

1 *Demons and Deliverance: Discourses on Pentecostal Power*

She was the about the most familiar diabolic spectacle of the Nigerian 1990s, a distinctive cinematic creation that combined decades of folkloric and popular cultural imagination of the devil and its operation in human spaces. Yet, she felt uniquely novel in her emblemizing of evil within the coordinates of Christianity, an African supernatural milieu, and the cinematic engravings of the perception of good and evil.¹ Ayamataंगा – that was her name – was made up to have a moderately dark visage. She was not only polylingual, she also mixed human languages with that of demons. Ayamataंगा possessed a raucous and mocking laugh that spoke the voices of a legion of demons through millions of TV sets.² For those who followed the TV series by the Mount Zion Faith Ministries International, *Agbara Nla* (1993), Ayamataंगा was an image of the evil demonic specters that they had always known existed in the supernatural sphere. The television series and its representation of the devil transformed evil into an apprehensible human character, evoking similar feelings of dread derivable from watching a horror film. So compelling was the teleseries that the streets would empty out every week as people sat in their homes to watch the next installment. The Ayamataंगा effect on public imagination at broadcast time was quite impactful.³

¹ As Rosalind Hackett notes, during this period, works by popular American deliverance specialists such as Derek Prince, Rebecca Brown, Marilyn Hickey, and Lester Sumrall were also widely available. All of these influenced local cultural producers of demonic encounters. Hackett, “Is Satan Local or Global?,” 113.

² The impact of *Agbara Nla* was also partly due to the paucity of TV entertainment content at the time. *Agbara Nla* preceded the liberalization of the media and subsequent private ownership of media houses. There were quite few television channels in 1999, mostly government owned. With viewing options constricted, the drama and its original storytelling circulated across the country and became quite popular.

³ Adedokun, “Pentecostal Panopticism and the Phantasm of ‘The Ultimate Power.’”

Ayamatanga had possessed the body of a covetous born-again Christian, Bose. Through the somatic agency of Bose, Ayamatanga explained her motives to both Bose's pastor and the viewing audience. Her persona's contemptuous malevolence of divine power – and to an extent, her ability to repel prayer – made Ayamatanga fascinating enough to be launched into the public imagination as a material representation of evil. She was “an experience of dread,”⁴ the haunting fear of finding oneself in a place of helplessness, and the threat of what could befall those that slipped through certain margins of spiritual protection. The climax of the series came when Ayamatanga had to be exorcised. God told her pastor that He had already converted a sorcerer, Isawuru, who lived in a village called Muwonleru, for that purpose. Isawuru, now called Paul Esupofo,⁵ was the chosen “deliverance minister” for Bose. Both the pastor and Bose's husband went to the village to fetch Paul Esupofo and bring him to the city, in Lagos.

Paul Esupofo, played by the young actor Mike Bamiloye made up as an old man with grey hair and costumed in a simple attire of a village dweller, entered the house. He was shown the sparsely furnished bedroom where Bose lay on the bed with her hands tied to the bed poles, and her face covered with blood from her self-inflicted wounds.⁶ The demon, noticing the power Paul Esupofo embodied, was threatened enough to put up some fight to intimidate him right from the door. Paul Esupofo would not be frightened. He had come in with the confidence of a man whose years of sorcery had given him an insight into the entire gamut of the devil's mischief. Now he had found a new source of agbara – power, that is – in Jesus Christ, and it was the ultimate one.

As anthropologist Robin Horton indicated in his study of the Aladura church movement – precursors of the Pentecostal

⁴ Alford, *What Evil Means to Us*, 3.

⁵ (Meaning: Esu – which Yoruba translate as “the devil” – has come to nothing). As has been variously argued, Esu, a Yoruba local deity, is not the equivalent of “the devil” as conceived by Judeo-Christian theology. Substituting Esu for the devil in translating the Bible might have made the Christian theology more relatable and eased the work of missionaries, but it destroyed the whole ethical system on which the concept of Esu was based. Christians, especially, have continued to translate Esu as the devil. As is evident in this name, “Esupofo,” Esu is still being judged for a crime he did not commit.

⁶ This scene is reminiscent of the film *The Exorcist*. In my interview with Mike Bamiloye, the founder of the Christian group that made the series, he confirmed that the scene was inspired by *The Exorcist*.

movement – although *agbara* translates to “power” in English, it also has a traditional meaning for those who speak Yoruba. Power is transcendental and coerces reality to one’s ends. When translated into the semiotics of Pentecostalism, it is “the power of God and the spirits as manifested in the space-time world, either directly or through the medium of religious leaders.”⁷ Power is a compelling force, but it is also understood to be in gradations. As they say in Nigeria, “power pass power.” The Pentecostal quest is, and always has been, to embody power at its highest level. For instance, when the English-language version of the series later made for non-Yoruba-speaking audiences and African internationals was released, it was titled *The Ultimate Power*. “The ultimate” quantifies the degree of power they are fixated on: the one at the apogee.

In the episode, Paul Esupofo engaged Ayamataंगा in a fierce spiritual interaction that saw him praying fervently on TV, and reeling out invocatory scriptures from the Bible to disarm the kingdom of the devil in both the film and also in the imagination of the enraptured viewer.⁸ As Paul Esupofo prayed, he was shown to transcend into the kingdom of evil where Ayamataंगा and other demon spirits lived. In the spirit realm, he appeared wearing an all-white costume, his head wrapped in a white headdress, and holding a sword. The demons were costumed in red and black, with a shiny star embroidered on their attire. Ayamataंगा herself was wearing a long red dress, her long woven hair reaching as far as her waist.⁹ There, Paul Esupofo fervently prayed with the sword in his hand raised to the heavens as he instigated the power of God to release Bose from the hold of those captives. As the Bible already metaphorized the word of God as “the sword of the spirit,” having a sword in his hand as he invoked the Bible before the legion of demons intensified the point that this was a literalization of spiritual

⁷ Horton, “African Conversion,” 88.

⁸ The series has been uploaded to YouTube: www.youtube.com/watch?v=zLrqN6GJxso

⁹ When the series ended, Ayamataंगा – as a hail of the devil – continued echoing in the public imagination until it became a byword and popular slang for beautiful women thought to imperil the social order through their propensity for evil. As *Olubitan* shows, it is part of the legacy of *Agbara Nla* that “Ayamataंगा,” a name its creator insisted was purely inspired by the Holy Spirit, symbolized personified and transcendental evil, and has become subsumed into urban lore.

warfare.¹⁰ Paul Esupofo prayed to disarm the demons in their kingdom. When Bose was eventually freed from their captivity, even the viewer who had followed the series and whose insides had tightened with the tension of that contest felt a cathartic purge.

Some twenty-six years later, the highly charged melodramatic scene was replayed in a different teleseries by the same production company that made *Agbara Nla*, the Mount Zion Faith Ministries International (MZFMI). This second series is also produced for television and titled *Abejoye* (2020) or *The King Maker*.¹¹ Although the plot also featured personified good challenging evil, something had changed in the conception of spiritual warfare. The character that confronts the devil is the same actor – Mike Bamiloje – who played Esupofo in *Agbara Nla*. In *Abejoye*, his character, Olayiotan, is an older man who has traveled from his village in Nigeria to visit his son and his family in Dallas, Texas. He had arrived in the USA as a sorcerer but he was soon converted to Christianity by the family’s Nigerian pastor who ran a church for immigrant Nigerians. His character in *Abejoye* was unlike the humbly dressed the old man in *Agbara Nla* whose environments in both the village and city were relatively modest. Olayiotan was more richly attired in all-white. In contrast to the house where the Bose’s deliverance in *Agbara Nla* took place, this family’s abode is in a Dallas suburb, from the visual takes of both the interior and the exterior, showed the trappings of an American middle-class life.

