four, interreligious encounter in Ogbómòsó has created a number of different types of multiple religious belongings and identities. While each case is unique and fluid, in terms of current belongings and identities, three of the individuals are at least partially connected with Christianity, Islam, and AIR (Agbo, Oni, and Şadé), seven of the individuals with both Christianity and AIR (Olamilekan, Monifa, Afolabi, Abdullah, Aisha, Ayo, and David), and two of the individuals with both Islam and AIR (Zaria and Ezinas). While some cases represent an outright and clear claim of belonging and identifying, as well as recognition of traditional religious boundaries, in many cases there are qualifiers or appropriating that brings one tradition within the belonging and identification of another tradition. Thus, the boundaries of religious traditions are being blurred in the lived world. For instance, in Afolabi's case, he belongs to and identifies as AIR and says that he follows Jesus, but does not belong to any church or identify as Christian. As Afolabi proclaims: 'Jesus is not limited to any religion or people group.' Agbo makes a similar argument regarding the AIR festival of *Egúngún* and Catholicism. He states:

You know, in Catholicism, we have the veneration of the saints. This is really a form of spiritual ancestor celebration as we look to the past and recognise those who have gone before us in death ... *Egúngún* is a celebration of our African heritage and kinship. To be Catholic one must not think that this is somehow off limits. *Egúngún* is part of our history and we should be sure to make it part of our future. My religion has nothing to say of my participating in my community festival.

As another example, in Oni's case, she belongs to a church and identifies as

Christian, but claims to also have a relationship with both Islam and AIR. As she states: ‘I am not a Muslim, but I have a relationship with Islam ... it is part of me through my husband and my father ... I am also not a Traditionalist, I do not follow *Ifá* or any *Òrìṣà*, okay? But I have a relationship with our traditional religions and culture.’ In the case of Ayo, he belongs to and identifies as Catholic and regularly participates in Pentecostal churches, but rejects the notion that he is Pentecostal. As he states: ‘Being Catholic is the most important to me ... I am like a Pentecostal sometimes, or I act like a Pentecostal, but I do not belong to those Pentecostal churches.’ Thus, in each case religious belonging and identity exists on a scale and the scale is highly personal and context dependent.

Fluidity of Religious Belonging and Identity

Related to the types of religious belonging and identity is the issue of fluidity. As all of these cases demonstrate, religious belonging and identity are not static. This fluidity is especially apparent in Ogbómòsò because of its multireligious composition and the close contact and interaction Christians, Muslims, and AIR have with each other on a daily and sustained basis. In both case studies, the participants have encountered and negotiated varying degrees of belonging and identity throughout their lifetimes. In most cases, the participants claimed to have had liminal phases of transition between religious traditions and even now their status is fluid. As Şadé, an individual interviewee from Chapter Four, noted about her transition to Islam: ‘[I] gradually became also a Muslim.’ In her case, this transition occurred even as she claims to have remained Christian. As she stated: ‘I would not say I converted to Islam. Eh, I did not leave Christianity; I did not have to repent of anything. I became also a Muslim. That’s it.’ This brings issues of religious

conversion and religious switching to the fore. These concepts point to changes that occur religiously in form, character, or function, but as the cases from Chapter Four establish, in the lived world these changes are not necessarily a one-time event, a one-way process, nor do they necessarily create an immediate change. Additionally, it must be noted that these changes occur not only across religious boundaries, but within them as well. Thus, in addition to interreligious journeying, intrareligious journeying is just as significant. In terms of scholarly documentation, this fluidity means that tracking religious belonging and identity is like recording a snapshot in space and time. This intrinsic connection to context must be kept in mind and any notion of constancy critiqued. For the purposes of this thesis, however, the point again is the documentation of the existence of these phenomena, which is where snapshots can be helpful.

Mutability of Religious Traditions

Given the religious composition of Ogbómòsò and the encounter that occurs between and within multiple religious groups and their traditions, the mutability of religious traditions is not only standard, but also commonplace. As both case studies demonstrate, the boundaries between traditions are contested and often blurred for those with multiple belongings and identities. Thus, their religious practice can become conflated, resulting in innovative forms and practices that flex and cross categorical boundaries. From the case study on OSC in Chapter Three, rituals like *Yemaya Wudu* and Chrislamic Divination demonstrate how religious traditions are mutable in the hands of religious practitioners. The application of the Yorubá spirit of accommodation, which mutates aspects of religious traditions, across elements such as songs, prayers, sermons, and pilgrimages also provides further evidence of

this. In the case study from Chapter Four, we find this in the case of Aisha who mixes multiple forms of Christianity, Islam, and AIR. As she states:

Of course I am Pentecostal. I go to my Pentecostal church, two, three times every week. But you know I see *Iyanifa* sometimes. I go to *Egúngún*. We were there together, yes? So I am an African Pentecostal, maybe? A bit of everything ... I have charms. These protect me. They were blessed by *Iyanifa* and I carry them with me ... you know part of me is still Baptist, still Muslim ... Some say that I am a hypocrite and I do not trust in Jesus enough. No, this is not it. Jesus is in all of everything, you see? We can use Jesus in all things, even charms.

