

The New Pentecostal Movement in Nigeria and the Politics of Belonging

Journal of Asian and African Studies

1–15

© The Author(s) 2016

Reprints and permissions:

sagepub.co.uk/journalsPermissions.nav

DOI: 10.1177/0021909616649209

jas.sagepub.com



Abimbola O Adesoji

Obafemi Awolowo University, Nigeria

Abstract

The Pentecostal Movement in Nigeria, like elsewhere, is a distinctly Christian organization by virtue of what it professes and what characterizes it. Increased privileges for leaders, leadership visibility and leadership style have tended to encourage other aspirants to form similar organizations. Despite the existence of an umbrella association like the Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria, different centres have emerged, each seeking relevance and influence. Using historical and sociological approaches, this paper discusses the trends in the New Pentecostal Movement in Nigeria, identifies some characteristic types and probes into the basis for belonging, seeking to belong or otherwise. It also interrogates the strategies employed and its effectiveness or otherwise.

Keywords

Pentecostalism, proliferation, contest, belonging, re-orientation, Nigeria

Introduction

The Pentecostal Movement in Nigeria has become a phenomenon. Its popularity and influence are, among other causes, the direct result of its large membership, expanded network, growing wealth, and fraternization with the business and political class. Equally important are its promises and manifestation of the spiritual power of healing, deliverance and manifold material blessings for its members. Whereas pioneering missionary efforts by the Mainline Churches beginning in the mid-nineteenth century and the emergence of the African Independent Churches provided a foundation for its growth, other developments – such as the entry of American and British Pentecostalism into Nigerian higher institutions of learning and their use of the media of mass communication to reach a larger literate audience – crystallized the movement and aided its emergence as a distinct network with recognizable traits. From being restricted to a few urban centres up to the 1970s, the movement grew, in part due to the oil boom of the 1970s, and the subsequent oil doom in the 1980s, with its harsh consequences on the poor masses. The ensuing disorder and tension brought about an

Corresponding author:

Abimbola O Adesoji, Department of History, Obafemi Awolowo University, Room 302b Humanities Block 2, Faculty of Arts, Ile-Ife, 220005, Nigeria.

Email: aadesoji@oauife.edu.ng, aadesoji2@yahoo.com

increased level and diversity of religious demand by the masses, an occasion that the movement rose to.

While the growth of the movement meant the spread of the gospel, it also meant increased branch networks, membership, funding and perhaps greater opportunity to exercise influence. More importantly, it meant that the relationship between leadership and followers and among leaders within the different groups in the movement had to be managed. This becomes important when the entrance of different kinds of leaders and the diversification of ministries emphasizing different aspects of Christian beliefs is considered. This, coupled with the leaders' charisma and desire to make their group the most visible or accessible perhaps with the knowledge of its benefits, has naturally bred competition. A characteristic of such competition is the desire to exercise profound influence within their organizations and in the larger movement. This development has resulted in the emergence of different centres of influence that leaders aspiring to higher offices look towards, very often struggling to meet the conditions for belonging. Where these conditions could not be met, aspirants often decide to take short cuts, remain loners, appear unconcerned or console themselves with self-imposed titles and authorities outside the mainstream of the movement. Oftentimes, the struggle for acceptance at one extreme and the resignation to fate at the other, as well as other such schemes have informed the labelling and the categorization of the different centres and groups in the minds of the perceptive public.

Although categorization within the movement can be fluid and overlapping, the scenarios painted above apply mostly to latter generations of the movement, hence their label, the New Pentecostal Movement. The New Pentecostal Movement could therefore be described as the latter generation of Pentecostal groups, which, in their bid to seek visibility and attract patronage, engaged in subtle competition for the religious space, perhaps with a view to exercising greater influence within the movement and in the larger polity, particularly at the level of leadership. It is also described as the third wave of Pentecostalism in Nigeria, the first two being the Classical and the Indigenous Pentecostalism. The third wave lumps together Charismatic Pentecostalism and Neo-Pentecostalism (Ayegeboyin, 2004: 72–73; Ayegeboyin and Ukah, 2002: 68–86).¹ Observably, not all the latter generation of Pentecostal groups belong to this third wave. This essay explores strategies employed by the New Pentecostal Movement to project and protect its identity, seek relevance and contest the religious space. It also assesses the workability or otherwise of these strategies and their effects on the movement as well as on the larger polity. Using historical and sociological approaches, this research has a particular focus on South West Nigeria, and makes use of 18 case studies, supplemented with some minor ones. In all, a total of 25 people were interviewed across the region, comprising pastors, church leaders, religious scholars and opinion leaders.

The politics of belonging: An explanation

In the simplest sense, to 'belong' could mean to go along with the spoken and unspoken rules of conformity in a group, its prejudices and biases. It could mean knowing how others think and act in a certain way so that one's relationship with them can grow strong. It could also be described as a way a person feels when they are accepted into a place, group or home as it creates the feeling of acceptance, happiness and fulfilment. Central to the concept is the idea of being, and revolving around it or emanating from it are the issues of sense, emotion and relationship. Significantly, the essence and feeling of belonging generate or produce the idea of a community. Belonging is seen as shorthand for a larger idea composed of attraction, identification and cohesion (Marshal, 2002: 360). Group memberships according to Marshal (2002: 360) arise via some combination of chance and choice, a status that one may not be committed to or desirous of. Thus, human social

interdependence necessitates that some of these group memberships become solidified into something potent and secure. This brings about the idea of belonging.

The growing number and sophistication of Pentecostal movements and organizations attests to the desire, and the capacity of individuals and groups to negotiate new forms of belonging. Conceived as synonymous with but broader than identity, three approaches are discernible on the subject. The primordialists or the essentialists treat identity as fixed and organic, something pre-given, predetermined, or natural. From this perspective, identity is conceptualized as an independent variable used to explain other phenomena such as conflict, war, aggression, cooperation, coalition and passivity (Bacova, 1998: 29–43). Whereas this perspective invokes identity as an explanation, little effort is made to explain or understand identity itself. The origins or essence of identity are taken for granted or rendered irrelevant (Bloch, 2003: 22–51; Croucher, 2004: 36–38). With reference to the New Pentecostal Movement in Nigeria, the contention of the primordialists would be that the seemingly unchanging outlook or characteristic traits of organizations within the movement explain their diverse responses. What is not properly considered is that the capability of an identity that is not properly defined and mostly seen as constant is limited in eliciting dynamism which characterizes the movement. Besides, its fluid or intersecting nature notwithstanding, the defining character of organizations within the movement is discernible.

