

Introduction: Power Identity: Politics, Performance, and Nigerian Pentecostalism

When I began the fieldwork for this research in Nigeria, one of the questions that I frequently confronted from the Pentecostal Christians to whom I introduced myself as a scholar of performance studies was the correlation between Pentecostalism and my academic discipline. In those moments, reeling out academic studies that have variously established that theater and religion have always been interwoven from as far back as Ancient Egypt and Greek societies would have, at best, elicited an indifferent shrug.¹ I could also have mentioned that religious rituals in African societies have always had dramatic elements; that in both profane and sacred settings, the communication of meaning to both human and divine witnesses takes place through repetition of symbolic actions. However, as someone raised in the Pentecostal culture myself, I knew that kind of academic explanation would likely backfire. Nigerian Christians, generally, are sensitive to allusions that their religious practices have any African syncretic elements. Pentecostals especially do not take kindly to the insinuation that their practices are not purely divinely inspired. To draw lines that connect what they do with “rituals,” a terminology they associate with “pagan” practices rather than as a form of symbolic communication, was to lose them.²

The answer I often provided was that worship activities such as singing, dancing, preaching, speaking in tongues, miracle performance, hand laying, prophetic utterances, prayers, ecstatic worship,

¹ See, for instance, McDonald & Walton, *The Cambridge Companion to Greek and Roman Theatre*; Wise, *Dionysus Writes*.

² Albrecht in *Rites in the Spirit: A Ritual Approach to Pentecostal/Charismatic Spirituality* notes the same about Pentecostals in the USA, although they have a slightly different reason for the disavowal of “rituals.” He says that to them, “rituals represents something ‘dead’, meaningless or even ‘unscriptural’, and ‘unscriptural’ mechanical religion.” Rather than such a niggling term, they use less-charged expression such as “worship services,” “spiritual practices,” or “Pentecostal distinctives.”

and so on were all performative in nature.³ It is, therefore, worth studying these ritual activities as performance acts to understand the various rites through which people communicated with God, and how they navigated their identity as both Pentecostals and as political subjects. What they did within their churches mattered if one wanted to understand the contemporary Nigerian social character. Sometimes, I supplemented my answers with Bible verses. Often that was enough, although in some other cases I was further prodded to clarify. They could understand studying Pentecostalism as religion or sociology, but performance?

I learned to recalibrate my standard explanation to convince people that my conceptualization of Pentecostalism as performance was in no way pejorative or belittling of their faith practices. In fact, the approach underscored my taking them seriously enough to understand how they generated meanings through their actions. I tried to simplify my research by saying the disciplinary tools of performance studies are to critically investigate Pentecostalism: what they do, why, and what factors they contend while doing. My characterizing Pentecostalism as performance, I explained several times and in various ways, was in no way a judgment of the boisterousness of their worship activity or their general activities. It was so I could use the right analytical approach to examine their actions, the thoughts that created them, their assumption of their identity as social actors, and the transformations that occur when the truth of social conditions are dramatized through acts of fervent worship.

One of the pastors that I approached, a senior administrative member of one of the most prominent Pentecostal churches, was not to be easily moved. He said, "Performance?! You think we are playing here? No, we are not performing here. We, are making power happen. Even when you see us sing and dance, we are not playing. If we are performing anything at all, it is power! Power! We are a people of power! Power is our identity!" I was momentarily taken aback by the characterization of a religious identity category that sidestepped familiar essences of theology or doctrines, and pivoted straight to its ambitions. To say that for

³ The range of activities are general to Christianity, but these listed activities are almost peculiar to Pentecostals. The Pentecostal liturgy and worship are quite diverse, and too inflected by local contexts for one to homogenize or universalize them successfully.

Pentecostals, power is the distinct marker and their means of self-differentiation means power is not only capable of activating social processes and coercing situations but also stands in the place of the “self,” the one whose performances enacts or actualizes. The “I” of the identity is an embodiment of power and the body itself as a place of power inscription. His response gave me pause, and I was prompted to further think of his answer in several ways. My engagement with his response formed the direction I pursued in this book. I follow this self-conceptualization that construes identity primarily through the point of its desire, power, and expresses as much in multiple sites of social relations. Consequently, I explore seven theses on power throughout this book.

First, by telling me that power is the Pentecostal identity, he clarified how Pentecostals operate within a social milieu that affirmed and contested their desires for being, and how their faith practices continuously imbue the social matrix with saliences that also facilitate their performances of power. I was used to sights of people praying; eyes closed, fists bunched like a hammerhead and swung to crush the air and all the oppressive forces it harbors while they chanted “Power! Power! Power!” However, by directly stating that power was their identity, he had helped me apprehend the ideology that distinctly underwrote their ritual actions. At that point, I could fold up the research and go home since he already handed me the answer that I sought. However, I still had more work to do to clarify certain questions. If power is the identifying marker of the Pentecostal, what cultural practices constitute it? What are the histories, desires, knowledges, tools, and innate divergences of this identity, and how do they interact with other ideological elements that make up the society? How is the social milieu being transformed by the Pentecostal performance of their identity as the people of power? In talking about power as the Pentecostal identity, he also challenged me to consider its organization and performance across various levels. Definitely, that power cannot be uniformly performed across every stratum of the Pentecostal demographic. It would be instructive to see how people who stood at the social margins feel empowered through Pentecostalism.

Second, by using the present tense to tell me what they do – *we are performing power* – he alluded to the ritual activities through which they strove toward their desired status as permanently ongoing.

Cultural studies have typically explored identity along the lines of cultural sameness and strategic differentiation, raising questions of how people choose to see themselves in relation to other groups. As much as identity is construed based on the many ways that history is instrumentalized to generate an essence and mark the positioning of the self against an *other*, what makes it perceptible is the performance aspect. Its beingness requires a consistent series of action and stylized behavior to become what it is, or what it purports to be. Identity is not a given; its recognizability as a distinct category also depends on the consistency of performing it. If power is that distinctive marker of Pentecostals, it also means they act in a series of determining ways to articulate their striving to attain and embody that power. From an internal conviction of divine form of empowerment now conjugated into an external determination of identity, they impersonate an ideal through which they also intuit their “cosmically empowered identities . . . a singular poetic impulse to bring self into being and manifests in acting.”⁴ Power performed is not only inscribed into the body, the persona too becomes all about power itself and all its actions are oriented toward confirming that defining identity. There is no thought or action that is not about acquiring and performing power.

Third, the nonstop nature of this identity performance also registers the flimsiness of power as it is performed. As I will show in the forthcoming chapters, the moral authority generated through Pentecostal power performance is continuously contested by various other people who seek their own power within the construct of Pentecostal power. The sense of immediacy and continuity in “we are performing power” also suggests a restless grasp for more power on the part of these subjects who become the place of power inscription. That coincidence of site with the end goals means they cannot *not* perform power. Their activities are means as much as the ends, and the Pentecostal subject has to be seen performing power perpetually. In discussing the power and authority Pentecostal leaders embody, political theorist Ruth Marshall, noted, “the authority and fortunes of pastors rise and fall. They are subject to close and critical scrutiny on the part of converts.”⁵ The social and ritual

⁴ Mason, *The Performative Ground of Religion and Theatre*, 8–9.