In this more recent scene, Olayiotan is lying on a bed when he is visited by a demon figure sent from his village. He rises abruptly as soon as he senses the presence of the devil. The rather striking blackened visage of the devil slowly emerges through the plain-colored bedroom wall, and

¹⁰ The sword comes up frequently in Nigerian prayers, and while the weapon is mostly an image called up during prayers, it also compels some theatrics. For instance, Nimi Wariboko notes of a West African prayer that goes thus: *Holy Ghost, sword, shear, shear, shear*. Wariboko says that when people pray this prayer, they have taken up the sword (of the spirit) in their minds already, and saying “shear” repeatedly while moving their fingers as if they are cutting the air means they are already fighting the battles psychologically and their bodies are moving to the rhythm. He says, “The punning meaning that arises as a his hand becomes a physical sword as well as a spiritual sword of God – and his voice duplicating the killer-sound of the sword-hand – brings together images, sounds, and words in an associative freedom that is both liberating and threatening in its embodiedness.” Wariboko, *The Split God*, 160, 161.

¹¹ Season 2 of the series was released in 2020, but I got a preview copy a year earlier.

Olayiotan instantly confronts it with the sword of the spirit—that is, the word of God. This time, though, he has an actual Bible in his hand. Unlike the days of *Agbara Nla*, however, the old man character does not stop at calling up God's word to overpower the devil. While the chant with which he tells the devil he cannot be harmed because of his new status as the child of God began with scriptural invocations, as characteristic of such rituals, he also slips in commentaries meant to induce some laughter. The climax of this scene comes when man and the devil face each other, the camera swirling around them and alternately showing them from the back and the front. With one costumed in white and the other in black, the contrast of light and darkness, good and evil, God and devil, righteousness and decadence, is quite apparent. The Bible still in his hands, Olayiotan continues invoking its verses at the demonic figure, and gradually, his prayer turns into a song. Still standing before the devil figure that was heaving its body, Olayiotan sways his own body in a light dance. The devil too, in a rather unusual move, begins to mirror Olayiotan's dance. Olayiotan commands the devil to dance for Jesus, and both characters move rhythmically to the sound of Olayiotan's voice. Still facing each other, they both dance together for a moment before Olayiotan commands the devil to disappear!¹² Amidst the characteristic seriousness and tension of the banishing of the devil, this moment of frivolity where the spiritual warrior dances with the devil is quite significant. Unlike the potent and ravaging possessing force of *Ayamatanga*, this demon appears domesticated; its threat is far less compelling. While *Ayamatanga* spoke her grievances through Bose's body and provoked the viewer to a moral judgment of issues, this demon has no voice and the fight within it is rather too quickly extinguished. It barely posed a threat to the Christian patriarch who easily subdued and literally house-trains it by making it conform to the kinetic rhythm of his empowered Pentecostal body. There is spiritual warfare, all right, but the apocalyptic anxiety with which it haunted the social imaginary in *Agbara Nla* is lessened.

Certain symbolism in the deliverance scenes in *Agbara Nla* and *Abejoye* are consistent enough to draw a schematic map of how the notion of spiritual warfare that rests heavily on the imagination of Nigerian Pentecostals has shifted through cinematic and real time and

¹² www.youtube.com/watch?v=axcxui10wYA

expresses their evolving aspiration of power. First, there is an old man character who is a recent convert to Christianity from occult practices – typically represented with the aesthetic and the poetics of African traditional religious beliefs. He is brimming with the fire and enthusiasm of his newfound knowledge of Christ and relationship with God, and has been empowered to expel a demon through the rituals of spiritual warfare. This character has also moved from the rural and essentialized African spaces—symbolized by the “village”—to the urban area to vanquish a demon in an interior(ized) space such as the body or the bedroom. Having been a part of the occult, he implicitly understands its operations and can control demonic agents in the name of Jesus. This recent convert also self-consciously marks his identity as a new creation in Christ to distinguish between pre-Christian life and the present.

However, other aspects of the narration of the diabolical have changed: the patriarch who banishes the demon in *Abejoye* has grown physically older. Mike Bamiloye, who was made up to look older in *Agbara Nla*, is actually advanced in years when he plays Olayiotan. Visible signs of material comfort associate religious faith with upward mobility and prosperity. Viewed from an extra-diegetic angle, MZFMI itself has acquired material resources over the years. Understandably, it represents economic upgrade as compatible with faith and power. The cinematographic quality of the more recent *Abejoye* shows far more technological and aesthetic sophistication than *Agbara Nla* that was shot with, “the kind of amateur camera they use for birthdays.”¹³ Expansion from a rural and urban Nigerian territory to a suburban home in one of the largest cities in the USA shows a transcendence of the provincial, a geospatial shift that also indexes other kinds of changes. Then, there is the function the devil fulfils; as a comedic spectacle in *Abejoye*, a departure from Ayamatanga as a source of abject terror which needed to be urgently expunged. Because the devil did not go away – it *never* does; it is an open-ended narrative template that fills up with contemporary anxieties – its feature in both series is quite instructive.

With the similarities and differences in the characterization of the devil figure and the mode of the devil’s vanquishing in *Agbara Nla* and *Abejoye* highlighted, this chapter reflects on Pentecostalism and its

¹³ Personal interview with Mike Bamiloye.

evolution through the years using the teleseries' depictions of spiritual warfare to illustrate the social evolutions that their narrative elements convey. While demonic encounters are a staple in MZFMI productions, I have chosen these correlated scenes from *Agbara Nla* and *Abejoye* because they have narrative similarities that illustrate the historical arc of the Pentecostal movement even though the two series' broadcasts span almost three decades. The Pentecostal movement has a longer historical arc, but since the focus of this book is mostly on the present era, I have bracketed the historical period covered here with the two television productions that stretch from the 1990s to the 2020s. Rather than a direct historical analysis of Pentecostal evolution to narrate their power identity, I chose to look at the archived stories of demonic confrontations told at certain junctures of Nigerian social history to see how they express the times and the spirits that haunt them.

The teleseries that carry these stories of human encounters with demonic specters illustrate the desire for power, the quest for it through spiritual means, and how the eventual attainment of cultural power became the crucial distinguishing mark of the Pentecostal identity. To ensure their *being* within Nigeria's disempowering political economy, they reached for the ultimate spiritual power as a means through which other forms of power could be acquired. Through their faith in the name of Jesus, ritual prayers, mass congregational gatherings, Bible schools, prosperity gospel teachings, and collective mobilization toward economic, political, and social ends, they worked toward becoming people of power. Power identity is permanently signifying; it keeps beckoning at social and historical situations as it seeks to establish its essence. The more Pentecostals performed their power identity, the more they were transformed and revealed as people of power. This desire for power and the perennial obsession with being identified by power would map unto the Pentecostal subject until power identity came to name the circumlocutory process by which the desired objective and its pursuer mutually identify. However, for power identity to be confirmed, it has to enter into the political realm where its constituents are tested and attested. One of the ways the Pentecostal subject negotiates their way through the thickets of the political sphere is through the instrumentalization of the demonic. These specters condense the symbols and myths of an irredeemable evil opposition, and they are a quick reference to

understanding the nature of confrontation in processes and places of power exchange.