Given the weaknesses and inconsistencies of this perspective, constructivists or social constructionists have provided alternate viewpoints. They argue that treating anyone's identity as a basic group identity fails to appreciate that individuals have a number of identities, some of which intersect or collide with others, and all of which vary in salience across time and contexts. In addition to multiplicity, constructivists also emphasize malleability, with the content and meaning of identities shifting across time and place for individuals, groups, and whole societies. These emphases on multiplicity and malleability notwithstanding, constructivists do not portray identity as arbitrary; rather they seek to explain the emergence, variation in, and reconfiguration of different identity/belonging formations by reference to political, economic and sociocultural conditions (Cerulo, 1997: 385–409).

But this approach is still limited by the powerful and seemingly irrational passion and sense of embeddedness that often surrounds identity, just as it also confronts a troubling paradox of emphasizing the invented, constructed, imagined and performed nature of identity (Anderson, 1991: 163–185; Bell, 1999: 1–10). Despite the presence of the influencing conditions in the movement in Nigeria, belonging is usually not strongly issue-based and can sometimes be inclusive or entrenched given the emotional attachment involved, oblivion to the basis and purpose, as well as the prevailing circumstances and context of the various forms of identity. In a sense, therefore, identities within the movement apparently emerge based on the perquisites at stake, real or veiled, indifference to such perquisites or abhorrence towards them. Driving or raising the stakes within the movement is leadership, hence its centrality. This has led to the emergence of the third approach, that of constructed primordiality, which combines insights from both approaches. This involves the preservation of an appreciation for the emotional appeal of belonging while shifting needed attention to the dynamic processes and politics of identity formation and reconfiguration. Constructed primordiality also recognizes that identities are never formed in isolation as an individual or group identity always emerges in relation to others and in the context of specific opportunities and constraints. Identity is therefore contextual and relational (Somers, 1994: 606–620). Identity and belonging are phenomena that people accept, resist, choose, specify, invent, redefine, reject, and actively defend. These scenarios have played out clearly within the movement in Nigeria, given the desire on the part of member organizations to either flow along with the current, seek to circumvent the popular flow, find an alternative course to it or turn away from it completely. Being a complex concept, belonging captures the affective dimensions of attachment and identity while preserving

an awareness of its fluidity and constructedness and it operates at the level of individuals and groups, ranging from very small to very large, while also connoting the juridical and emotional dimensions of status or attachment (Bell, 1999: 1; Croucher, 2004: 39–41; Probyn, 1996).

Inherent in the concept and practice of belonging is the related reality or fear of not belonging. Consequently, individuals, groups and nations understand and define who they are by specifying who they are not. Thus with the reliance of identity on an 'Other' and belonging to an 'Us' which necessitates the existence and recognition of a 'Them', there is the implication of the existence of boundaries which may be social, cultural, political or economic in nature and which, depending on the individual, the group, and the context, will range in importance or centrality from very low to very high. This brings about the concept of bounded or exclusive belonging, of which religion or language could be a source. Although they are more about achievement at several levels of abstraction, and are constructed (Bell, 1999: 3; Butler, 1990: 140), identity and belonging are not arbitrary and are not inconsequential. Rather, they are very real and quintessentially political (Barker, 2000; Croucher, 2004: 41).

The politics of belonging refers to the 'processes of individuals, groups, societies and polities defining, negotiating, promoting, rejecting, violating, and transcending the boundaries of identities and belonging' (Bhambra, 2006: 32–41; Croucher, 2004: 41). These politics and processes are highly contextual. Its fluid and old nature notwithstanding, the contexts in which belonging is negotiated often change. Despite its applicability to politically related issues like citizenship, nationhood, ethnicity and gender in the context of globalization, these approaches – particularly the constructivist and the constructed primordialists approaches – are germane and pertinent in understanding and explaining the issue of belonging within the Pentecostal movement in Nigeria. Of particular relevance is the malleability or fluidity of identity as characterized by the constructivists, determined as it were by certain variables across context, time and space and the dynamic process and politics informing its formation and reconfiguration. Pertinent also is the recognition that identities are not formed in isolation but in relation to others and in the context of specific opportunities and constraints as postulated by constructed primordialists. Similarly, the reality of not belonging has led to the devising of other strategies to maintain relevance while also enjoying benefits associated with belonging. The purposeful formation of identity with its envisaged benefits and the changing context in which belonging is negotiated all have applicability to the Pentecostal movement in Nigeria.

Defining Pentecostalism in Nigeria

Without doubt, issues involved in the concept and practice of belonging have close relevance to the growth of Pentecostalism in Nigeria. The origin and growth of Pentecostalism in Nigeria as well as its basic features, epoch and ramifications are well documented in literature. For Isichei (1995: 286–287), Anderson (2001: 80–87) and Ojo (2006: 31–35), its origin could be located in the activities of indigenous religious movements starting with the revival of Garrick Sokari Braide of the Anglican Church in the Niger Delta in the 1910s, the revival meetings in the Anglican churches in Lagos from 1916 to 1918 and the activities of the Diamond Society. This first wave of Pentecostalism, according to Ojo (2006: 35–37), was the foundation for the second and third waves and the activities of Rev SG Elton of The Apostolic Church, missionaries from Britain and the crusades conducted in Southern Nigeria by some American evangelists like Rev Billy Graham and TL Osborn, as well as Rev John Stott from Britain in the 1960s, aided by the influx of American Pentecostal literature. These developments prepared the ground for the revival of the 1970s. As far as Burgess (2008: 5–6) is concerned, western definitions of Pentecostalism that focus on historical continuity with the American Azusa Street Revival or adherence to a doctrine of 'initial evidence' have proved