⁵ Marshall, *Political Spiritualities*.

activities that engender their power is transient, too fleeting and too variously challenged for it to be broadly accepted as a foregone conclusion. That fragility necessitates their performing power to sustain their perception as people of power.

The possibility that the power they gain can be lost just as easily means there is an element of paranoia always underlining their actions. They stoke anxieties that generate the impulse to develop more power to sustain what is already attained. Power identity is fluid and can be easily disassembled. Those for whom power has become their identity also have to keep doubling down on power practices to maintain that identity. Power has to be performed unceasingly because of the frequent destabilizing threats this identity faces from social forces. As power is hierarchical, it also has to compel both adulation and reverence, and remind people of its existence and what it can do. The repetition of these processes can lead to authoritarianism and crudeness in using the instruments that produce power. If performing power transforms one's social status and informs one's identity within a society, the processes by which that identity is established can also be the means of its disestablishment. The constant need to perform power will run into social conflicts and impasses that will delimit that power.

Fourth, production of the empowered self through performance is personally transforming and has social implications. As a religious movement whose doctrinal practices and vernacular are quite pervasive, especially in the urban areas, their social practices also condition political impulses. To a large extent, social practices also condition political impulses. Their theology of domination is explicitly confirmed in the way they try to control the social sphere, and their self-identification as the "people of power" thus makes complete sense. The cultural realm, notes historian Christina Klein, is that "privileged space in which politically salient meanings can be constructed and questioned, where social categories can be defined and delimited, where shared values can be affirmed and contested."⁶ In that same cultural realm, indices of identity are established, performed, transferred, memorized, and reiterated.⁷

⁶ Klein, *Cold War Orientalism*.

⁷ Here, I allude to performance studies scholar, Diana Taylor, who said "performances function as vital acts of transfer, transmitting social knowledge,

Fifth, despite Pentecostal proponents having never hidden their intention to dominate the cultural arena, it is still striking that a faith movement can be defined by the will to power. Pentecostal ethicist Nimi Wariboko, speaking about the Pentecostal understanding of power that rationalizes a fixation on power is a form of identity, said, “knowing that ... reality is split between the seen and unseen world ... and extracting knowledge from the invisible realm to explain, predict, and control the visible world is an important identity marker for Nigerian Pentecostals.”⁸ Their fixation with supernatural power creates real-life consequences through manipulating the invisible. This was expected as Pentecostalism developed in the context of various kinds of crises of modernity, development, and identity.⁹ For the youth population that poured into the urban centers in the 70s, Pentecostalism provided an identity by which to bypass provincial identities and embrace a new life in Christ along with other promises of upward mobility. Pentecostal faith not only “reconstituted the Christian identity under the hammer of failures and shortcomings of the Nigerian state and under the pressure of immense difficulties of economic survival,”¹⁰ it also transcended a mere identity label of “Christian.” Pentecostalism promised that the processes of conversion and transformation could “reconstitute their experience of the world.”¹¹

Sixth, power in Nigerian Pentecostalism is informed by inherited notions of power: the belief that supernatural forces undergird the manifestation of everything tangible, and access to this form of power will determine every other form of power, whether social, political, or economical. Nigerians have watched, and therefore implicitly understand, how these various forms of power have been performed through the years of authoritarian government and how the hegemonic performance of power reached into the transcendental to maintain its hold on the public. Pentecostals particularly have learned the dimensions of power – to achieve certain goals, as a condition of existence, and as a form of identity – and embodied the understanding that these three coexist, cofunction, and are mutually determining. When the pastor

memory, and sense of identity through reiterated, or what Richard Schechner has called ‘twice-behaved behavior.’” Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire*, 2.

⁸ Wariboko, *Nigerian Pentecostalism*, 39.

⁹ Vaughan, *Religion and the Making of Nigeria*.

¹⁰ Wariboko, *Nigerian Pentecostalism*, 32.

¹¹ Marshall, *Political Spiritualities*, 141.

said “power is our identity,” he meant that the faith movement’s pursuit of goals through various ritual and social performances has, over time, become both their unique self-presentation and self-recognition, as well as their existential condition. Both their goals and the conditions of their existence are reciprocal presuppositions that are diagrammed and performatively enacted by identity. Pentecostals’ identity not only points to these but also participates in their power and glory.

Finally, I consider the simultaneous rejection and acceptance of my characterization of Pentecostalism as a performance as equally instructive. This pastor’s reaction, which Western theater scholars might identify as an “antitheatrical prejudice,”¹² (that is, the intuitive aversion to acts that are theatrical partly because its mimetic nature is associated with the art of “deception”), was understandable. If one viewed his objection as protecting his faith from being discounted as mere frivolity or artifice, it made sense that he resisted the idea of construing Pentecostal practices as play or ad hoc constructions of spectacle that might fall apart under a critical gaze. Yet, his unease was telling in other ways too. What repulses people and how they show it can effectively dramatize the social conflicts, tensions, and power negotiations ongoing in that society. The stage, whether the proscenium one of the traditional theater or the banal one on which we perform everyday life, can magnify broader historical struggles, the cultural shifts and political contentions that created such sensibility.¹³ His acceptance that they do perform – although what they do is power – leads me toward the social history of Pentecostalism as a faith movement that has undergone several epochal shifts and has evolved to the point of describing itself by what it has achieved.

Performing Pentecostalism, Pentecostalism as Performance

At the early stages of this research, much of the study of Pentecostalism was being carried out in anthropology, history, religious studies, and political science. They were producing important work on techniques of Pentecostal religious practices ranging from invocatory prayers to mediated liturgies. While some of them touched

¹² Barish, *The Antitheatrical Prejudice*.

¹³ Freeman, *Antitheatricality and the Body Public*, 2.

on the dramaturgical aspects of Pentecostal worship, and even applied performance theories in their studies, the elaboration of the creative dimensions of these performances that performance theory engagement would have highlighted was often missing. The religious social activities still out of range of scholarship focus are ones crucial to understanding the nature of the movement because they help critical reflection on the production and reception. The ones that I highlight here show Pentecostal religious performance are not all about collective obedience and social compliances to religious authority. Instead, they demonstrate more nuanced ideas of Pentecostal identity constructions. With the malleability of its theoretical constructs and applicability to virtually every cultural product, performance studies presented the best methodology to examine Pentecostal aesthetics, embodied actions, and political consequences.¹⁴

Excitingly though, ongoing studies in performance scholarship literature have begun to explore the nexus between the discipline and various religions, opening up more channels of understanding how the performative nature of religion – and its rituals – facilitates belief and seals believer identity. These wide-ranging works prompt us to pay close attention to how believers themselves increasingly understand religious activities – from worship to proselytization – as performative, and astutely use that level of conceptual awareness to their advantage.¹⁵ Theater studies, these studies rightfully note, has always engaged the aspects of religion through a critical analysis of mutually evolved history and shared elements such as spaces, lighting, embodiment, aesthetics, and the dramaturgy of liturgy. Recent work by theater studies scholar David Mason, for instance, critiques the approach of theater and religion that takes one as reflecting the other to open up a path for understanding how their imbricated foundations powerfully express their mutual truths.