Her religious practice challenges each tradition and contests the boundaries of what is considered proper or authentic. This innovation is also especially apparent within the case of Lekan who belongs to and identifies as both Christian and AIR:

What I found was convincing because I was surprised at how well the Yorùbá system fits within the Christian system. The *Òrìṣà*, for instance, are similar to interpretations of angels and demons in Christian teachings. The *Òrìṣà* are manifestations of God and you have that in Christianity. This could be Jesus, who was God, but also had a physical presence. Jesus is really just a manifestation of God, who we call *Olódùmarè*. But so are we. We are made in the image of God, of *Olódùmarè*—the same is true in Christianity.

The cases here provide evidence that lived religious experience influences and causes mutations of religious traditions. How people belong to and identify with religious traditions impacts the transmission from person to person and generation to generation. Thus, when it comes to defining authentic or proper forms of traditions, just like with belonging and identity, this defining process is highly personal and context dependent.

Negotiating Religious Belonging and Identity

In terms of a rationale for belonging and identifying with multiple religious traditions, both case studies reveal a variety of reasons including family upbringing, economic incentives, getting married, enjoying multiple traditions, believing in

multiple traditions, and being convinced of some aspect of each tradition. At the same time, many cases reveal the tension and conflict that exists in Ogbómòsò. For a number of participants they feel forced to negotiate at least part of their belonging and identity surreptitiously. From the case study on OSC in Chapter Three, a majority of members claim to guard parts of their identities and belongings due to what they often term, 'religious persecution'. The stories of Ayokunle, Monifa, Bolaji, Opeyemi, Tula, Romoluwa, Jimoh, and Grace all offer evidence of feeling forced to belong and identify surreptitiously. Beyond stories of vandalism, arson, illegal evictions, and imprisonment, other specific claims of persecution include physical abuse, verbal abuse, familial excommunication, social excommunication, bribery, and job loss. I recorded that 32 people from OSC have openly revealed their affiliation with OSC and 27 reported that they were persecuted in some way as a result. My conversations with group members revealed that some individuals had left OSC as a result of the fear of being persecuted for their multiple religious belongings and identities. It is difficult to know how many, but it appears between 10-20 individuals have left the group for this reason. Similar examples are revealed in the case study from Chapter Four. For instance, in the case of Şadé, while she claims to have never given up on her Christian identity, upon being married her public belonging to Christianity ceased. Examples like this abound throughout the study and provide evidence for how people with multiple religious belongings and identities often feel forced to keep elements of their religious life private.

Belonging and Identity in Nigeria and Beyond

While the primary purpose of this thesis has been to document how interreligious encounter has created multiple religious belongings and identities in

Ogbómòso, it is important to reflect on how the cases presented may contribute to a larger discourse and offer insight into a variety of contexts. Regarding the concept of belonging, this thesis contributes to debates surrounding the nature of belonging and how it should be defined. Instead of limiting belonging to official and public members or adherents, both Chapter Three and Chapter Four offer insight into how individuals with unofficial and private belongings operate and conceive of their status. While those who belong surreptitiously are always present, the scholar who excludes these members by definition will not even think to search for them.

Relatedly, traditional understandings of belonging may fit certain Western standards of religiosity, but these standards are not universal. Indeed, some religious traditions are more institutionally bound and public than others. For instance, participation in AIR is often private and without institutional (i.e. official) acceptance. Even within the public setting, for instance at indigenous festivals, the official framework is comparatively non-institutional. Thus, this thesis argues that any conceptual use of belonging needs to be inclusive of those on the margins of group membership. This shifts the dynamic and provides an important contrast to those in positions of power.

Regarding the concept of identity, this thesis has contributed to an on-going debate about the usefulness of the concept for analytical purposes. On a theoretical level, I propose that *identity* is not devoid of *identification*. Rather than ‘los[ing] its analytical purchase’, as Brubaker has suggested, I argue that conceptions of identity can and should include, as Brubaker puts it, ‘processual’ research and an active understanding that lacks the reifying notions that a strong sense of identity implies.²³⁵ Regarding identity as a reifying process, this thesis stands in stark

²³⁵ Brubaker 41.

contrast and provides a series of descriptive cases as evidence of the inherent flexibility and fluidity of identity. While documenting and analysing identity poses many challenges, not least of which is finding analytical patterns, these challenges reflect the complexity and fluidity of the lived world.