Thus, demonic encounters are a rich site of cultural and historical knowledge because their appearances – or even the instinctual sensing of their presence – awaken a primal instinct in those whose sensibilities have been attuned to see them as radical evil. As Pentecostals think of spirits in the literal and metaphorical sense, spectral appearances are not only spiritual, they are also political because they illustrate a quest, a haunting, an incitement to demonstrate power. In the realm of the political, bodies contest against each other to determine who will control the symbolic and material resources necessary to live as fully realized human beings, and also who – the “other” against whom the “self” identifies – needs to be diminished for this aspiration to be unambiguous. As Pentecostal ethicist Nimi Wariboko stated, “Politics is haunted by what it excludes, combats, expresses or represses. There is always the possibility of specters intruding into the contest and exchange of power even as the specters of possibility float over the site of contestation” and politics is therefore, “spiritual warfare, a struggle between *one power of being* against another that determines the *who* of the contestants’ humanity. The spiritual is the inner dynamics of political in all spheres of society or public life.”¹⁴ Accordingly, specters appear in power contestation to shift the struggles from abstract contentions to more apprehensible depictions of evil. Their deployment into social struggles impels antagonistic transactions in the political sphere where the “militant site of the agonistic transfer and control of power” occur.¹⁵ In Nigerian politics the process of power exchange is “akin to warfare, with clear, concrete definition of friends and enemies,” and “the possession of power means control over resources, meanings, and the power of being, political processes and sites are patrolled and pervaded by spiritual presences.”¹⁶ Their haunting presence turns political contestations for power into spiritual exercises, and the sites of spiritual exercises reveal the dynamics of political machinations as various blocs that struggle against one another for the control of power express their desire for control through spiritual exercises.

Since these teleseries producers are a part of the Pentecostal movement themselves, the stories they tell about the devil and its expulsion

¹⁴ Wariboko, *Nigerian Pentecostalism*, 145. ¹⁵ Ibid. ¹⁶ Ibid.

approximate how they imagine Pentecostal power. It is also telling how they characterize threats to the body of Christ from the social body, and what a Pentecostal needs to do to overcome. In narrating those basic stories of the agonistic contests between good and evil, they “stage an enchanted world in which spiritual powers are perpetually present, and in which the struggle between good and evil within the self mirrors an epic struggle against the demonic forces at large in the world.”¹⁷ They also provide other kinds of illumination of a period through the physical setting of their stories, aesthetic choices, and the politics of the era. The intertextual character development arc of Esupofo and Olayiotan from the early '90s to the 2020s, for instance, shows a level of growth and maturity in the MZCFMI's outlook. Even from the basic elements, one could see that the narrative identity of the Pentecostal movement has evolved from the ascetic new convert of Paul Esupofo who dwelled in an African village and traveled to the city to deliver its inhabitants from haunting demons, to the richer and more cosmopolitan character of another new convert, Olayiotan, whose territories – spatial and otherwise – have been widened across continents. Yet, the quest for power through staging demonic encounters remains consistent.

Abejoye's depiction of a Nigerian Christian family in a US suburb is also the story of the Nigerian professional class's migration to the new world in search of greener pastures. Not all of those in Paul Esupofo's generation confronted the devil with the sword of the spirit. While some stayed behind in the country and sought to transcend the limitations of their economic situations through the blessings of the prosperity gospel that Pentecostalism would later popularize in Nigeria, others fled to the far more prosperous metropolitan cities of the world. Some migrants would become “reverse missionaries” whose religious activities have contributed to an intensification of Christianity in a secularizing West.¹⁸ One such migrant was the pastor who preached to Olayiotan and urged his conversion to Christianity in *Abejoye*. These migrants graduated to global spheres with their religious practices reconfigured to match their identity in tandem with their new locales.¹⁹ Yet, they also remain haunted by African demons who, they say, need no visa to travel across space and time to haunt them

¹⁷ Marshall, “The Sovereignty of Miracles.”

¹⁸ Olupona, “The Changing Face of African Christianity.”

¹⁹ Adogame, *Religion Crossing Boundaries*; Adogame, “Transnational Migration and Pentecostalism in Europe”; Asamoah-Gyadu, “Mediating Spiritual Power.”

and who take the guises of evil in the repertoire of issues that immigrants face.²⁰ As *Abejoye* showed, the demons also track immigrant Christians to their new abodes through familial connections and the spiritual breaches that occur due to the sins of the fathers of the house. To battle them, African immigrants gravitated toward their churches. This choice also keeps them “rooted locally and in the land of origin, but also into an intra-communal web linking them with different places across the globe.”²¹ Their modes of confronting and understanding of the demonic are, therefore, also narratives of social history.

The Social and Political Life of Demonic Specters

The demonic encounters in *Agbara Nla* and *Abejoye* are both, at the root of their narrative, an illustration of historical knowledge and sensibility during a period of Nigeria’s history. While they might not immediately appear as a rational discourse on history, the rationale for conjuring a spectral presence in religious or social rituals is a function of both the temporality and the ideology underwriting the religious imagination. Demons too have a social life, and the contingency of their social effects can make them become “true” and “self-evident.”²² In every demonic encounter are assembled the anxieties that haunt the social body within a period, but which are beyond quantifiable proof or empirical demonstration. As people get caught in the ground-shifting changes in the ethical structures of their society, as their familiar lived realities give way to new structures of social experience, they betray their shifting orientations through their behaviors, imaginings, and insights – all of which builds up and is articulated through intangible and spiritual entities. Therefore, the spectral appearances of demonic figures are configurations of social encounters.

MZFM featured a devil figure, *Ayamata*, popularly received as a foreboding specter of evil.²³ Almost three decades later, the same

²⁰ Adogame, “The Anthropology of Evil,” 433.

²¹ Buttici, *African Pentecostals in Catholic Europe*; Cherry, Stephen & Ebaugh, *Global Religious Movements across Borders*; Miller, Sargeant & Flory, *Spirit and Power*, 193.

²² Blanes & Santo, *The Social Life of Spirits*.

²³ Women seen as unruly and nonconforming came to be labeled “*Ayamata*.”

drama company reenacted a similar scene of deliverance from malevolent evil. Given how popular *Agbara Nla* and the Ayamatanga character were, they returned to haunt the present rendition of the demonic conquest of *Abejoye*. As theatre and performance scholar Marvin Carlson explained theatre and cultural memory, each staging of a show brings something familiar back to us. There is a “ghostly quality” to theatre productions as “a simulacrum of the cultural and historical processes,” and that is because it produces a sense of haunting that viscerally awakens glimmers of memories that have already been incorporated into the body politic.²⁴ *Agbara Nla*’s account of the deliverance of a demon-possessed body, like other religious drama, is a public lesson in the struggle between God as the force of good, and the devil as that of evil and sin.²⁵ When a replay of its iconic demonic encounter was brought back in *Abejoye*, it aroused not only the ghostly quality of what has been staged previously in *Agbara Nla*, but also the era and all the feelings it evoked in those of us who watched it. The ghosts of past demons also coincided with those of the present, and both sites of demonic encounter cohere the mood of the present.

Although the modes of expelling demons in both scenes demonstrate consistent belief in the agency of spirit beings, they also display other shifts in the social dimensions of haunting. The figuration of the devil, their breach of either the body or interior spaces, and the kind of harm they cause are a part of larger social trends. In *Agbara Nla* and *Abejoye*, different periods of Nigerian social history and the changes that have occurred are emblemized in these cinematic representations along with the demons that the appointed ministers of God encountered. While the cultural effect of demonic beings is a useful framework for an understanding of the social forces that brought the specters into being, these encounters also document social histories. For instance, the period and the spaces and places where these encounters occur and reoccur, and the degree of fervency displayed during demonic expulsions, are also important for understanding the culture that bred these representative stories.

The assertion that evil can be destroyed for good from the inside of the human body also raises the question of the components of the inside of the human destroyer or the exorcist and the moral authority that

²⁴ Carlson, *The Haunted Stage*, 2. ²⁵ Van Dijkhuizen, *Devil Theatre*.

legitimizes this agent of “good” to carry out the deliverance. Theatre scholar Nahidh Sulaiman pointed out that exorcising demons enlarges the belief that the problem of evil can be supernaturally treated while also affirming belief in human interiority.²⁶ How the details are conceived in the social imagination, and the political and moral consequences, all unfold in their cinematic representations. In both *Agbara Nla* and *Abejoye*, while the spectacle of a devil with a darkened visage is consistent with the idea of evil as semiotically black, the “good” foil, the human representation of the conquering God, appears as the patriarch. This character dramatizes its contrasting purity against the darkness by dressing in white. Whether in a modest city homestead in Nigeria or in a suburban home in Dallas, Texas, surrounded by the props of middle-class financial contentment, the consistency of the depiction – in both, he also first goes through a process of conversion from a village sorcerer to a born-again Christian – shows a normative mindset of the nature and trajectory of good and godliness, and the embodiment of supernatural power. In both TV series, the deliverance minister is the quintessential Pentecostal convert. He had to be someone who left a past life of sorcery to embrace Christ and whose Christian identity evidences power and authority in the name of Jesus Christ.