Several works from performance scholars have compellingly studied the relationship between theater and (mostly) Christianity just as theater scholars are engaging religion critically and providing a grid of thought broadly applicable to performance studies.¹⁶ For instance, theater scholar Elizabeth Schafer has looked specifically at the

¹⁴ Bial & Brady, “Introduction” in *The Performance Studies Reader*.

¹⁵ Palacios, “Introduction: Performing Religion.”

¹⁶ For instance, there is Jill Stevenson’s study of how the belief systems of evangelical Christians in the USA inflect their engagement of performance genres.

relationship between theater and Christianity, exploring their complex intersected histories as they navigated the borders of the real and realism.¹⁷ She noted that theater can deliver an appearance of what is real through stagecraft, and that ability to mimic the real might unsettle belief. While scholars have trained their focus mostly on Christianity (especially in its nondenominated forms), others in the growing corpus of scholarship construe the category of religion in more encompassing ways.¹⁸ Performer and scholar Cia Sautter, in exploring the performance of religion and the attendant effectual power of the sacred, attempts to free the sacred experience that can come through the performing arts from the compartments of the Western mind that experiences religion and performance as disparate.¹⁹ In a similar vein, for performance scholars Claire Chambers, Simon du Toit, and Joshua Edelman, the meaning-making practices of religion do not only happen through abstract or formal theology, but performed ritual acts.²⁰

These works are critical in understanding how contemporary scholarship is finding fresh convergences in the imbrication of theater/performance and religion beyond looking at the thrill of the former as a religious experience, or the rites of the latter as merely construed to satisfy instincts for entertainment.²¹ Indeed, virtually any cultural or public practices can be studied as performance events, and the multiple perspectives of these works have been quite illuminating.²² By collating the depth and intricate details of actions used to express one's faith, these works disentangle overlaid structures of meaning and point us to the larger imports of embodied religion being acted out in sacred and profane contexts. However, much work that purports to reconcile theology with embodiment and performance reveals itself as still wedded to classic Western ideas of construing religion as formal liturgy and practices of faith as lacking spontaneity. Approaches toward

¹⁷ Schafer, *Theatre & Christianity*.

¹⁸ An example will be Marvin Carlson's study of the conjunction of Islam and theater.

¹⁹ Sautter, *The Performance of Religion*.

²⁰ Chambers, Edelman, & Toit, "Introduction" in *Performing Religion in Public*, 1–2.

²¹ Childers, *Performing the Word*.

²² Although not primarily a performance scholar, political theorist, Ruth Marshall, vigorously engaged the performative component of spiritual warfare by Pentecostal/Evangelical in her investigation of their modeling of truth. Marshall, "Destroying arguments and captivating thoughts."

performance of religion and spirituality that deploys performance as a methodological tool to free religion from the abstraction of dead-rigid dogmas supposedly challenges the binary between faith and reason, personal experience and rationality. This rediscovery of the liveliness of religion reflects concerns that are peculiar to Western societies and do not consider the ways African Pentecostal practitioners, for instance, have long abandoned orthodoxy and built livelier theology through their creative performances whether in the sacred space of church or just in daily life. Religious practitioners in the Pentecostal denomination self-consciously create for the worshippers, the “experiences designed to foster embodied beliefs that respond to specific devotional needs and priorities.”²³

While some of the contemporary scholarship of religion and theater/performance still grapples with how the theories of the latter can adequately illuminate the study of the former, Pentecostals have been unabashedly borrowing the tools and techniques of theater/performance to curate livelier religious experience and encounter for worshippers. Pentecostals, especially in Africa, may recoil at any suggestion that their activity has something to do with “theatre,” “performance,” or even “drama,” yet, even a superficial study of their activities as they plan worship activities that would take place within the church (as well as online) and their reflexive analysis of each worship session says otherwise. Their careful construction of their religious leaders as persons who embody the power of God to the degree to which it appears in the church and among the congregation, their use of modern technology to enhance embodied experience, and the general ways they try to shape the event of church services, show how much they innately grasp their faith practices as a performance event.²⁴ Their attitude of seeing worship as a performance and planning accordingly (for both their present congregation and even prospective members) shows how much they appreciate the rich potential of performance to generate conceptual frameworks that motivate people and ultimately establish their power identity. With that in mind, it now behooves the researcher to

²³ Stevenson, *Sensational Devotion*, 4.

²⁴ This phenomenon, of course, is not limited to Africans. For instance, anthropologist James Bielo, explored how fundamentalist Christians created a theme park in Kentucky where the Bible story of creation is staged into an experiential encounter for the purpose of religious conversion, education, and of course, entertainment. Bielo, *Ark Encounter*.

study the level of political intelligence and aesthetic appeal at which they aim when they perform their faith through worship and social practices. Since they enrich their worship activities with similar instruments used by performance artists, scholars would only be taking their efforts seriously if their actions are examined from the critical lens of the theater/performance traditions and the artifices they consciously appropriate. To treat their creative output as performance is not to inquire about their ability to entertain, but to acknowledge the artistic and political intelligence of their efforts.

In recent times, the flexibility of performance as an analytical tool has made it more pronounced as an increasing number of works from across interdisciplinary aisles corral its theories to analyze social and political phenomena. From the social commentators who borrow the terminologies and deploy them rather casually, to academics who are pushed to reclaim ideas and refocus arguments, performance has become the go-to paradigm to explain the actions of politicians whether they are on television or Twitter, various sporting events, daily life, Instagram photos, news broadcasts, and weather reports. With so many possibilities, it is exciting to be a part of this conversation of burgeoning discoveries. Yet, the promiscuity makes the scholar of Pentecostalism hesitate to divine Pentecostal practice as performance without subordinating ineffable and elusive spiritual realities to theoretical paradigms that view all politics as theater merely created to be witnessed by an audience. As the pastor I mentioned earlier said to me when I told him that I was studying Pentecostalism as a performance, “You think we are playing here?” The righteous indignation that underlay the question has kept me mindful about how I read the discursive practices of worship and the political actions that emanate from them. As rites and social behavior are usually done as an act of faith, I understand the insistence on them being seen as inspirations that stem from their spirituality, rather than their spiritual practices evaluated as mere outward representational exchange.²⁵

In this book, my conceptualization of Pentecostalism as a performance is an analysis of how the techniques and aesthetic effects of colorful Pentecostal practices inform practice, resonate with their subjective experiences, persuade, and elicit the behaviors that turn into political actions. Embodied faith propels the body to move in certain