inadequate because of the great variety in the movement elsewhere. Specifically, Burgess uses African Pentecostalism, related to Nigerian Pentecostalism, to describe any African church or movement that stresses the experience of the Spirit and the practice of spiritual gifts. This includes older African Initiated Churches, mission-related Pentecostal churches and newer (post-1970) African-founded Pentecostal churches, fellowship and ministries. The kernel of his argument is that Nigerian Pentecostalism originated in a series of indigenous revivals with no direct links to the USA or Britain. But Wariboko (2014: 1–17) sees Pentecostalism emerging through multiple pathways that were mediated through culture, history, religious nationalism, and the economic and political dynamics of Nigeria with personalities and cultural historical antecedents playing crucial roles. Whereas, Omotoye (2010) sees Pentecostalism generally as the third phase of Christianity in Nigeria, the earlier phase being that of the Mainline and African Independent Churches, Kalu (1998) calls it the ‘third response’ to white cultural domination and power in the church, the former two responses being Ethiopianism and the Aladura/Zionist churches.

Accounting for the growth of the Pentecostal movement in Nigeria we can list such factors as the growth in the number of tertiary educational institutions which provided an incubating ground for the emergence of future leaders and members who became the torchbearers of the new movement, and the rapid growth of urbanization in the seventies resulting from the oil boom era and the unrest and uncertainties that characterized it which had an impact on the structures and message of the movement and its membership (Ojo, 1988a: 141, 2006: 3, 35–37). As asserted by Ojo (1988b: 175), the presentation of the charismatic movements in a manner acceptable and relevant to Nigerians and their adaptation to the situation in Nigeria is a central factor in their rapid growth and success. For Marshall (1992: 9), the dramatic rise of the movement was one of the most remarkable trends in the 1980s. Essentially however, Burgess (2008: 83–99) sees the civil war that lasted from 1967 to 1970 in Nigeria as having profound impact on the growth of the movement in Eastern Nigeria. Specifically, the efforts of Scripture Union in secondary schools, the subscription of the Igbo to the concept of *Ezi-ndu* – the power to enhance life (physical health, material prosperity, fertility, individual success, communal success and practical guidance) – and the failure of the Mainline churches to offer these coupled with the emphasis of the movement on Bible study and innovative worship, repentance and charismatic expressions, all accounted for the revival.

Their different labels and categorizations notwithstanding (Ukah, 2005: 254–255),² it has been noted that there is no strict demarcation among them. Rather, all are Pentecostal but incorporate varying elements of doctrine and practice which are associated by scholars with the American and British ‘fundamentalist’, ‘evangelical’ and ‘neo-evangelical’ labels as well as with successive waves of American Pentecostalism which, in the Nigerian context, are identified most often with prosperity doctrine churches associated with the Word of Faith movement (Marshall, 1992: 9–10). Besides, mobility of members across churches and groups and sharing in activities make such absolute separation as could be found in the Western world difficult in the Nigerian situation (Ojo, 2006: 12). Apparently they are linked to mainstream Christianity by their agreement on the major doctrines of faith, like incarnation, the trinity, the divine inspiration of the scriptures, the sovereignty of God, the death and resurrection of Christ and the expectation of the personal return of the Lord Jesus Christ (Ojo, 2006: 191). Distinguishing Pentecostalism in Nigeria as a movement in its own right is the new birth, membership of a church as an assembly of the regenerated, sanctification and holiness, baptism of the Holy Spirit and speaking in tongues, faith healing and miracles, deliverance, restitution, prosperity, and emphasis on evangelism and mission (Marshall, 1992: 8–10, 1993: 216–217, 1995: 244–245; Ojo, 2006: 92–213, 2007: 178). Broadly, the shift of emphasis, beginning in the early 1980s, from speaking in tongues and the retreat from the world which characterized early Pentecostalism, to the miracles of prosperity and divine healing of the new wave in the 1990s was seen as an innovation at the level of practice and the relationship of

believers to the world which surrounds them, rather than as any deep theological revision (Corten and Marshall-Fratani, 2001: 5–6; Marshall, 2009: 180). The transformation within the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG), with the creation of a new model unlike the classical ‘parish’, and the new emphasis on financial prosperity through giving unlike the abhorrence of wealth originated by Rev Josiah Akindayomi, could be understood from this perspective (Anderson, 2001: 85; Marshall, 2009:180; Ukah, 2005: 257–258).

However, beyond their general features, some groups within the movement are still known by their specific features, which, rather than changing in response to the changing milieu around them, have remained entrenched. The emphasis on holiness and sanctification, restitution, Bible study and evangelism, and healing, by such groups as The Apostolic Faith and the Deeper Life Christian Ministry has not changed (Ojo, 1988a: 152–159). Even for a relatively young group like the Mountain of Fire and Miracles Ministries, the emphasis on spiritual warfare and deliverance from ancestral foundations which it was known for from inception has remained firmly entrenched while the emphasis on financial prosperity that characterized the Living Faith Ministry is still its essential feature. Thus within the broad framework of the movement, the doctrinal emphasis varies.

Proliferation, contestation and belonging: Reflections on re-orientation

The emphasis of the different groups within the movement notwithstanding, one significant feature of the Pentecostal movement in the 1980s and 1990s was its phenomenal growth. This was characterized by the establishment of new ministries and organizations, tremendous membership growth, an increased branch network and, of course, increased church wealth, influence and patronage exemplified in the ability to organize larger, more cost-intensive programmes attended by the cream of the business, political and traditional elite. This phenomenal growth has been explained by certain developments, one of which was the rapid economic decline of the 1980s following the relatively prosperous years of the 1970s. The collapse of oil prices in 1981 coupled with the profligacy of leaders resulted in massive unemployment, runaway inflation, wage freezes and scarcity was worsened by the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) introduced in 1986, which further increased hardship in the cities with massive retrenchment and devastating price increases. This situation, coupled with the blocked access to political patronage, resulted in hopelessness, tension and apathy, a void which the movement was able to fill with its offers of strength and purpose and emphasis on personal renewal and hope (Marshall, 1992: 20–21, 1993: 222–224; Ukah, 2005: 253–254). The search for personal and collective salvation was complemented by access to a concerned and caring community of believers which offered moral and practical support in times of need (Ojo, 2006: 21; Wariboko, 2014: 17–21). These economic woes were compounded by the failure of government, both civil and military, the seemingly unending transition programmes and repression of citizens, all of which brought about an increased level and diversity of religious demand by the masses (Hackett, 1998: 260).