The methodological choice of interrogating Pentecostal character from the perspective of a film/drama company such as the MZFM is strategic. MZFM has an institutional progression arc that both exemplifies and aligns with the Nigerian Pentecostal movement, and the stories they have told through the years express the spirit of the times. We cannot talk about Pentecostalism from the '90s upward in Nigeria as “the most important source of religious and cultural creativity in the continent . . . channels for harnessing spiritual and social resources for members’ aspirations to modernity”²⁷ without also locating the creative sites where the affective images that buoyed the church messages were concurrently produced. Narrations of faith are backgrounded by the spiritual and social atmosphere in which people are presently embroiled, and their tales are meant to both speak *to* and speak *of* their experiences. Nigerian Pentecostalism did not arrive on the global scene all by itself. MZFM was – and still is – one of the tributaries that

²⁶ Sulaiman, “Theatre of Exorcism,” 180.

²⁷ Wariboko, “African Pentecostalism,” 21–23.

poured into Pentecostal imaginaries, and their activities give a moral shape to the Christian social life. MZFMI has not only evolved with the faith movement, its advancement as a cultural institution also epitomizes the evolution of Nigerian Pentecostalism.

Performances, particularly when popular, isolate the spirit and the sensibility that rule a period. Their reverberation with the public effectively indexes the traumatic pangs society goes through as its new realities are being birthed. If even a word can condense and “register all the transitory, delicate, momentary phases of social change,”²⁸ stories such as popular TV shows and series are cartography of experiences, feelings, and sensibilities that rule an era. We can fully understand why *Agbara Nla* and its stories of demonic encounters resonated with the public when we enter “the interior domain of politics, to the structures of feeling, the habits of the heart, the worlds of moral sense and perception”²⁹ that gave the story so much traction and made it one of the most popular Nigerian dramas ever. Performance scholar Richard Schechner explained cultural productions through the methodological lens of performance:

Whatever is being studied is regarded as practices, events, and behaviors, not as “objects” or “things” Thus performance studies does not “read” an action or ask what “text” is being enacted. Rather, one inquires about the “behavior” of, for example, a painting: how, when and by whom it was made, how it interacts with those who view it, and how the painting changes over time.³⁰

The graph I plot through this chapter with the two teleseries parallels their creation with the Pentecostal trajectory. To understand the Pentecostal implosion and its rapid growth, one must look beyond the structures of their religious activities or the managerial acuity that raised the massive cathedrals. The dramas concomitantly staged within the same period as Pentecostalism grew are representative of issues that needed addressing to heighten people’s faith. The idea is to locate the how and the where that “multiple elements reach a density that condenses various social interests into a movement with confrontations

²⁸ Voloshinov & Bakhtin, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, 19.

²⁹ Alexander, *The Performance of Politics*, 278.

³⁰ Schechner, “What Is Performance Studies?,” 3.

and systemic features, the elements of which are not exactly repeatable, but do resonate onward from its early phase.”³¹

Following Schechner, I inquire into the “behavior” of the two series, the social and political context of their making, how the politics of their era coincided with their reception, and how the encounter has changed over time. From around 1990 when they first started making television dramas, the various MZFMI productions resounded with the audience.³² As a youngster growing up in Ibadan in the ’90s, I recall how much each weekly episode of *Agbara Nla* informed public understanding of demonic influences.³³ Even though various MZFMI series were – and still are – popular, *Agbara Nla* remains their touchstone production. A veritable classic, its enduring popularity owes to the topicality of its message in the era it was produced.³⁴ The plot of *Agbara Nla* spoke about virtually everything Nigerians could relate to regarding the imbrications of political and spiritual power. From *Agbara Nla*’s depiction of Abuja (as the Federal Capital Territory and the nation’s capital is popularly labeled) as a seat of corrupting power that seduces Christians away from the love and the work of God, to stories of mysterious women who wield economic power to recruit other vulnerable women into the sinful vanity fair province of urban spaces, the teleseries was an all-encompassing exegesis on competing forms of power. Power, a permanent fixation of Nigerian Pentecostalism, could be construed as a character in the story because the quest for its possession drove the entire series from beginning to end. Viewers soon found themselves rooting, not for the characters’ deliverance from militating forces of evil, but for the power they embody. For those viewers whose various conversion stories to either a Christianity or to Pentecostalism parallel that of Paul Esupofo – from a great sinner to a great believer – the manifestation of power across the

³¹ Shapiro & Barnard. *Pentecostal Modernism*, 55.

³² Adogame, “To God Be the Glory.”

³³ On this one, I have also relied on memory of peers and acquaintances for information. In interviews and our joint recollections of our growing years, we deduced how much *Agbara Nla* influenced our ideas of the demonic. Most of us grew on a joint diet of TV programs, not just because we were of the same generation but also because we had narrow choices at the time. In 1993 Nigeria, the few television stations in the country were run by both the federal and the state government and they tightly controlled what could be viewed.

³⁴ This is particularly true of southwestern Nigeria where many mega Pentecostal churches are also currently located.

thirteen episodes of *Agbara Nla* were a dramatization of the processes by which their power identity was established.

Having taken astute advantage of the various political, technological, and economic changes at the end of the millennium to build a film industry that can be described as a generator of modern Christian mythology, MZFMFI became a household name, especially among Christians. Their stories translate religious messages, as preached in the church and from interpretations of the Bible, into video/film productions. The agenda is to expand the faith sensibility already ascribed to believers by the church and to exhort the religious imagination through morally sanitized entertainment. One of MZFMFI's specialties which they have repeatedly explored is the demonic imaginary, and this is quite understandable since fantasy has a strong hold on the public mind. The MZFMFI transmutes demons to cinematic forms, and also creates a mythopoeia of demonic actions through their staging of human nature. Thus, both the church and filmmakers form a circular route through which supernatural reality and its imaging on the screen unearth latent beliefs, ideas, visions, and ethics that are translated into cinematic images – consumed, validated, and recirculated into the public moral imagination. Staged and fictional performances allied to the Pentecostal movement such as *Agbara Nla* and *Abejoye* were some of such performance art practices that captured the sociocultural impulse. Given the force of its reverberation with the viewing public, also shaped the lineaments of faith.

MZFMFI started as a traveling theatre group of young evangelists, performing mostly dramas on church altars they turned into makeshift theatre stages.³⁵ These were done during interludes in church services, both as a supplement to the sermons and also as “safe” entertainment for Christians who have to live in a culture riddled with other vain worldly distractions. By 1990, the company started producing TV dramas, videos, drama series, and much later, action thrillers. As a Christian film company, it straddles two creative Nigerian “enterprises” that have demonstrated, globally, the people’s resourcefulness

³⁵ Though they shy away from the provenance, Christian drama artists who mutated into video filmmakers are also inheritors of an older tradition of artistic productions by legendary Yoruba artists such as Hubert Ogunde, Duro Ladipo, Moses Olaiya, and Isola Ogunsola. Drama ministers grew to become an integral part of the Pentecostal material culture who use their artistic skills to shape the religious and public moral imagination.

to organically build entire industries with little material start-up capital and more of the intangible resources of zeal, faith, and sheer grit – the Pentecostal movement itself and the Nigerian film industry popularly called Nollywood.³⁶ When the story of Nollywood's founding around the same early '90s is narrated, there is typically a focus on the ingenuity of the earliest practitioners who saw an opening created by the coincidence of global technological resources and a local taste for familiar stories.³⁷ Then there is a discrete focus on the aspect of Nollywood popular cinema that oriented toward the propagation of Pentecostalism and whose preoccupation was the imagination of modernity through a Christian (Pentecostal) lens. While the promotion of Jesus and Christian religious power in the Nigerian film industry have considerably tapered off,³⁸ the ideological underlay of Nollywood films remains partly wedded to preoccupations with the morality play format that came about through its relationship with the Pentecostal movement in the '90s.³⁹ The other part that does not quite feature in these narratives of mega successful enterprises of the Nigerian film industry is the chronicles of the likes of MZFMI founders.⁴⁰ Artists

³⁶ On Nollywood, see, for instance: Adesokan, *Postcolonial Artists and Global Aesthetics*; Haynes, *Nollywood*; Ugor et al. *Global Nollywood*. Okome, "Nollywood."