²⁵ Dox, *Reckoning with Spirit in the Paradigm of Performance*.

directions, and performances carried out by a mass of people who subscribe to a faith movement such as Pentecostalism, necessarily moves even the body politic in radical ways. Such movements generate the spiritual forces that trouble, corrupt, disrupt, affirm, and ultimately restructure society's ethos. However, my interest in Pentecostal performance is not restricted to activities within church venues alone. This work also critically looks at the various sites of their action, where both the sacred and the profane combine into political behavior with transformative consequences. I employ performance as a framework for studying social situations and by "viewing them as performances, thereby facilitating a new sort of thinking about them."²⁶ By focusing on phenomena that clarify social interactions in Pentecostal culture, I also explore the creative means by which people express their identity as people of power and even expand the cultural ideas of empowerment. The evocative force of Pentecostal performance has had an inscriptive effect on the Nigerian social character. Faith has created acts and spectacles, and by engagement with them, have also highlighted the conflicts and social struggles that drove people to summon spiritual forces to transform reality in their favor.²⁷ Subsequently, they perform power to challenge discursive authorities that rule their lives.

Performance studies offer a unique approach to understanding how Pentecostalism, a faith movement deeply invested in drawing the power of the indwelling Spirit to determine temporal circumstances, to "live out" their faith in practical terms. Through performance, we can also conceptualize how the "micro-level of individual shows and the macro-level of the socio-political order . . . productively interact."²⁸ As performance is primarily about bodies in action and the ways we witness them, this work explores the experiential and phenomenal dimensions of Pentecostal practices – both within and outside the church, but all of which are mounted in the propagation of their faith.

"Power Is Our Identity": Pentecostal Self-Recognition

Scholars of performance and power tend to locate the latter within a system of interactive signs embedded within the backdrop of social

²⁶ Shepherd, *The Cambridge Introduction to Performance Theory*, x.

²⁷ See, for instance, Asamoah-Gyadu, *Contemporary Pentecostal Christianity*; Ukah, *A New Paradigm of Pentecostal Power*.

²⁸ Kershaw, *The Politics of Performance*.

culture, and continuously stoked to hook into familiar structures of meaning. For my purposes here, I will focus on only two modes of performing power as they occur between the dominant and the dominated class, and then go on to demonstrate how both forms lead us to notions of power among African Pentecostals for whom “the object of political power is wealth and control over the channels of accumulation creates a logic in which the struggle for power at *every* level has to become a zero-sum game.”²⁹ While Nigerians, as a modern nation-state, might not have a central organizing myth that binds its disparate ethnic and religious identities, yet there exists the mythos of power – that it ultimately flows from a transcendental source and the source legitimizes the human agents that possess it. By foregrounding both forms of power before describing Pentecostal power, I show how belief in the power in the name of Jesus drives Pentecostals to use the supernatural to coerce natural forces. When the contemporary wave of the Pentecostal movement burst on the Nigerian social scene around the 1970s, it came with promises of revival for those on the margins of society. Over time, the movement would acquire power of its own and even come to recognize itself by that power. To Pentecostals, power is the ability to transcend the limit of one’s human ability, and it is essential to relationship between humans and God.³⁰

The first form is the efficacy that occurs because a display of ritual activity has been presaged by myths and mutual beliefs in the ability of that power to perform. Power in this sense is not a thing or a material object, but is indicated through social constructions of reality and the structures of meaning built into the society. This structuring determines the bodies and the objects that will be considered sacred, which people’s lives matter, boundaries of identities, and the ability to marshal the intensity of the forces of collective feelings toward certain causes and give those issues the weight of social importance. Usually vertical, this form of power reposes in institutions or in charismatic political figures who direct the rituals of investiture that legitimates authority, and public demonstrations of the command *of* and control *over* the public spaces, and also blend people, history, and events. The holders of symbolic power get to select what makes up social reality from an endless stream of historical materials, public memories, and

²⁹ Marshall, “Power in the Name of Jesus.”

³⁰ Akinade, “Holy Dilemma,” 154.

symbols. They also use institutional authority to curate what will be identified as culture, ethos and norms, and collective understanding of reality.

Power performance is a precursor to its coercive uses, and that is why witnessing such displays is important. The public's participation constitutes their identity as political subjects within a centralized political system, reinforces the moral order, and also confirms their understanding of who wields power within society as well as the specific members of the society that embody part of that power. Expression through dramas and spectacles provides the epistemological context whereby members of a community sense their place within the social order. In a study of how performances shaped politics in pre-modern societies, anthropologists and archaeologists Takeshi Inomata and Lawrence S. Coben, noted that "performance is characteristic of all known societies and . . . theatre and spectacle are the contexts par excellence where power relations are alternatively established, celebrated, mocked and subverted."³¹ Thus, they note, "theatre and spectacle are commentaries about the contemporary social order and metadiscursive acts."³² Performances constitute the social order because the phenomena people are compelled to witness contain dense symbols that demonstrate the degree of their social relevance within the mix of signs and systems of power.

How power is performed and/or received depends upon the degree of the cohesiveness of the social backdrop. When sociologist Jeffrey Alexander describes power and the modes by which is performed in society, he elaborated on how it happens against the backdrop of the structures of culture, how they inform actions and also give them meaningful resonances.³³ These meaning-making processes are not to be taken as permanently stable; they are regularly enhanced through a spectacular restaging of those symbols. For holders of political powers especially, the augmentation of social symbols is sometimes dramatized through pomp and majestic displays that speak powerfully to people because, "the audience, its concentration on the impending performance channeled and sensitized by a strong emotion, is in a better position to be influenced, persuaded or manipulated by the actions they witness."³⁴ It is this illustrative display of performed

³¹ Coben & Inomata, *Archaeology of Performance*. ³² *Ibid.*, vii.

³³ Alexander, *Performance and Power*. ³⁴ Garlick, *The Final Curtain*.

power that brings people to regard political power as almost sacred, and they normatively yield to the force of its authority.³⁵

An instantiation of how power holders in the society try to create a cohesive system of signs is what historian Andrew Apter illustrated in his study of the second World Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture, FESTAC '77, that held in Lagos, Nigeria, in January/February 1977.³⁶ The grand festival celebrated global black art and culture during the years of the oil boom when international economic forces aligned in favor of the country and brought almost unprecedented prosperity. Through its captivating force, the grandeur of the gathering of black people and their diverse performance cultures from different parts of the world was a project of retrieving African history and pride. On one side, the splendor of the festival would erase what Africa had lost to the humiliating years of slavery, colonialism, and other historical events that have culminated in underdevelopment. On another side, Nigerian leaders who were at that time military dictators could – through the songs, dances, drama, and celebration of black spiritual essence – also sell themselves to the rest of the world as the holders of black power, wealth, and glory. Thus, FESTAC '77, with ostentatious black cultural displays, was purposely spectacular because of the political ends it needed to fulfill.³⁷ It is rather apposite that the bridge between tradition and modernity, an imperfect African past and the utopic future

³⁵ See, for instance, Nimi Wariboko's analysis of the nurture of sacred kingship through the rituals and festivals that regularly take place in Ile-Ife. In responding to Jacob Olupona's *City of 201 Gods*, a book that studies the various sacred activities in the city of Yoruba people's origin, Wariboko demonstrates how the power of the king is regularly deepened in the consciousness of the community through the myths and rituals that are publicly staged all year round. Olupona, *City of 201 Gods*; Wariboko, "The King's Five Bodies."