The use of the media, both print and electronic, by the movement to propagate their message on a much wider scale, and the emphasis on personal evangelism in such private and public places as buses and taxis, markets, offices, hospitals, schools and prisons, meant that the Pentecostal message was not restricted to its members alone. Visual appeals on television and in books, complemented by musical and religious drama videos, had the effect of persuading younger people in particular to make a commitment (Hackett, 1998: 260–266; Ojo, 2006: 3). Given the crop of educated leaders of the Pentecostal movement, mostly university graduates, that emerged in the late 1970s and early 1980s, it is easy to understand how the media became a potent tool of

evangelization and how it promoted the growth of the movement. Beyond the well-known Pentecostal organizations of the 1970s, like the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG), the Church of God Mission and the Deeper Life Christian Ministry (DLCM) (which eventually metamorphosed into a church in the early 1980s), many Pentecostal groups sprang up in different parts of Nigeria, although there was a concentration in the cities. There were varying membership structures and branch networks or a single nucleus and a mega congregation, and varying degrees of prominence. By 1997, the number of churches was estimated at 2000 (Ojo, 2006: 17–18, 61–63). Interestingly, many of the organizations that are the focus of this study are based in Southern Nigeria with greater concentration in southwestern Nigeria. One explanation for this, among other factors, was the region's early contact with western education and Christianity.

Given the centrality of leadership to the transformation and proliferation of these movements with their charisma and mobilizational efforts, particularly among young undergraduate students in Nigerian universities, the decisive role of leadership in the re-orientation of the movement and the development that emanated from it can be seen. One immediate consequence of the appeal to university undergraduates was the emergence of a crop of leaders who by virtue of their exposure and experience as fellowship leaders within the universities had been prepared for Christian leadership outside the campus. Added to this was the prosperous nature of leadership within the movement which young leaders were exposed to from the mid-1990s onwards and which convinced many that being a pastor (or, more appropriately, a president-founder) could be profitable. As contended by Marshall (2009: 181–182), doing God's work became a serious career option for many aspiring youth who were locked out of the classical networks and itineraries of social mobility and success, and were inspired by the possibility of achieving private wealth through the movement. This conviction was strengthened by the possibility that they might head a large organization, like those they had seen within the movement, with all the perquisites and privileges attached to it.³ Also attractive to the youth in the universities was the liberal and permissive mode of dressing, in contrast to the prescriptive and conservative mode characteristic of classical Pentecostalism (Ayegboyin and Ukah, 2002: 68–86).

However, proliferation within the movement necessitated the desire and struggle for distinction informed mainly by competition for clients or members and the exercise of influence. The earlier groups within the movement – categorized as the established, refined, simple or more mature – were mostly not involved in this struggle. A number of factors could explain this. Not only were their organizations well entrenched, their foci were already well defined (apart from the transformation that took place in the RCCG in the early 1980s). Also, their leaders, irrespective of their natural ages, perhaps had come to see themselves as elders and fathers in the movement and rather

Beyond seeking to separate themselves from the 'crowd', which the proliferation in the movement represented, these distinct or distinguishing factors became a basis for seeking honour and recognition in the form of higher offices.⁵ Categorized as aggressive or the ambitious, the approach usually was to get any of the centres (otherwise known as College of Bishops) within the movement to ordain them for higher offices, mostly in elaborate ceremonies, and in the process confer on them and their new offices recognition, legitimacy and membership of the elite class within the movement. Although the consent of the council of a church over which a bishop will preside must be sought and obtained, the significance of the College of Bishops derives from the fact that only the college that consecrates a bishop can remove him or her upon the complaint of the Church Council.⁶ Commonly, a College of Bishops formed by a quorum of three bishops is considered adequate to consecrate a new bishop.⁷ Beyond being the vogue, it would appear also that the desire for access to the elite with all its trappings was a consideration. This consideration, however, goes beyond the ambitious to those in other categories who desire or have one form of office or the other. Examples of the member organizations in the 'ambitious' category are Living Faith Church, Sword of the Spirit Ministries, and Agape Christian Ministries. The circumstances surrounding the emergence of these centres within the movement, their organization if any, and their functioning is still not clear, but what is clear is that they are multiple, a development often caused by split within the ranks. Geographical proximity, relationship among the groups within the movement, particularly at leadership level, mentoring patterns as well as patterns of affiliation within the movement help to explain the nature, size, types and functionality of these centres. Often also, the conditions for ordination include but are not limited to the membership and/or branch strengths of the aspiring candidates' organizations, their visibility, particularly in the area or a region of operation, and the payment of money.⁸ From the initial single centre that was spearheaded and dominated by the late Bishop Idahosa, there are now centres in almost all of the states in South West Nigeria with responsibility to oversee and exercise influence in those states.⁹

There are, however, colleges whose influence cuts across regions or states, like the Pentecostal Bishops Communion of Nigeria and Pentecostal Bishops Fellowship of Nigeria. Interestingly the same late Bishop Idahosa provided the link with the International Network of Pentecostal Bishops and Archbishops through which dominant American Pentecostal influence (particularly those that have to do with appointment) became pervasive in Nigeria.¹⁰ Following in its footsteps are others like the College of Bishops of the International Communion of Christian Churches and International Communion of Pentecostal Charismatic Bishops (ICPCB).