This thesis does not suggest that multiple religious belonging and identity is everywhere. Indeed, as Catherine Cornille has suggested, ‘... a total commitment and unitary belonging are ideals for most religions of the world’.²³⁶ This is reflected in the fact that most people throughout the world belong and identify with a single religious tradition. However, I would caution against the thinking that it is a rare phenomenon. Despite exclusivist claims from many religions, the lived world of individuals and groups is flexible and lacks a stable, coherent ‘self’. As Stuart Hall reminds us: ‘The fully unified, completed, secure, and coherent identity is a fantasy. Instead, as the systems of meaning and cultural representation multiply, we are confronted by a bewildering, fleeting multiplicity of possible identities, any one of which we could identify with – at least temporarily.’²³⁷ While scholars have long considered the possibility and reality of this religious flexibility in certain parts of the world and with certain combinations of religions, this thesis contributes directly to the concept in Africa among Muslims, Christians, and AIR. While those who belong and identify with both Islam and Christianity are undoubtedly a minority, they are an important minority because their existence challenges reified notions of what is or is not possible. Thus, despite their marginality, the cases from Ogbómòso can be placed in discourse with a wide range of cases and contexts.

²³⁶ Cornille 2.

²³⁷ Hall, ‘The Question of Cultural Identity’, 598.

Cognitive Dissonance?

Lastly, the question must be posed: are these cases merely a matter of cognitive dissonance? Are people who belong and identify with multiple religious traditions merely lost in a state of inconsistency and contradiction? Within the cases presented in this thesis, I found that participants had an explanation for their beliefs. Instead of cognitive dissonance, I observed and listened to them attempting to reconstruct categories and resolve conflicting or contradictory theories to achieve some sort of consonance. While the combination of traditions may appear irrational or contradictory, I found that their cosmological maps were able to synthesise and reinterpret religious traditions, even reinventing traditions, in an attempt to find what they often viewed as the common essence between and among multiple religious traditions.

Even if dissonance remains, these cases challenge essentialised and normative typologies of religion. Indeed, while typologies can be helpful to a point, approaches that only allow for the possibility of classifying people in single, discrete categories are unhelpful and misleading. This thinking easily masks the varied, dynamic, and complex belongings and identities of people in the lived world, many of who live across and within multiple religious traditions. Indeed, as this thesis has made clear, while sustained interreligious encounter produces competition and tension, resulting in group reification, polarisation, and even violent conflict, it can also provide a habitat of exchange and mutual influence—revealing the heterogeneous quality and mutability of communities and traditions—at times even resulting in innovative forms and movements that flex and cross categorical boundaries.

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APPENDIX A

Consent Form for Egúngún Case Study

University of Edinburgh
School of Divinity

Consent form for participation and personal data to be used for research

Thank you for agreeing to participate in the research project, the details of which are:

Research Project Name:	Interreligious Encounter in Ogbómòsò
Name of Researcher:	Corey L. Williams
Researcher's Contact Details:	UK mobile: +44 (*)*** ** * Nigeria mobile: +234 (*)** ** * Local Address: Francis Jones Guesthouse, Ogbómòsò
Scope of the project:	This is a PhD research project that focuses on multiple religious belonging and identity in Ogbómòsò, Nigeria.
Confidentiality and Anonymity:	All interview data will be stored on a password secure laptop. In the case of audio recordings and transcripts, these will be kept locked up when not in use. All names will be anonymised with pseudonyms.

Please complete the following:

I consent to participating in this research project and understand that I may withdraw

at any time: YES NO

I consent to my personal data, as outlines below, being held for use in the research project detailed above: YES NO

Name:	
Signature:	
Date:	

APPENDIX B

Consent Form for OSC Case Study

University of Edinburgh
School of Divinity

Consent form for participation and personal data to be used for research

Thank you for agreeing to participate in the research project, the details of which are:

Research Project Name:	Interreligious Encounter in Ogbómòsò
Name of Researcher:	Corey L. Williams
Researcher's Contact Details:	UK mobile: +44 (*)*** ** * Nigeria mobile: +234 (*)** ** * Local Address: Francis Jones Guesthouse, Ogbómòsò
Scope of the project:	This is a PhD research project that focuses on multiple religious belonging and identity in Ogbómòsò, Nigeria. The project is social scientific in orientation, not theological.
Confidentiality and Anonymity:	All interview data will be stored on a password secure laptop. In the case of audio recordings and transcripts, these will be kept locked up when not in use. I will not publish video or photographs of you or the property at OSC. I will assist in protecting your identity by anonymising your name with a pseudonym. I will not publish any details regarding your location or the location of OSC.

Please complete the following:

I consent to participating in this research project and understand that I may withdraw at any time: YES NO

I consent to my personal data, as outlines below, being held for use in the research project detailed above: YES NO

Name:	
Signature:	
Date:	

APPENDIX C

Survey of Active Membership at OSC

1. What is your gender?
2. What is your age?
3. What level of education have you completed? Are you currently studying?
4. What would you say is your standard of living? Choose one of the following: very poor, poor, moderate, wealthy, or very wealthy.
5. Are you employed?
6. What ethnicity you are?
7. What religious tradition or traditions did you belong to and/or identify with prior to OSC?
8. What religious tradition or traditions do you currently belong to and/or identify with?