³⁶ The first one took place in Dakar, Senegal, in 1966.

³⁷ The splendor of celebration of FESTAC '77 festival illustrated how Nigeria intended to objectify newly found power along racial lines. The production of these performances extracted from local stories and myths, the global Pan-African ideology of black destiny, and also took place at a temporal juncture when international forces were productively interfacing with their economic trajectories resulting in excess of revenue that boosted the power of the nation-state. By showing the Nigerian and foreign audience different stunning displays, the holders of power within Nigeria also produced the specific images which people's imaginative faculties would further multiply to eventually discern the full extent of their coercive forces. The various public exhibitions that a nation-state's agents occasionally put up in the celebration of political power are efficient mechanisms of performing power.

that Nigeria and its leaders desired to illustrate the country's emergence as a nation rapidly moving to modernity, culminated in the building of a grandiose theater structure, the National Theatre, in Lagos.³⁸

As performance studies scholar Diana Taylor noted in her study of public spectacles in Argentina, such displays by state agents are a powerful efficacious technique of forging an inherent notion of national identity. They stir a longing in the people (and also manipulate it), bring the spectators insight into what is being enacted, invite them to move between the demarcating lines between actor and spectator. The state can do all this and still deny people access to power.³⁹ These public events and rituals condense the symbols that people already know and understand, and strengthen existing meanings and their interpretations. They also act to "build(s) up those continuities of language and performance that locate and or, by means of the event of the drama, the storyline of retrieved history, and the logic of a projected future, a reconstitution of the body politic."⁴⁰ This form of power often seeks to normalize hierarchies. For sociologist David Apter, when these performances are at their best, they also "enable politics as theatre to endow a particular space with a certain clarity, miniaturizing, focusing, concentrating and intensifying public attention, by magnifying a symbolic register."⁴¹

The various staged displays put up during those festivals are not the "power" itself; these spectacles and spectacular performances are both an objectification of power and an arrow pointing toward the sources of power in the society. According to postcolonial theorist Achille Mbembe, state power creates

through its administrative and bureaucratic practices, a world of meanings all of its own, a mastercode which, in aiming for a primary centrality, also, and perhaps paradoxically, governs the logics of constitution of all other meanings within these societies . . . attempts to institutionalize its world of meanings . . . to make that world fully real, turning it into a part of people's common sense.⁴²

³⁸ Apter, *The Pan-African Nation*. ³⁹ Taylor, *Disappearing Acts*."

⁴⁰ Apter, "Politics as Theatre," 227. ⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Mbembe, "The Banality of Power and the Aesthetics of Vulgarly in the Postcolony."

It was not altogether surprising that the national theater, a huge architectural monument put up to host the spectacular performances of FESTAC '77, would metonymize the power of the military government in power at the time.⁴³ In 1973, General Yakubu Gowon signed the contract for Bulgarian engineers to build Nigeria a theater that looked like “a giant crown rising out of the earth, as if linking the wealth of the land – its chthonic traditions and subterranean oil – with national territory and sovereignty.”⁴⁴ By the time the FESTAC '77 festival took place, Gowon had been ousted in a coup, but that did not stop the diadem that made up the architecture of the theater from being nicknamed “Gowon’s cap.” The image of him and his military cap had been inscribed into the minds of the populace so much that his apparition appeared in the site where military government forces staged culture to miniaturize their power.⁴⁵

This conflation of performance space with the power of the military government shows that the public dramatizations are quite efficacious in impressing an audience. But it does not end there. The drawing out of public acts and scenes in these grandiose performances can reveal those who are marginal to the construct of the culture being symbolically staged. Such theater, along with its ritual ceremonies and pageantries, is ultimately about celebrating of some kind of victory – whether won or needing to be sustained – and that is why marginalized people experience these displays as clarifying moments. By watching the plaited components of the performance and “contemporary ideological traditions with the voices of that tradition as the exemplars of the public,” they also realize their contributions to the polity and other civic demands placed on them are “radically disconnected.”⁴⁶ Even though staging of splendor can be entertaining, it can also evoke terror and revulsion when it dawns on people that the myths being staged in the public sphere are exclusive of their histories and realities, and it is upon their bodies the victories being celebrated have been – and will

⁴³ The design of the national theater was a replica of a similar one in Bulgaria, the Palace of Culture and Sports in Varna. See <https://nationaltheaternigeria.com/h3/about-us/>

⁴⁴ Apter, *The Pan-African Nation*, 47.

⁴⁵ By the time the festival took place, there was another military administrator in place, General Olusegun Obasanjo, whose head too would come to metonymize the National Theatre. During Obasanjo’s time, the theater was called “Obasanjo’s head.”

⁴⁶ Coleman, “Elections as Storytelling Contests,” 175.

continue to be – tested when the holders of this power need to push beyond allowable limits to preserve the integrity of the articles of this power.⁴⁷

This insight produces a crisis that leads to a breakdown of constructed social cohesion and ultimately leading to the second form of power performance: the marginalized rise to demand their right to power through radical performances. Having now been inspired to be an active participant, they try to wrench their suppressed narratives out of the suffocating grip of official power even at the cost of the total destruction of traditions and social practices, and the public artefacts that monumentalize them. Confronted with the violence, marginality, erasure, and disempowerment that underwrite the public performance of power, these underdogs get restless and begin to push a counter-performance with which political power has to reckon. Performance is a particularly powerful medium for this self-assertion as – according to postcolonial performance scholar Nandi Bhatia – its “visual focus, emphasis on collective participation and representation of shared histories, mobility, potential for public disruption, and spatial maneuverability impart yet another layer to the cultural investments of colonial and postcolonial texts in framing, organizing and presenting alternative stories.”⁴⁸

What thus follows are radical acts by the excluded to denaturalize their places within the canon of social influences, and also arouse the public to their existence and the importance of their epistemologies too. They, the disempowered, resist their subjugations by turning their marginalized conditions into innovative forms of performance that counter existing performances of power. These counter-performance s take an unruly turn, comprising minuscule everyday revolutions to slash through the forces of ideological and hegemonic power.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ In Nigeria, it is said that the marginalized people of the Niger Delta community did not know how badly they had been robbed of their natural resources that had been taken to fund Nigeria until they arrived in the nation’s capital during a national rally, saw the splendor the country could afford at their expense, and they took to militancy. It is not enough to assert that the “emotional responses of the participants and audience are never homogenous, and they may at once involve positive and negative feelings, as well as disinterest,” these instants also illustrate to them – as the Niger Delta case illustrates – that they were being shortchanged. Coben & Takeshi Inomata. *Archaeology of Performance*, 15.