The existence and relevance of these centres within the movement has raised a fundamental question about the relevance of the Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (PFN), as an umbrella association for the Pentecostal movement and its links, if any, with the centres. Founded on 10 February 1985, its position could be understood in the context of its nature, being more of a cooperative or a coalition than a legislative or sanctioning body for the furtherance of the Pentecostal gospel (Amata, 2002; Ukpong, 2006). Its voluntary nature notwithstanding, the PFN has certain doctrinal parameters for all churches or groups that are willing to identify with it and which serve as the fundamental articles of faith for all Pentecostal churches in the country, without necessarily setting a ceiling for an individual congregation's articulation of her doctrines and beliefs (Amata, 2002; Okonkwo, 2005: 2). Implicitly, the concern of the PFN was more of adherence to doctrines than with the exercise of administrative control over members. Despite serving as a new coordinating centre for Pentecostals in Nigeria, it also became a part of the larger body, the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) founded in 1976 but which by 1988 had incorporated churches associated with the PFN (Enwerem, 1995: 101–129; Freston, 2001: 184). The dilemma of the PFN, its seeming complacency or perhaps its connivance on the issue of who becomes what or who does what for who, could be located in the broader context of belonging to another Christian organization like

CAN without really being responsible to it. This raises a fundamental question of where the Christian responsibility for advising, correcting, challenging and censoring if necessary, lies.

For those who could not belong perhaps by virtue of their inability to meet the requirements for belonging, two major types of responses are discernible. First, they remain loners. Secondly, they seek to console themselves with another title conferred not by any centre or leader but by themselves. Within the rank of loners, two different sub-types are discernible. The first group comprises those who give the impression that they are on their own but actually have links with some prominent or influential members within the movement, who they take as their mentors or 'fathers in the faith' and to whom they render 'due benevolence' in the form of a certain percentage of their organizations' income, either at fixed or regular intervals and in addition to paying lump sums to be ordained for higher office. Pastor Akin Akinnola of the defunct Holy Ghost Ministries International, Ondo, made known his allegiance to Late Archbishop Benson Idahosa during a worship service in 1997. This, according to him, involved paying a tithe of the church's income to him, seeking his counsel and inviting him or leaders in his ministry to special programmes, like the church's annual convention. Others in this category are Commonwealth of Zion Assembly (COZA), Lagos, God's Love Tabernacle (GLT) and Rhemaword Ministries, both in Ile-Ife. Under this arrangement, they remain the head of their organizations and retain their separate identity. This option, while giving the impression of a rebellion against the dominant influences within the movement, is akin to taking a short cut to attain what the ambitious attained through an open route.¹¹

The second sub-type who could be described as the real loners are those who neither fraternize with any centre or individual nor seek any position either overtly or covertly. Rather, they relate with their colleagues who started their organizations around the same time as their own and have a similar focus or shared a similar vision. Characteristically, those in this category enjoy the company of one another and this is manifested in their invitation to one another's programmes and the key roles they play at them. Apparently, a major basis of these relationships is personal friendship built and nurtured over a period of time but also sustained by similar perceptions of and disposition to the contest within the movement. Worthy of note also is their seeming refusal to cringe or stoop before men of influence within the movement who they consider to be mostly their contemporaries and without which they would not be admitted into the core or popular leadership level of the movement. Mention could be made of such organizations as the Living Jesus Ministries International, Full Redemption Ministries, both in Osogbo, House on the Rock, Fountain of Life Ministries and Daystar Christian Centre based in Lagos.

The second major response to the reality of not belonging or the feeling of exclusion is seeking consolation in another position, which although was not originally popular within the movement in Nigeria, has been popularized. By conferring on themselves the title of 'Apostle', individuals within this group based their position or located their authority in the biblical listing of church offices, which places apostle above all other offices (see 1 Corinthians 12: 28–31 and Ephesians 4: 11). Another biblical passage, often used as a justification, is the instruction which Apostle Paul gave to Timothy, 'his son in the faith', on the requirements for being made a bishop (1 Timothy 3: 1–7). Other charges of Apostle Paul in the Acts of the Apostles 20: 28 and Philippians 1: 1 have been used as justification. The logic of the argument is that the office of the apostle is higher than that of the bishop and is in fact the highest office in the church and, set against the aspiration of almost every individual for the office of bishop, it is better to be distinct.¹² The president-founder of the Holy Ghost Centre International, Ondo, Pastor Akin Akinnola adopted the title of apostle when his contemporary, Pastor Felix Remi Adejumo of Agape Ministries, Akure, became a bishop. Similarly, the president-founder of the Word Communication Ministries (WOCOM), Ibadan, Rev Sunday Popoola is known as an apostle. Notwithstanding, the impression created is that the title is more of a resignation to fate, while seeking consolation elsewhere. This position could be likened

to an age-old *Yoruba* proverb that says that when a child fails to get a chunk of food in a struggle with others, he consoles himself that there is no food that is eaten that will not be exhausted. The position of these leaders could therefore be borne out of disillusionment following their exclusion or inability to belong on one hand, or on the other hand, out of protest, informed by the need to prove their relevance. This category of apostle is, however, different from those who were made apostles by the church by virtue of their spiritual gifts. This is mostly the case with the Apostolic Church Nigeria and Christ Apostolic Church (CAC). In most cases, the leadership of such organizations is properly defined and the apostles operate under higher authority. Implicit in the position of the affiliated loners who take the short cut, those who remain real loners or those who take consolation in another title is their admission, if only tacit, of a contest which they avoided directly or completely, or were even beaten in. For both the loners and the resigners, the strength of their organizations varies. While some have a large single congregation, others have multi-branch networks. Generally, the desire for office, whatever its nomenclature, was the vogue in the 1990s and early part of the 21st century, and was more of a rule than the exception. In particular, the ordination of Benson Idahosa as a bishop in 1981 set in motion a development which has been difficult to contain. Archbishop Idahosa later played a major role in the ordination of the likes of David Oyedepo, Francis Wale Oke, Mike Okonkwo and Uma Ukpai as Bishops.¹³

Perhaps the experience of the ambitious, loners and resigners had informed or convinced some others to be aloof. These unconcerned or neutral groups remained leaders of their congregations, and appeared to show no interest in honorific or big titles or offices and seemed not to be bothered by the race to spread their power base. The decision to be unconcerned could also have been borne out of the determination to remain focused with the important task of 'winning souls and preparing them to be responsible citizens, and most importantly for heavenly reign with God'. Prominent in this category are Latter Rain Assembly, Believers Loveworld and Elevation Church all in Lagos. Arguably these categorizations are not static or fixed, particularly with the intensification of the struggle to belong, the changing context of negotiation and changing variables and also the continued proliferation within the movement. Also it does not describe all the Pentecostal groups in Nigeria; rather it is based on major trends within the movement.