³⁷ In the era in which *Agbara Nla* was produced, many Nollywood films of the "halleluyah genre" were proclaiming a similar message of deliverance from evil forces and unabashedly pandered to Pentecostal Christian sensibilities and middle-class consciousness. *Agbara Nla's* visualization of evil felt credible because it had an added advantage of having being produced by African Christian evangelists who supposedly know – through lucid divine revelations, cultural embeddedness, and sheer intuition – what "evil" religious people who practice African religions do in their covens. By simultaneously depicting Christian supremacist attack and also pandering to an Africanist worldview through theatrical aesthetics, the message of the play resonated with a viewership that cut across social strata and religious divides. On the halleluyah genre, see: Kumwenda, "The Portrayal of Witchcraft, Occults and Magic in Popular Nigerian Video Films."

³⁸ One reason could be that those storylines have become commonplace, and the audience would rather have more nuanced and less didactic stories.

³⁹ See, for instance: Meyer, "Praise the Lord."

⁴⁰ Today, the MZFMI is arguably the most prominent and dominant Christian film production company in Africa with a grass-to-grace story that Pentecostals enjoy testifying about. They have become an organization that has made dozens of films, built a drama institute, run an online streaming site and a movie channel on satellite TV, and made films in different countries in the world including a Hindi-language film that was shot in New Delhi and featured a cast of Indians. When *Abejoye* was first released, it premiered in over 360 locations, most of

like Mike Bamiloye also saw an opening – a yearning for stories about Christian lives told by actual Christians – that needed to be filled, although their motives for going into the business of filmmaking were primarily about evangelism rather than just profit.⁴¹ As a cultural producer, MZFMFI played a crucial role in the forming of the Pentecostal identity, the contouring of the religious imagination, and the construction and enforcement of conservative values and ethics. With performance as a medium, MZFMFI propagates religious values with their depictions of Christian social and family life, and demon vanquishing.

When I interviewed Mike Bamiloye – the founder of MZFMFI, and the person who also acted the characters of Paul Esupofa and Olayiotan – one of the several lasting impacts of *Agbara Nla* that he described was how the drama boosted the faith of church field workers. He talked at length about how the church missionaries who had been sent to rural areas testified that the vigor of the screen visualization of Christian triumph over evil heightened their faith in what they could accomplish in the mission fields.⁴² Deliverance ministers too testified that watching *Ayamata* eventually cast out intensified their faith that the power of God could exorcise the most malicious of all devils. The evangelists and revivalists that churches sent to carry out fieldwork in many rural areas would screen the series to people before asking them to give their lives to Jesus.⁴³ These fieldworkers claimed that the

which were the Pentecostal churches in Nigeria, Africa, Australia, Europe, and the US. The stories they tell, whether on screen or as their religious corporate success narration, are also a personal testimony to how far they have come.

⁴¹ Asonzeh Ukah, in his study of Christian films, uses the “religious economy” model to describe the neoliberal model that explains the how and why the cultural marketplace has been amenable to the success of these films and how their creators make “profitable” choices. While the model helpfully illustrates the push and pull of economic forces and the fervent capitalist imperatives that helped the Christian film industry thrive, that secular conceptualization also risks eliding the sheer evangelical zeal that drove companies such as the MZFMFI. Following *Agbara Nla*’s astounding success, MZFMFI recalibrated the size of its vision demonstrating astuteness in deciphering social trends influenced by the discernment of spiritual needs. With such perspicacity, the company could catapult itself from a band of struggling drama evangelists into respected artists that are sampled all over Africa and beyond. Asonzeh. “Advertising God.”

⁴² Personal interview with Mike Bamiloye.

⁴³ As Bamiloye told me, prior to Christians making films, what evangelists used to screen to prospective converts was the Hollywood story of Jesus, *Jesus of Nazareth*. Because many of the audience could not understand the language or

missional exploits of the evangelists in the drama gave them a renewed stamina about the urgency of their missions to witness to all and sundry. With their eyes open to another level of the spectacular display of God's power, their feet were quickened as they hastened to harvest the souls of the spiritually unsaved and the politically disenfranchised. In later sections, I will elaborate more on the Nigerian political context when *Agbara Nla* was produced and why its spectacular elements of the demonic captivated public imagination.

As Bamiloye shared with me at his residence in Ibadan, one of the biggest factors that contributed to the success of MZFMI's evangelistic mission is that people view its dramas mostly in the intimate spaces of their homes. Their organizational mission has been to minister to this social unit by telling relatable stories that depict spiritual warfare as it takes place on a cosmic scale and also affects people at individual and family levels. Unlike other – and more public – church outreach programs, these dramas transmit the gospel directly to people's homes where family members cluster and bond around their TV sets. Their persuasive messages are directly broadcast to an entire household, the unit of the society that will carry out the social reforms the play intends. As anthropologist Katrien Pype also noticed of similar Pentecostal Christian television series in Kinshasa, the cultural producers of these materials and their works do not stand apart from the society; their goals connect to the extant social reality they aim to transform through their artistic productions. Pype noted, "As such, the evangelizing TV actors are mediators. They try to negotiate between lived realities and what they think is the best way to actualize a better society."⁴⁴ For Kinshasa, embroiled in extensive social conflicts, the teleseries tell of people in search of redemption and renewal. The stories on their TV that feature conversion to Christianity are a discourse put forward toward the possibility of social progress – ending chaos and social disorderliness – and ultimately "produc[ing] the good, the orderly, and the healthy."⁴⁵

The audience's reception of these stories primes their hearts for the sermons of personal and social transformation they will encounter in churches and in other evangelistic outreaches. With prior reception of

follow the accent, someone narrated the storyline to them over a microphone. With MZFMI making films, they started showing local stories that resonated with audiences quite well.

⁴⁴ Pype, *The Making of the Pentecostal Melodrama*. ⁴⁵ Ibid.

relatable stories of supernatural encounters rather than abstract theological issues, people become more amenable to receiving the salvation messages preached in churches. The churches too find that thanks to the teleseries and the live performances “drama ministers” stage in church, their task of convincing people about the workings of the power of God are easier, and so they conscript both teleseries and also live drama performances into their church activities. Churches not only sponsored drama organizations like the MZFM to bring live stage productions to church, some developed their own “drama department.” They have brought in well-known “drama ministers” to perform during church services or hired professional drama directors to make plays for the church. So, Nigerian Pentecostalism has also thrived and become one of the most important cultural movements because it co-opted one of the most powerful devices for ideologically fine-tuning a society: narratives, and their dramatization through various media forms.⁴⁶

Bamiloye attributed the wide acceptance of *Agbara Nla* among Yoruba people in the southwestern part of Nigeria to the “richness” of the language and culture with which the story was visually and oratorically rendered. Because of the language, he said, people understood the message at an instinctual level. He said the story elements such as “the evil power residing in the village, evil powers in the city, occult powers, spiritual powers, and the diabolic power of witchdoctors” were all relatable.⁴⁷ When they made the English translation, *The Ultimate Power*, the elements of the story’s demonic encounters were familiar enough within the universe of the African worldview for the story to resonate across cultures. “Almost everyone in Africa could relate to the story’s elements,” Bamiloye said. “The compelling message of victory, deliverance as the solution people are looking for . . . all of these are relevant to the African life.”⁴⁸ Their drama productions consciously created cultural forms that resonated, and can be said to have “freed Christianity to be more at home in local situations.”⁴⁹ Through various methods that instrumentalize the demonic, they divined unfulfilled spiritual longings and ideals, and created explanatory spiritual paradigms for phenomena in the natural sphere. Their legacies

⁴⁶ Meyer, “Picturing the Invisible”; Meyer, “How Pictures Matter,” 160.