⁴⁸ Bhatia, *Acts of Authority/Acts of Resistance*, 3.

⁴⁹ Scott, *Weapons of the Weak*.

Without being as disruptive, polemical, confrontational – or as scholar of black performance, Thomas DeFrantz puts it, “to sing against the grain of the other instruments”⁵⁰ – they would more likely swim unnoticed within the fast-moving streams of other cultural practices. With mental and moral clarity of their positions, they are spurred to innovate dissident tactics, eccentric actions, renegade behavior, insurrectional acts, transgressions, manias, and various other antisocial and anti-normative cultural expressions to undercut the totalized powers of symbolic authorities. Since the goal is to challenge existing ideologies that exclude their realities, there has to be a destabilization of the normative order. Performance, whether the theatrical one enacted on stage or as a series of cultural practices, becomes a site of contesting power and political struggles against the ruling order.⁵¹ They demonstrate their power as agents through their dramatized resistance politics that rupture the stable meanings embroidered into the social fabric.

While dominant power stages public spectacles to instruct on who is to be feared and what will be done to protect authority, the oppressed’s counter actions and provocative critiques of powerful forces curtail absolute authority. Social acts that confront the performance of authority with resistance delimit norms, call attention to social evils, and incite the public to a yearn for a new order through mobilizing toward transformative actions.⁵² One of such instances is the case of East Africans who turned the colonial Christian theater and its pacification agenda on its head and subversively used the same theatrical traditions and morality lessons colonizers bequeathed them to center their own local stories.⁵³ By making use of indigenous traditions and

⁵⁰ DeFrantz & Gonzalez, “Introduction” in *Black Performance Theory*, 6.

⁵¹ In the critical and creative works of theater scholars/practitioners such as Bertolt Brecht, Ngugi wa’Thiongo, Femi Osofisan, Augusto Boal, Wole Soyinka, and August Wilson, the political transformation ignited on the theater stage has radical potentials that can carry over to social and political life. The eyes of the dominated, having been opened by witnessing displays of power, makes it a mission objective to denaturalize the despotic visions that has tucked them within the marginal corners of the social spheres and designate such as their “natural” lot.

⁵² Bhatia, *Acts of Authority/Acts of Resistance*, 3.

⁵³ Okagbue, *Resistance and Politics in Contemporary East African Theatre*. Also see Samuel Kasule’s similar study that showed how theater continued to be a useful form of political engagement in postcolonial Uganda where, faced with a murderous and absolutely tyrannical government, people instrumentalized theatrical performances to stand up to a brutal government.

culture, the colonized subjects also ingeniously made political performances of resistance meaningful at an instinctual level for those steeped in the culture.⁵⁴ Another example of such resistance politics is the “tactical performance” of civil rights advocates in 1960s USA. These protestors demonstrated their power even within a social sphere actively trying to obliterate them. They came up with innovative techniques, such as passively letting themselves be beaten without fighting back, that subverted the tactics authorities pulled up from institutional memory and used to suppress dissent.⁵⁵

For scholar of black performance studies Daphne Brooks, this quest for calling attention to one’s difference in the worldview of crushing political authority takes the strategic forms of anti-realistic cultural expression and innovation techniques that rupture or override the placid surfaces of a normative sphere. She says of black cultural performances and its unique radical approaches, “rather than depending on conventional realist methods to convey the humanity and value of black subjectivity ... black producers ... perform narratives of black culture that resist the narrow constraints of realist representation.”⁵⁶ As these actors occupy a marginal position within the structures of power in society, they truly have to resort to unconventional methods to assert their presence. Without nonconformism, their action will not get past the deadweight of traditions and self-justifying bureaucracy. Thus, such performances typically comes with excess—which could be in form of noise or vulgarity. Whenever the society eventually re-fuses, it is sutures up into its cultural fabric the dissident elements its marginalized subjects bring to the mix.

This last detail brings me to the boisterous ways contemporary Pentecostalism is performed in the Nigerian social sphere, and through which they spectacularly demonstrate their fixation with obtaining power. Pentecostal performance of power encompasses both the totalizing actions of the dominant and the confrontational tactics of the dominated. On one hand, it mimics the trappings of power as exhibited by the privileged power class and, paradoxically, also inhabits the space of the marginalized to push for more power. This ability to be

⁵⁴ Odom, *Yorùbá Performance, Theatre and Politics*.

⁵⁵ Bogard, *Tactical Performance*. ⁵⁶ Brooks, *Bodies in Dissent*, 6.

simultaneously powerful and to still fight for power from the position of an embattled party has enabled their continuous dominance in various cultural realms—political, economic, and cultural—and consequent shift in social relations.

As have been noted by its historians, the current wave of Nigerian Pentecostalism gained traction around the 1970s in university campuses where young people began to form church fellowships. These young people would enter public transport vehicles or stand in street corners to loudly proclaim the gospel and urged people to be “born again.” What they lacked in formal theological training, they made up for in passion and their belief in the authorizing power of God’s Spirit. In his account of the Pentecostal and Charismatic revivals in Nigeria, one of the pioneers of campus evangelism in Nigeria, Austen Ukachi, noted how the FESTAC ’77 celebration was, to them, an open invitation of demonic forces into the country. Rather than see a festival of black grandeur the military leaders intended, what they saw was a celebration of African paganism and solicitation of demons from all over the black world into Nigeria.⁵⁷ To them, this festival that celebrates African culture along with its “pagan” practices represented a moral and temporal retrogression. The historical festival—particularly its featuring of black religious and spiritual culture in the diaspora—although meant to capture the essence of black cultural power and proudly celebrate it before the world, registered to them as demonism. Rather than racial pride, they saw a conflation of transcendental and political power, and how wielding the composition could truly make things happen, but against them as Christians. With the mentorship and nurturance of missionary Rev. Sydney G. Elton, they motivated fellow Christians on the necessity of praying for Nigeria over issues such as “revenue allocation, national elections, and at other times encourage Christian

⁵⁷ The festival was a month-long event and it featured a spectacular celebration of African music, art, and religions. The event attracted thousands of people from Africa and the diaspora, with about fifty-six countries represented and famous artists like Stevie Wonder, Miriam Makeba, and others performing. For Christians, however, the celebration of African indigenous religions at the festival was considered to be a deification of satanism, a glorification of idolatry. Nigeria’s subsequent economic misfortunes and corruption have been attributed to this misadventure with evil spirits and has become the popular lore. Ukachi, “Emplating God,” 351–368.

students to participate in campus politics.”⁵⁸ From campus politics, this group would graduate to contend national politics where the power that was at stake had far more potency in coercing social realities.