Among the categorizations highlighted above, three apparently fit into the identity group typified by the primordialists. These are the simple or refined, the real loners and those maintaining complete aloofness with their seemingly fixed or organic identity. The passivity of the simple in particular is a measure or manifestation of their identity. But for the ambitious or the aggressive leaders as well as the dependent loners, their desire and willingness to belong makes them fit perfectly into the basic features expounded by the constructivists, even though, unlike what the constructivists postulated, identity in this case is not arbitrary but more of a deliberate choice. Even for those who did not aspire to belong to the popular orientation, like the refined or the real loners or the aloof, they related with their likes or peers either on the basis of their generational groupings, similarity in disposition or even on the basis of personal friendship or family relations. And for those who desire to belong, like the ambitious or the dependent loners, their willingness to meet the conditions for belonging, given the recognition and the influence which they desire, shows the context and the nature of relationship which they aspire to. In a similar manner, the response of those who conferred on themselves the title of apostle amounted to redefining or reinventing identity. Generally, the identity concepts provide a mode of understanding the groups within the movement. Thus, whether unconsciously or consciously, leaders in the New Pentecostal Movement engaged in politics of identity by defining, negotiating, promoting, rejecting, violating, and transcending the boundaries of identity and belonging.

Significantly, the politics of belonging manifesting in different forms within the Pentecostal movement has the capability to generate unhealthy rivalry and undue competition for offices,

privileges and popularity while distracting members from the main purpose of the movement. Besides, the Holy Spirit ministry which is the driving force of the movement and which should be the distinct or distinguishing factors for identifying and categorizing organizations and for seeking and excelling in offices, is hindered. More importantly, the schemes and competition have had a negative effect on the movement, particularly as they reflect the evils of the age rather than acting as an agent of change.

Sustaining identity: Between strategy and workability

The emergence of many of the organizations in the movement under the control of the president-founders reflected the tremendous influence of American Pentecostalism which grew with the affiliation that started much earlier (Ayegeboyin, 2004: 86; Ojo, 2006: 189; Ukah, 2007: 12–14). Given that sustaining identity is much more strenuous than creating or carving it, different typologies within the Pentecostal movement have devised the means to remain relevant. Whereas, Marshall (2009: 46) has argued that the born again movement is primarily a regime of the self acting on the self to transform it and that the born again ethic is unique not because the central element is a code but rather a moral programme or set of techniques of the self, leadership within the movement seems to have seen this differently. Thus, rather than the otherworldliness of the pre-1980s, the dominant typologies into which the different strands of the movement belong have devised means to sustain the status quo, apparently to remain relevant and better positioned to exercise continual influence. This explains why the ambitious or the aggressive and other categories (irrespective of their status or station) have devised an institutionalization mechanism. As part of the institutionalization process, some of these organizations have listed the wife or children of founders as members of the board, which made it easier for them to exercise some authority while the founder is still alive and to fit into the succession plan after his demise. Even for those who did not do this when alive, the intervention of ‘elders’ in the movement both within and outside the country have made succession of close family members possible.

As part of the preparatory process, these family members were usually ordained as pastors and leaders in the organizations irrespective of whether they had a pastoral calling or not. This was more of a rule than the exception. This was the case with the emergence of Mrs Margaret Idahosa as the presiding bishop of the Church of God Mission founded by her late husband. Their son, Faith Emmanuel Benson Idahosa, was also ordained a bishop thereafter. Similarly Mrs Mercy Ezekiel is the vice president of her husband’s ministry, Christian Pentecostal Mission. She is also the national and international coordinator of women in the organization (Williams, 2002). The implication being that the layers of leadership that were built over a period of time and exposed to the nitty-gritty of leadership – having been elevated to higher offices within the organizations – were often abandoned. Naturally, those who could not bear the shock often left to start their own organizations. Another extreme of the succession game plan was usually to frustrate the career of gifted, bright and visible/popular ministers in their organizations, not because those ministers were not loyal but to prevent them from overshadowing the founders and their protégés. Usually the strategy was either to transfer them to remote, less visible or new branches, or deploy them to the office to deal only with filing, a move, which, of course, reduced their visibility. This also resulted in the departure of the marginalized who left sometimes with the support of the congregations who were perplexed by the visible act of ‘injustice’.

It was under this circumstance that Pastor Ayo Oritsejafor left the Church of God Mission of Archbishop Benson Idahosa to establish his own organization, The Word of Life Ministries.¹⁴ The institutionalization process also involves establishing/incorporating personal ministries within the bigger ministries and enhancing them nationally and globally, such that proceeds accruing to such

ministries are outside the purview of the board of trustees of these organizations, where they exist and where they are not dominated by family members. Discernible in the effort at institutionalization by leadership according to Marshall (2009: 173), was the shift to worldliness within the movement in the 1990s, bringing to the fore the emphasis on miracles and prosperity and the attendant rise of charismatic, miracle-working prosperity pastors into wealthy celebrities. Accumulation and power analogous to those in the wider political economy against which the born again movement had originally set itself, became the distinguishing features necessitating the clamour to either become like others, sustain the present status or seek another way to be relevant.