⁴⁷ Personal interview with Mike Bamiloye. ⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Robert, “Shifting Southward,” 53.

as “drama ministers” include how their cinematic approach to demonic encounters shaped a template for the social imagination of the Pentecostal cosmic world. Particularly in Nigerian Christian films, the MZFMi dramaturgy of spiritual warfare – that is, the encounters between humans and demonic figures as a site of demonstration of embodied power of Jesus Christ – carefully crafted to accent the thaumaturgy of the power of the Pentecostal identity, continues to reproduce a notion of triumphalism in Nigerian Pentecostal circles.

While Bamiloye attributes the compelling message of *Agbara Nla* to the depth of cultural symbolism that gave it resonance with Africans who live in a spirit-filled world, I would argue that it was the era that made the message in *Agbara Nla* applicable on physical and spiritual levels. Here, I agree with religious studies scholar Simeon Ilesanmi who mapped the rapid growth of African Pentecostalism into a mainstream cultural practice and observed that, “as in the rest of the third world where Pentecostalism has flourished, it is neither the indigenous tradition per se nor a penchant for emotional spiritualism that explains the success of this movement, but rather the larger cultural and political milieu in which it arose.”⁵⁰ For *Agbara Nla* and other productions by MZFMi that featured demonic encounters, the evangelizing story reverberated with the audience because of the political context in which the imaging of good and evil landed, and which also accentuated the Pentecostal desire for power as its identity. *Agbara Nla* was broadcast in 1993, a most significant year in the political history of Nigeria. That was the year Nigerians had also gone to the polls to elect a civilian president and finally end the years of autocratic military rule. Although the election was adjudged free and fair by local and international observers, it was annulled by the military government unwilling to yield power to civilian leaders. The election results have never been fully released officially, but the unofficial figures pointed in the direction of a winner: Chief Moshood Kashimawo Abiola, a billionaire philanthropist who won on a largely pan-Nigerian mandate. Nigerians, unwilling to accept the subterfuge against a popular mandate, poured into the streets to riot against the military authority. Those public demonstrations marked one of the bloodiest and most traumatic periods in the history of postwar Nigeria.⁵¹ In that period, the urban spaces were marked

⁵⁰ Ilesanmi, “From Periphery to Center.”

⁵¹ Obadare, “Democratic Transition and Political Violence in Nigeria”; www.nytimes.com/1993/07/07/world/rioting-in-nigeria-kills-at-least-11.html; www.nytimes.com/1993/07/07/world/rioting-in-nigeria-kills-at-least-11.html

by fear and disempowerment, an uneven notion of power that people would seek to redress in their churches through the superior force of an ultimate power.

As a youngster in that era, I still have vivid recollections of the chaos of those times, the social uncertainties, and the anxieties of the sinister times that still lay ahead. I recall youth demonstrators setting up bonfires with used car tires, running from teargas set by the police and soldiers who sought to disband the protests, and relentlessly returning to the sites of demonstration to start another bonfire. They made an effigy of the then-military head of state, General Ibrahim Babangida, placed it in a coffin and took it to the local broadcasting television station where they set it on fire. It was a ritual my late uncle, one of the demonstrators, imagined would have a supernatural effect on the abusive military rulers of the period. In those polarized times where good and evil were considered starkly divided between the ruler and the ruled, people staged physical and spiritual showdowns they thought would restore the moral imperative of the triumph of light over darkness. None of their enactments of imprecation so as much as grazed the leaders who were seemingly shielded behind the impregnable force of totalitarian power they possessed. In addition to the riots and bloodshed were curfews, scarcity of essential household commodities, industrial actions – the aftershocks of the economic programs of the '90s such as Structural Adjustment Programs that left the country weakened – the breakdown of social and public facilities, corruption, and a palpable feeling of trepidation and despondence that overwhelmed the country.

Nigerians, finding themselves swirling amidst the vertiginous performances of power play from government officials whose distance from their oppressive realities added to the soldiers' mystique, poignantly prayed against the spiritual forces and the "principalities and powers" that threaten their lived conditions. The world was being upended along with the prefabricated values and ethos that formed its cornerstones, and the reigning idea of desirable moral justice in the political and economic crises was an apocalyptic vision of the oppressed citizens finding the superpowers to violently overthrow their sadistic leaders. That cathartic conclusion to the ongoing moral

[.nytimes.com/1993/07/06/world/nigerian-protests-erupt-in-violence.html?auth=login-email](https://www.nytimes.com/1993/07/06/world/nigerian-protests-erupt-in-violence.html?auth=login-email)

crisis in the polity was not going to come from a formal or legalistic instrument of justice, they realized, but from a source of power that transcended all the forms of power they knew.

The drama, *Agbara Nla*, came on TV in that political context where the military government's power loomed large in the imagination, and the collective sense of disempowerment was acute. The prophetic message of *Agbara Nla* was thus a timely one, and its visualization of a power tussle between the forces of light and darkness reverberated across the populace who saw – through their screens and in their minds – that there was indeed a form of power that was above all other powers, and could dislodge that of their political leaders. *Agbara Nla*, however, did not just dramatize the subsisting power that powered the ethical and political life in Nigeria to the audience. It also aroused visceral feelings of disempowerment and nudged people to seek empowerment in the *ultimate power*. It urged them to convert to this new way of life, to give up the traditional ways of life and the accompanying sociality as a means of achieving victory over the deprecating forces of evil.

The project of religious conversion typically becomes inevitable when a new sociopolitical order has established symbols of producing power with which everyone now reckons. Personal conversion happens either when, within the newly configured milieu, someone has had experiences of triumph over odd circumstances or when the new religious form promises better protection against some threatening forces.⁵² Either way, the larger social changes make people more amenable to converting to a new faith. Whatever fantasies the new order promises, this religious ideology also promises to fill people with the ingenuity necessary to attain the many possibilities that have been triggered in their world. By destroying the evil powers that lurked in the rural areas/villages that represented traditions and origins, and from there go forward to banish the demons that existed in cities, *Agbara Nla* taught that the terror that evil powers wreak can be overcome by breaking the loop between the demons of one's origins and the ones that dominate the present. Through various symbolisms, the story links the vindictive power of evil to one's provenance and the social processes that formulated one's subjectivity. To exorcise the demons that haunt the city – modern life, that is – requires one to go back to one's

⁵² Horton, "African Conversion."

primal African roots to displace the conventional sources of power with the power of Jesus's name and these reformulated roots will, by God's design, correct what is wrong with the present. By consistently costuming the Christian who confronts the devil in white attire, they even outlined the puritanical grounds through which these malignant forces could be confronted: an ethic of self-discipline that demanded Christians to purge themselves of any moral contaminants.