For a faith movement whose formative contours took place within the context of political instabilities, the Pentecostals that emerged, especially from the 1990s to the present, were more politically conscious. They appeared on the cultural scene with a confrontational attitude determined to contend for the power with which political authorities had dehumanized society for so long. The divine mission was to cause some seismic shifts and also move the tectonic plates of culture and history in the direction of God. There was no question of them appearing as genteel Christians who had come to respectably negotiate an inscription of their existence into the collective ethos. Any other approach except the one that sought domination would have been impractical in Nigeria’s postcolonial context where power is variously contested in every sphere as a war. Besides, power and politics in Nigeria are treated as warfare, with a clear definition of who is a friend and who is an enemy.⁵⁹ Without power, one lacks access to “extracting and allocating resources from the *commons* that are needed to live a fully human life.”⁶⁰

Powered by the name of Jesus, they punctuated the atmosphere with noisy prayers, evangelical outreach programs, their beliefs in the metaphysical, and the victorious shouts of hallelujah over those dark forces.⁶¹ Church historian Ogbu Kalu noted that Pentecostal youths arrived on the cultural stage to contest the traditional ways of obtaining power – through witchcraft, sorcery, ancestral cults, and covenants. Partly because they were largely also disempowered political subjects, they angled for a form of power and authority that “rests on divine inspiration, and not on an influential position in society.”⁶² Their mission was to contend for the amalgam of political and spiritual

⁵⁸ Ukachi goes on to narrate how, partly in response to the demonic invasion of the country by the proponents of the festival, they formed the Christians Students Social Movement of Nigeria (CSSM now CESM) on May 7, 1977. They began to hold prayer conferences to sensitize believers on the need to pray. Ukachi, *The Best Is Yet to Come*, 297.

⁵⁹ Wariboko, *Nigerian Pentecostalism*. ⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 45.

⁶¹ Adeboye, “Explaining the Growth and Legitimation of the Pentecostal Movement in Africa,” 25–39; Ojo, “Pentecostalism and Charismatic Movements in Nigeria.”

⁶² Kalu, *African Pentecostalism*, 113.

power that the country's authoritarian leaders wielded.⁶³ As the proselytization efforts undertaken by the earliest converts began to gain ground, the movement's growing power became evident through the compelling spectacle of a massive sea of heads that gathered at crusade grounds to hear the word of God and pray. Gradually, as their established churches boomed and sought divine power to challenge the crisis of meaning and the futility of existence in postcolonial and post-civil war Nigeria, their activities became quite noticeable. This movement sought to recreate reality and drew from their repertoire of social and spiritual epistemologies to create the scope of meanings that would reconstruct social ethics. Such political action was meant for them "to begin anew," to instigate a fresh start since the re-fusion of the ruptured opened liminal spaces to them. Given how much Pentecostals are invested in using their embodied actions to reverse contrary social circumstances, there is no performance of the self in everyday life for them that is not simultaneously a performance of power, a distillation of their conviction – who they are, what they do, and their efficacy to change the world – into quotidian actions. With such gravity of belief in their ability to coerce even intractable existential reality in their favor, their social behaviors become a symbolic investment in the economy of transforming faith. They not only identify as people *of* power, they also identify *with* power, particularly political power whose apparatuses and affective force they frequently mimic. In the coming chapters, I reflect on Pentecostalism's emergence as a cultural force at the intersections of faith and power. By demonstrating the kinetics of their identity politics, and their brokerage of the power they have found in the name of Jesus, I narrate how their performance of their social and sacred selves has defined the Nigeria social and political culture.

The Researcher as a Pentecostal

Being a Pentecostal for a long time was greatly beneficial in pursuing this project. Having joined a Pentecostal church at age fifteen when I first

⁶³ Jeffrey Alexander also observed in his study of performance as a generating force of power that, "Power comes into being when social actors exercise their agency. It is subtle and complex, often of exquisite indirection, a process that is not all that different from how dramatic actors project the power of their characters in a play." Alexander, *Performance and Power*, 3.

followed my mother to a church in Ibadan that she had just discovered and was enthusiastic about, I had been part of the faith movement long enough to understand certain dynamics. Thus, I began my fieldwork among family and friends who introduced me to other people, especially those who had administrative roles in their respective Pentecostal churches. Most of them were quite welcoming, and our relationship got better each time I proved my Christian bona fides. But Also because I was no longer based in Nigeria, I also used a research assistant, Kalu Daniel Chibuike to conduct some interviews for this work, particularly the ones with the artists in Chapter 5. Sometimes Kalu would conduct an interview for me, and by the time I returned to Nigeria, I would have had enough insight on an issue to do other rounds of interview. That model saved me some transatlantic trips and the hassles of having to frequently call interviewed people back to clarify one or two things. This network of family and friends kept working for me until year 2020 when I finally put the last full stop to the writing of this book. Some of the interviews featured in several chapters, I must note, were anonymized to protect the identity of the respondents.

Another factor that helped this work advance was my weekly newspaper column with *PUNCH* Nigeria, which I have been writing since 2008, and I have some reputation as a result. In my weekly articles, I have been an unsparing critic of leadership and political power in Nigeria and Africa. I have criticized both political and religious leaders whose actions have been a major impediment to African growth and development, and my criticisms affected – both positively and negatively – the way some people related with me while I was carrying out the fieldwork. The positive aspects were the times prior recognition opened some doors for me, while the negative parts were those few times some people connected the columnist with the researcher and instantly became defensive about their country, religion, identity, and religious practices. In some cases, someone I just met would give me a rejoinder to a past article I had written and there were a few times that some of the interview responses felt like they were responding to me the columnist, not the researcher. Over time and as I had repeated discussions with some people I surveyed, I noticed some of that attitude smoothed out considerably.

Chapter Breakdown

In Chapter 1, *Demons and Deliverance: Discourses on Pentecostal Power*, I use a close reading of staged/fictional performances allied to

the Pentecostal movement to lay out the history and nature of Pentecostalism, describe its preoccupation with power, and also showcase the successes of performing power identity. This chapter also argues that understanding Pentecostal performance of power identity entails not just looking at the practices conducted in the church or the structure of religious activities, but also within the theatrical activities and drama productions about demonic encounters that are staged to boost the faith of Pentecostals. The mediatized accounts of spiritual warfare narrated to Pentecostals by drama ministers are often morality tales, but they are also strategic to the reading of Pentecostal social history and ritual actions. Through them we can discern the demons that haunt the social body at a particular period of history, and let their demonic specters give form to the anxieties that irk people. In this chapter, I chronicle the Pentecostal trajectory and their demonstrated desire for power through two television dramas about deliverance from satanic attacks, *Aghara Nla* (The Ultimate Power) and *Abejoye* (The King Maker). Both were produced by the same Christian film company, the Mount Zion Faith Ministry, across about three decades. The differences in how both dramas capture the performance of exorcism are instructive in understanding how far the Pentecostal faith has traveled as a social practice and how they have achieved their power identity over this period of time.