The clamour for offices within the movement and the attendant scheming was complemented by the craze to acquire honorary doctoral degrees, mostly from American Pentecostal universities and often through their proxies and agents in Nigeria, and usually requiring payment. This practice is not restricted to the Pentecostal fold alone. Almost all of the visible leaders in the movement had honorary doctoral degrees, including sometimes those that did not clamour or struggle for office. But a few stood out, like Bro Gbile Akanni of the Living Seed Ministries who did not take the title of a pastor and did not establish a church but is widely respected within the movement.¹⁵ There are others, like Pastor Tunde Bakare of the Latter Rain Assembly, Lagos, Pastor Tunde Joda of Christ Chapel, Lagos and Pastor Olusola Ayodele Areogun of the Living Jesus Ministries, Osogbo.¹⁶ This is contrasted by the likes of Rev (Dr) Francis Olonade of the Full Redemption Ministries, Pastor (Dr) Samuel Abiara of the Christ Apostolic Church, Agbala, Itura, Ibadan, Late Apostle (Dr) Timothy Obadare and others who hold honorary doctoral degrees.¹⁷ Whereas those who studied hard to acquire a doctoral degree dropped it due to deep conviction and the desire to be better focused (as Pastor EA Adeboye of the RCCG did¹⁸), many others were chasing it and so prevalent was the trend that some leaders felt incomplete without it. For Wariboko (2014), given the setting in which Pentecostalism operates in Nigeria and the prevailing influence of society and culture on it, the situation with leaders who desire power and influence could not have been otherwise. The preoccupation with the development of self as postulated by Marshall notwithstanding, Wariboko (2014: 113–118) sees spirituality as a broader interaction of religion and politics. Whereas the two are inseparable in real terms, their interaction, conflict or even fusion and the effects they produce in the context of the Pentecostal movement are seen clearly in the desire for a stronger or more plausible identity with the knowledge of what such an identity could bring or result in.

Conclusion

Belonging within the Pentecostal movement has been defined, negotiated, promoted and rejected – sometimes not wilfully but by the inability to meet the conditions for it. The realization that belonging is neither isolated nor arbitrary but situated in the context of opportunities and constraints mean that its context is dynamic and its implications can be tremendous. While the defining line remains fluid, the scheming of the actors might continue for some time but when not all actors or organizations within the movement are involved it can be seen that the meaning and the impact will vary. Given the growth of the movement and the attendant desire to be unique or different, the likelihood of leaders within the movement developing ingenious means of either seeking or sustaining relevance within the movement – and in the process carving a niche for themselves in a seemingly competitive environment – is possible. But the extent to which they succeed in doing this is what cannot be said with any degree of precision. However, when it is considered that the different waves of Pentecostalism have their own orientation, it is possible that there could be a new wave with a different orientation, provided that it does not build on the present orientation characterized by contest for influence.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Notes

1. The label Charismatic Pentecostal relates to Pentecostal groups that grew in the 1960s and 1970s mostly on university campus from where they spilled over into the larger society. Rooted partly in the earlier wave of Pentecostalism, they either propelled spiritual renewal from outside the church or sought renewal within the church. Neo-Pentecostalism grew from the 1980s and is characterized by its large number of congregations, which are mostly independent, existing in a flurry of doctrines and practices, with rapid change. They are also multifaceted and less prescriptive but with leaders laying claim to authority through charismatic qualities, similar to Charismatic Pentecostalism.
2. Different terms have been used to describe this movement based on different conceptualizations, categorizations and perceptions by scholars. Such terms include the Born Again Community, Fundamentalist Movement, Neo-Pentecostal Movement, Pentecostal Movement, Charismatic Movement and Evangelical Movement.
3. These fellowship leaders have had the privilege of being addressed as pastors and accorded pastoral privileges since the mid-1990s and, as it was with those that were vibrant in the movement in the 1970s, they mostly ended up being pastors and president-founders of ministries.
4. Interview with Pastor Kingsley Ilori, Christ Peace Mission, Ipetumodu, 20 February 2014.
5. The most important of these offices is that of bishop.
6. Interview with Bishop Felix Adejumo, Presiding Bishop, Agape Christian Ministries Inc., Akure, Ondo State, 9 March 2010.
7. Interview with Bishop Felix Adejumo, Presiding Bishop, Agape Christian Ministries Inc., Akure, Ondo State, 9 March 2010.
8. It is difficult to determine the amount paid in different situations and the purpose of payment owing to the secrecy surrounding the issue of finance in the church but it appears that the amount varies.
9. Interview with Archbishop SGA Onibere, formerly of the Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion) President Founder, Charis Ministries International, Ile-Ife, Department of Religious Studies, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, 15 February 2016
10. Interview with Dr Abiola Ayodeji Olaniyi, Department of Religious Studies, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, 16 February 2016.
11. Interview with Rev Paul Akinpelu, President and Founder, Christ Witnessing Ministries, Ile-Ife and Kingdom Life Assembly Birmingham, United Kingdom, and a contemporary of the leading members of the movement in Nigeria, 15 March 2010; interview with Dr Emmanuel Okogbue, 48 years, senior lecturer, Federal University of Technology Akure and Christian Leader, Christ Chapel, Adeyemi College of Education Ondo, Nigeria, 25 February 2010
12. Interview with Apostle Hezekiah Akinyemi Oni-Ige, President, Christ Evangelical Explosion Ministry, 116–118 Hospital Road, Akure, Ondo State, 5 March 2010.
13. Interview with Dr Olujide Gbadegesin, Church Leader and Lecturer, Department of Religious Studies, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, 10 September 2014.
14. Interview with Dr Emmanuel Okogbue.
15. Interview with Ebenezer Oladapo, Church Leader and Federal Civil Servant, Lagos, 12 December 2014; Charles Adedeji Ogidan, Church Leader and Lecturer, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, 10 October 2014.
16. Interview with Dr Oluseyi Tewe, Church Leader and Veterinary Surgeon, Ondo, 12 April 2014.

17. Interview with Dr VO Edo, Church Leader and Senior Lecturer, Department of History University of Ibadan, 15 April 2014.
18. Interview with Adeyemi Awe, Church Leader and Senior Administrator, Adeyemi College of Education, Ondo, 12 April 2014.