In the traumatic Nigerian '90s, disempowerment and the prescribed spiritual solutions drove many to the churches, especially the Pentecostal churches that were growing at an exponential rate and whose central message was screaming "power in the name of Jesus."⁵³ Political theorist and historian Olufemi Vaughan noted how much the hardship of the times led to mass conversions of people seeking renewal through the born-again experience. He said, "As the crisis of the Nigerian state deepened by the 1980s, mass conversion to Pentecostal churches from mainline Catholic and protestant churches, as well as African-initiated churches, centered on material and spiritual empowerment."⁵⁴ Literary scholar Niyi Akingbe, speaking of *Waiting for an Angel*, one of the literary accounts of the period, noted that the writer, Helon Habila, "defines the underlying theme of despair and despondency, which pervades the Nigerian political atmosphere which lasted from 1993 to 1998" and also "underscores the reign of terror orchestrated by successive military administrations in Nigeria, especially the military regimes of Ibrahim Babangida and Sani Abacha."⁵⁵ Writers of that period, like Habila, succinctly captured the deprivation and the stranglehold of fear that characterized life at the hands of a brutal, corrupt, and oppressive military government.⁵⁶

⁵³ Marshall, "Power in the Name of Jesus."

⁵⁴ Vaughan, *Religion and the Making of Nigeria*, 140.

⁵⁵ Akingbe, "Saints and Sinners," 27.

⁵⁶ Akingbe notes *Waiting for an Angel* captures life in Nigeria at this period. He says that even the title of book, *Waiting for an Angel*, betrays the notion of a benign intervention from cosmic forces. "It looks more like a supplication offered to the divine in order to get rid of the military scourge plaguing Nigeria. . . . The novel reiterates the anguish of people under military repression, waiting anxiously for supernatural intervention to break the dire social and political straits in which they find themselves" (30). While I agree that Nigerians waited for divine intervention, they did not passively wait for a change in their circumstance. They also actively battled in idioms of the spirit.

As people sought divine intervention in a political situation, the already permeable barriers between spiritual, cultural, and political spheres further dissolved to orient people to there being only one source of the ultimate (supernatural) power, and it was the only force effective against the usurpers currently at the helm and who needed to be displaced. Stories like *Agbara Nla* aided this flight toward churches because it dramatized the limitations of even the most brutal and repressive modes of power and liberated minds to see how their conversion could move them from being subalterns to becoming producers of the symbolic instruments of power. This is not to argue that a singular vision or cultural production created Pentecostalism, but that the story gave shape to curiosities and feelings that were part of a larger current of sensibility. It also did so at a crucial historical moment. The quest for empowerment drove many people to the churches to find answers to existential problems that the leaders of the state could not address.

The next significant date in Nigerian political history was 1998 when General Sani Abacha, the repressive military head of state who had held down the country, died in suspicious circumstances. The country could, suddenly, exhale. The media (which the military also fought hard to suppress then) had reported that Abacha was sick and dying in the presidential villa, Aso Rock. Abacha, a Muslim from northern Nigeria, had reportedly been bringing in Islamic marabouts from several regions of Africa and the Middle East, and those people were carrying out fetish activities at Aso Rock.⁵⁷ The public's idea of repressive political power was therefore not just that of indifferent institutions or soulless bureaucracy but was also shot through with supernatural elements.⁵⁸ Amidst the chaos, those who would engage the state found an outlet in idioms of spiritual warfare, and they did so both by negotiating and legitimizing the indigenous cosmological traditions – such as spectral figures and the supernatural means of their conquest – that present the spiritual as the alternative space of engaging the political.⁵⁹

By what Nigerians generally interpret as an act of divine intervention, the dictator, Abacha died in June 1998, a Monday. He had been

⁵⁷ Obadare, "Pentecostal Presidency?"

⁵⁸ Marshall, "The Sovereignty of Miracles."

⁵⁹ Adogame, "Dealing with Local Satanic Technology."

sick, but his aides had gone to great lengths to hide the information from the public. Coincidentally, less than forty-eight hours before, at the Friday Holy Ghost service, the leader of the largest Pentecostal gathering in Nigeria, Pastor Enoch Adeboye of the Redeemed Christian Church of God (who was named as one of the fifty most powerful people in the world by *Newsweek* in 2008), told his church members that God was the beginning a new phase in Nigerian history. The Friday prophecy was a hint that it had settled in the spirit realm. At the news of his death, thousands of Nigerians poured out into the streets to celebrate their freedom from the clutches of oppressive political power. The bloodless coup of Abacha's death, they reasoned, could only have been sponsored by God. Shortly after his death too, political prisoners were freed all over the country and the march toward democratic governance began.⁶⁰ One of those who marched out of prison was Olusegun Obasanjo, a former military leader, who would become president the following year. Considering the role that faith in the God that Pentecostals propagated had played in keeping people alive through the turbulent '90s as they waited for divine intervention, it was not strange that they associated the death of Abacha and the subsequent historical events that freed Nigeria from the clutches of military power with Pastor Adeboye's prophetic message.⁶¹ More than a coincidence, it became a confirmation that the ultimate power that Pentecostals embodied would triumph over evil in both social and political life.

The Fourth Republic in Nigeria started in 1999 with President Obasanjo, a southern Nigerian Christian who identified with Pentecostalism (much of which is domiciled in southern Nigeria, particularly the west). This association with the highest office in the land was a major factor that boosted the surge of the Pentecostal movement in Nigeria.⁶² With the new era also came liberal modes of governance that guaranteed civil liberties, free markets, and new models of social prosperity for the populace. The year having marked a critical transitional phase for Nigeria Pentecostalism in many ways, also created a mood of sanguinity that converged in visions of boundless growth

⁶⁰ Abacha died June 8, 1998. The march toward civil rule began and culminated in "Democracy Day" on May 29, 1999.

⁶¹ Pastor Adeboye still repeated this testimony at the annual convention in December 2018.

⁶² Obadare, "*Pentecostal Presidency?* See also, Obadare, *Pentecostal Republic*.

and lack of limitations. The aspirational qualities of global Pentecostalism – the prosperity gospel theology, the vibrant use of media technology, appropriation of market techniques, and the fusion of the political and Christian religious spheres – that the Nigerian Pentecostal movement had been witnessing from the sidelines became fully attainable within their immediate society. Harvey Cox once said that Pentecostalism is “not a church or even a single religion at all, but a *mood*.”⁶³ His observation is important to understanding how the wave of Pentecostal preachers could tap into the optimistic mood of the newly freed Nigeria in 1999, and through the ethics and practices of Pentecostalism, create a Pentecostal milieu that would define the sociopolitical culture. Relatively young – the age bracket of Mike Bamiloye when he acted Paul Esupofo – this generation was not only brimming with optimism at the new Nigeria that was about to unfold, but they also brought their professional expertise and entrepreneurial instincts into organizing the church. The newly elected Pentecostal president’s public identification with his faith helped generate a prevailing ethos of Pentecostalism around the nation and boosted the power of pastors as the public face of the faith movement. With the massive resources the Pentecostal church could now mobilize as their church sizes exploded, they dominated the media and public culture to the point they also developed a symbiotic relationship with political power. From being the spectators of power, they become coproducers of it in the Nigerian polity. They became identified with power.

Since then, Nigeria’s political history has been jointly underwritten by the Pentecostal moral and spiritual imagination, a massive reworking of the political topography from the time power was coterminous with military dictators whose clique of power was dominated by Muslims from northern Nigeria. Political actors in Nigeria’s rebooted democratic society have latched on to Pentecostal idioms of power and corralled their vivid supernatural imagination into governance mechanisms.⁶⁴ The ways liberal democracy promotes policies that advance freedom for institutions such as the media, the economy, and social ethics, helped make the society amenable for collective and individual religious self-expression. This idea of freedom is not only

⁶³ Cox, *Fire from Heaven*, 45.