In Chapter 2, “What Islamic Devils?!”: Power Struggles, Race, and Christian Transnationalism, I explore the dynamics of political theology as it crosses the bounds of nationhood. Pentecostalism understands that spiritual and social power without political power is limited in its ability to coerce, and so it contests for power through spiritual warfare and active partisan politics. This chapter is an exploration into the nitty-gritty of the politics of Nigerian Pentecostal spirituality: confronting Islam, the other religion that contends power; the local politics of faith and ethnicity; and how all these dynamics of sustaining the power identity manifest in their adoration of the forty-fifth president of the United States, Donald Trump. Sociologist Ebenezer Obadare already argues, we cannot understand the ways Pentecostalism has impacted Nigerian politics without going back to where “the dawn of democratic rule in 1999 coincided with the triumph of Christianity over its historical rival, Islam, as a political force in Nigeria.”⁶⁴ While

⁶⁴ Ibid.

Pentecostals in Nigeria and leading religious authorities might have taken up considerable power since 1999 – the beginning of the Fourth Republic in Nigeria, that is – they still have to contend for it along the matrices of ethnic and national identity. This chapter takes the idea of Pentecostal Republic across space and time by looking at the roles of powerful pastors in the 2015/2019 general elections, how the election was “lost” and how a congregation deprived of a key source of symbolic power instruments derives vicarious joy from looking to Trump as the “Christian president” Nigeria missed in 2015.

In Chapter 3, “Touch Not Mine Anointed”: #MeToo, #ChurchToo, and the Power of “See Finish” is an analysis of what could happen when the performance of power identity through the production of image is ruptured. Here, I look at how a pastor stages his power identity through visuality, and how in the wake of the global #MeToo movement, his flow of visual signs and symbols to the audience was crucially undercut by the counter-power of women’s stories. The necessity of continuously being in the public eye and performing one’s power means the inscription of power identity on collective psyche also facilitates a critical reception of their persona. When leaders perform power by regularly thrusting themselves or their virtual images in front of their audience, they also become overexposed. The “#MeToo” events in Nigeria also show how people who have performed power to the point of embodying power will double down on the use of power to sustain their identity.

In Chapter 4, Everything Christianity/the Bible Represents Is Being Attacked on the Internet!: The Internet and Technologies of Religious Engagement I move toward the public contestation of power with powerful pastors through a crucial aspect of asserting power: money. This chapter illustrates a revolt against pastors through the critical examination of the aftermath of what was dubbed “The Great Tithe Debate,” a battle between Online Air presenter, Ifedayo Olarinde (known as Daddy Freeze), and most of the famous Pentecostal pastors. If the identity of Pentecostals is power, then the rise of modern technology has provided the means for which ordinary people on social media can duel with religious authority. Pentecostalism has frequently studied pastors’ influence, and one of the focal points of analysis is their ability to build immense financial power through skillful solicitation of their congregants’ generosity. With the ubiquity of technology, contenders threaten pastors’ authority to build financial capital through the

established ways of operating symbolic means. These contenders stage their own shows, demonstrating how they have equally been empowered to tap into the same symbolic instruments that generate power for their leaders. This development troubles not just the Pentecostal pastorate but their followers as well.

In Chapter 5, “God Too Laughs and We Can Laugh Too”: The Ambivalent Power of Comedy Performances in the Church, I investigate the trend of Nigerian Pentecostal churches interspersing church programs with comedy performances. I look at performance of power beyond acquisition and contestation to how power identity of authority figures could be affirmed publicly and contested privately. Comedy performance has consistently been treated as a site of resistance by the marginalized subject, but my study of comedy in Pentecostal churches shows some complications in this analysis of the art form. Using both ethnographic methods in my various fieldwork interviews with “gospel comedians” (as some refer to themselves), I consider exchanges that constitute power identity whose radicality is not found in the public sites but in the backrooms where negotiations take place between the artist and the producers.

In Chapter 6, “The Spirit Names the Child”: Pentecostal Futurity in the Name of Jesus, I show how naming rituals are a source of Pentecostal power and influence, and how this will remain strong for a long time as its values are invested in children as futurity. Much of this book is about a politics of identity that is not primarily construed along the lines of ancestry and the familiar markers such as ethnicity, nationality, class, etc., but the object of desire. This chapter shows that Pentecostals do not entirely dispense with ancestral or familial modes of identification; they supplant them in creative ways that show their power within social culture. To illustrate how the Pentecostal power is invested in the rhetoric of naming, I study an aspect of Pentecostal identity-building – giving both oneself and one’s children names that include “Jesus” (or “Jesu” in Yoruba) to fully embed the social and spiritual atmosphere of the society with their values. The Pentecostal onomastic, I note, is thus a sonic and systematized politics of societal ordering and contestation of spaces. The antiphonies of names as a process of “call and response” is the interaction of the many “transcendences” of Africa: histories – past and present; worlds – human and supernatural; cultural beliefs systems – indigenous and appropriations; all of which jumble and are manifested through Pentecostal onomastics.

In the concluding chapter, *Power Must Change Hands: COVID-19, Power, and the Imperative of Knowledge*, I note that the COVID-19 pandemic broke while this book was being completed and, therefore, I offer my reflection on the pandemic and Pentecostal power. In my description of how the Pentecostal establishment responded to the pandemic, I argued that what that apocalyptic event revealed was that the forms of power invested in and acquired over the years did not anticipate the world-changing event of the COVID-19. As a result, leaders showed they had no immediate answer for the situation other than resort to conspiracy theories and myths of their embattlement that did not quite stand up to the scale of the demands of the historical event.

As a cultural movement, Pentecostalism has brought together millions of Nigerians, both within the country and the diaspora, united by faith in the Son of God, Jesus Christ, and the empowering ideology of the embodied power of the immanent Holy Spirit. The conviction of empowerment has had an animating force. Along with other cultural factors, it propelled them to actions that marked a shift in how they experience or engage diverse political issues of the day. This dynamic Pentecostal interplay of religious and political actions has invigorated the social and political spheres, and actively reshaped the ways various politics is engaged at various levels. Performance artist and scholar Lance Gharavi noted in his argument that religion is not separate from social life but imbricated into the cultural context. Both are, he says, “formed by and through that context, its performances and discourses.”⁶⁵ Indeed, as an ineluctable part of the cultural context, faith has been comprehensible by watching its public staging in the divergent social spheres that Pentecostals occupy, understanding the identity complexes of those who witness faith acts being performed, and the diverse effects produced in spectators across the social spectrum. In reading faith as performance, other aspects of social culture – such as the organized pattern of sentiments, dictating impulses, moral inflections, and the actions that make us amenable to other actions – are equally highlighted.⁶⁶ Throughout this book, by bringing the analytical tools of performance studies to analyze Pentecostal events, I have explained how these private convictions translate to public performances, calcification of identity, formation of subjective ideals, and even contestation with religious authority.

⁶⁵ Gharavi, “Introduction” in *Religion, Theatre, and Performance*.

⁶⁶ Shapiro & Barnard, *Pentecostal Modernism*.