References

- Anderson A (2001) *African Reformation: African Initiated Christianity in the 20th Century*. Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, Inc.
- Anderson B (1991) *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso Press.
- Ayegboyin D (2004) Dressed in borrowed robes: The experience of new Pentecostal movements in Nigeria. In: Akinwale A and Kenny J (eds) *Tradition and Compromises: Essays on the Challenge of Pentecostalism*. Ibadan: Dominican Institute, pp.72–73.
- Ayegboyin D and Ukah A (2002) Taxonomy of churches in Nigeria. *Orita, Ibadan Journal of Religious Studies* 34(1–2): 68–86.
- Bacova V (1998) The construction of national identity on primordialism and instrumentalism. *Human Affairs* 8(1) 29–43.
- Barker C (2000) *Cultural Studies: Theory and Practice*. London: SAGE Publications.
- Bell V (1999) Performativity and belonging: An introduction. *Theory, Culture and Society* 16(2): 1–10.
- Bhambra GK (2006) Culture, identity and rights: Challenging contemporary discourses of belonging. In: Yuval-Davis N, Kannabiran K and Vieten UM (eds) *The Situated Politics of Belonging*. London: SAGE Publications, pp.32–41.
- Bloch A (2003) *Red Ties and Residential Schools: Indigenous Siberians in a Post-Soviet State*. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Burgess R (2008) *Nigeria's Christian Revolution: The Civil War Revival and Its Pentecostal Progeny (1967–2006)*. Oxford: Regnum Books International.
- Butler J (1990) *Gender Trouble*. London: Routledge.
- Cerulo KA (1997) Identity construction: New issues, new directions. *Annual Review of Sociology* 23: 385–409.
- Corten A and Marshall-Fratani R (2001) Introduction. In: Corten A and Marshall-Fratani R (eds) *Between Babel and Pentecost: Transnational Pentecostalism in Africa and Latin America*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, pp.5–6.
- Croucher SL (2004) *Globalization and Belonging: The Process of Identity in a Changing World*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Enwerem IM (1995) *A Dangerous Awakening: The Politicization of Religion in Nigeria*. Ibadan: IFRA.
- Freston P (2001) *Evangelicals and Politics in Asia, Africa and Latin America*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hackett RIJ (1998) Charismatic/Pentecostal appropriation of media technologies in Nigeria and Ghana. *Journal of Religion in Africa* 28: 258–277.
- Isichei E (1995) *A History of Christianity in Africa from Antiquity to the Present*. London: SPCK.
- Josiah-Amata OBE (2002) *The Nigerian Pentecostal Movement: The People, The Purpose and the Power*. 2nd ed. Lagos: Pillars House.
- Kalu OU (1998) The third response: Pentecostalism and the reconstruction of Christian experience in Africa, 1970–1995. *Journal of African Christian Thought* 1(2): 3.
- Marshall R (1992) Pentecostalism in Southern Nigeria: An overview. In: Gifford P (ed.) *New Dimensions in African Christianity*. Nairobi: All Africa Conference of Churches, pp.9–21.
- Marshall R (1993) 'Power in the name of Jesus': Social transformation and Pentecostalism in Western Nigeria revisited. In: Ranger T and Vaughan O (eds) *Legitimacy and the State in Twentieth-Century Africa: Essays in Honour of A.H.M. Kirk-Greene*. London: Macmillan Press, pp.216–224.
- Marshall R (1995) God is not a democrat: Pentecostalism and democratisation in Nigeria. In: Gifford P (ed.) *The Christian Churches and the Democratisation of Africa*. Leiden: Brill, pp.244–245.

- Marshall R (2009) *Political Spiritualities: The Pentecostal Revolution in Nigeria*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press 1993.
- Marshall DA (2002) Behaviour, belonging and belief: A theory of ritual practice. *Sociological Theory* 20(3): 360–380.
- Ojo MA (1988a) Deeper Christian Life Ministry: A case study of the charismatic movements in Western Nigeria. *Journal of Religion in Africa* 28(2): 141–162.
- Ojo MA (1988b) The contextual significance of the charismatic movements in independent Nigeria. *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 58(2): 175–192.
- Ojo MA (2006) *The End-Time Army: Charismatic Movements in Modern Nigeria*. Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, Inc.
- Ojo MA (2007) Pentecostal movement, Islam and the contest for public space in Northern Nigeria. *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 18(2): 175–188.
- Okonkwo M (2005) Two decades after: Our scorecard. *PFN News* 1(2).
- Omotoye RW (2010) A critical examination of the activities of Pentecostal churches in national development in Nigeria. *Centro Studi sulle Nuove Religioni*. Available at: <http://www.cesnur.org/2010/omotoye.htm> (accessed 30 September 2015).
- Probyn E (1996) *Outside Belongings*. London: Routledge.
- Somers MR (1994) The narrative constitution of identity: A relationship and network approach. *Theory and Society* 23(5): 606–620.
- Ukah AF-K (2005) Those who trade with God never lose: The economics of Pentecostal activism in Nigeria. In: Falola T (ed.) *Christianity and Social Change in Africa: Essays in Honour of J.D.Y. Peel*. Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press, pp.253–258.
- Ukah A (2007) *African Christianities: Features, promises and problems*. Working Paper No. 79, Department of Anthropology and African Studies, Johannes Gutenberg Universitat Mainz.
- Ukpong DP (2006) The presence and impact of Pentecostalism in Nigeria. Available at: <http://www.glopent.net/members/frdona/presence-and-impact-of-pentecostalism-in-nigeria.pdf> (accessed 18 January 2010).
- Wariboko N (2014) *Nigerian Pentecostalism*. Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press.
- Williams B (2002) Nigeria: 50 most powerful pastors. Available at: <http://www.onlinenigeria.com/links/adv.asp?blur=110> (accessed 21 January 2010).

Author biography

Abimbola O Adesoji is a reader and acting head in the Department of History, Obafemi Awolowo University. He was a Georg Forster Fellow of the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation at the Institut für Historische Ethnologie, Johann Wolfgang Goethe Universität, Frankfurt Main, Germany from December 2009 to November 2010. His research interests are traditional and contemporary Yoruba history and the socio-political history of Nigeria. He has recently published papers in the *Journal of African Media Studies*, *Africa eMediterraneo* and *Canadian Journal of African Studies*.