⁶⁴ Obadare, *Pentecostal Republic*. See also: Dowd, *Christianity, Islam and Liberal Democracy*.

abstract, it also has implications on bodies in the polity. Having been constricted by the forces of military power and abuse, these bodies are now freed to reshape social order with their vision of a moral citizenship that links self-mastery to the ability to influence the conduct of others.⁶⁵ In their reconceptualization of the moral order, they offered ethics and ideals through which people could envision and practically fashion a better life for themselves. As religious studies scholar Paul Gifford noticed, the Pentecostal faith movement is geared toward success. This orientation is quite conspicuous in their language – breakthrough, success, prosperity, abundance, victory – and these terms are mostly understood in terms of financial or material matters.⁶⁶ However, beyond the tendency to look to the supernatural for solutions, they also provided opportunities for upward mobility for their members through initiatives of economic enterprise and networking opportunities. These factors contributed to shaping the manifestation of Pentecostal power identity, such that they became one of the most influential groups in the country.

This growth from the margins to the mainstream of social culture and becoming the people of power is also highlighted by the similarities and differences in the rendering of the demonic encounters in the *Agbara Nla* and *Abejoye* series. While for *Agbara Nla*, Paul Esupofa faced a devil as an “other” presence that possessed the Christian body and needed to be urgently cast out to repair a fractured relationship with God, in *Abejoye*, Olayiotan is a “self-possessed” figure who could make a literal joke *of* and *with* the devil. The way conquest over evil is dramatized – either as a raw, spectacular and belabored contest that we see in *Agbara Nla* or a refined battle where the devil is commuted into metaphor and recedes into the imagination – are instructive gauges of the structures of feeling that inhere in the audience within the period. The notion of a comical moment with the devil, one tame enough to dance with, would perhaps have been unthinkable in the period that *Agbara Nla* was produced. Given the sociopolitical exigencies of the time, such an act would have been considered too frivolous and its effect counterproductive. The Pentecostal movement was relatively young, its fontanel was still pulsating with the thrilling prospects and uncertainties of a new birth. Thus, the narrative of devil as the

⁶⁵ Marshall, “God Is Not a Democrat.”

⁶⁶ Gifford, “Persistence and Change in Contemporary African Religion.”

quintessential depiction of the evil “other” had to be treated as an agonistic confrontation and a spiritual mandate that needed careful handling.

Enter *Abejoye*, the King Maker, the Already-Made King

The factors differentiating Olayiotan’s demonic encounter from that of Paul Esupofa encapsulates the various social changes that have occurred in Nigeria, along with the evolution of the Pentecostal movement. One, there is the factor of aging demographic, particularly by the vanguards of the movement, along with associated issues of maturation, conservatism, slow-down, and inevitable biological decadence. The generation of young people who pioneered the movement are now advanced in years.⁶⁷ The actor playing the “old man” character in *Agbara Nla* was costumed to embody an idea(l) of patriarchal power through theatrical artifice while in *Abejoye* he played the role by just being himself. In *Agbara Nla*, Mike Bamiloye’s act as an older man was an almost too obvious put on, a façade the low-budget film achieved with unsophisticated makeup and costumes. The audience had to – literally – suspend their disbelief for the attributes of old age in *Agbara Nla* to be convincing. By the time Bamiloye was acting the role of an old Christian patriarch in *Abejoye*, he no longer needed artifice to simulate aging. The very fact that he had truly aged in the eyes of the public/audience who had also aged with him gave Olayiotan’s character even extra-cinematic credibility. From 1993 to 2020, Paul Esupofa had not only grown into Olayiotan, but also became a formulator for confronting evil. Restaging of the earlier demonic encounter in *Abejoye* with striking similarities to *Agbara Nla* shows how a novel cinematic presentation can take a prescriptive turn and be less prone to arousing primal dread.

By the time *Abejoye* was released in 2020, Pentecostalism had become one of the most formidable forces in not only Nigeria but through Africa as well. Millions of people had become born again and joined a Pentecostal church, making the church a vast social network of people bonded by their spiritual and social relationships. The vanguards of the faith movement that had unabashedly proclaimed their agenda of creating a new sovereign order within

⁶⁷ Ojo, “The Church in the African State.”

Nigeria to which even the state authority would defer were succeeding.⁶⁸ As anthropologist Jean Comaroff narrated of the Pentecostal imperative to override social and political spaces, much of what is at stake is not just about people at the grassroots level questioning the existing order of liberal democracy. Instead, they also aim to “counter the institutional arrangements that have nurtured the modernist worldview . . . canonized above all in the liberal nation-state as imagined community, a model that posits a neutral public domain, clearly separated from the realm of private commitments and belief.”⁶⁹ Their practices of overwhelming the modern order that authorizes the civil law and market secularization has seen them striving to “unify the fragmented realms of plural cultural registers of liberal modern societies, thus to recover the profane reaches of everyday life as vehicles of divine purpose.”⁷⁰

In *Agbara Nla*, the demonic encounter was a means to stake a political claim within the debilitating Nigerian social order and demonstrate to beleaguered Christians that divine providence was on their side. The imagination of the devil was to project an end to a repressive military rule through the ultimate power of God. With the timeless word of God and the established tenets of spiritual warfare, they could use the devil figure to collapse the past, present, and the future into a counter-discourse of resistance against the hegemonic power that ruled their lives. Within the context of the brutal military government, this approach was just practical and strategic because important counter-discourses of overthrowing authority could be rendered to the public as part of a divine plan, and it could be taken for granted that their vision had long been embedded in His agenda. At the time of *Agbara Nla*, unlike Abejoye, their power identity, now also marked through the prosperity gospel, had not become a self-evident reality.

The prosperity gospel, an aspect of Pentecostal theology, is a doctrine of reciprocity between God and believers; people give their resources to God in faith and receive abundant blessings, usually in the form of money and other material goods. Also called the “health and wealth gospel,” it is a spiritual contract that posits that faith in God

⁶⁸ Ihejirika, “Media and Fundamentalism in Nigeria.”

⁶⁹ Comaroff, “Pentecostalism, Populism and the New Politics of Affect,” 49.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

should be accompanied by financial and material health for believers.⁷¹ Through the speech acts of prayer, tithes payment, positive confession, ritual enactment, and “seed-sowing,” people key into divine promises of material well-being to enable them to survive the wounds of global capitalism. In a globalized economy where market forces are deemed autonomous, and the sites/forces of production are de-anchored from those of consumption, money becomes susceptible to the idea of the occult economy – the imagination that physical money can be conjured.⁷² A monetary flow de-anchored from obvious means of productivity gives money a magical quality, and treats capitalism like the magic dust of social reformation, the messiah itself.⁷³

The Pentecostal prosperity gospel can, to some extent, be credited with boosting a work ethic, engendering an optimistic outlook of upward social mobility, creating a wide network of social support from religious cohorts, and encouraging a transcendence over the structural imbalances that have kept Africa poor. The teachings have been popular, especially among the poor and the benighted who are urged to sow a part of their income to the Lord and expect an abundant blessing in return. People have shared testimonies of how they sacrificed their personal property such as entire monthly income, cars, inheritance, school fees, and so on only to receive a miraculous yield. Even those who do not get a spectacular reward still maintain their faith and ultimately expect some degree of return on their investment.⁷⁴ The theology altered the way they thought of impossible dreams of wealth, and the realistic means by which it could be acquired in post-military Nigeria. Prosperity gospel provided a conscious moral paradigm through which people could engage in consumption of modern goods without feelings of guilt or worry about sliding into sin.⁷⁵ By literally “demonizing” poverty, the preachers created an apprehensible spirit for its manifestation and transposed the imagery of the devil onto it. The specter of dread the devil evokes in people became synonymous with the wretchedness of poverty, and further drove people to seek the divine power to survive brutal conditions.

⁷¹ Wariboko, “Pentecostal Paradigms of National Economic Prosperity in Africa.” On the logic of this spiritual transaction, see: Wariboko, “Faith Has a Rate of Return.”

⁷² Comaroff & Comaroff, “Privatizing the Millennium.” ⁷³ *Ibid.*, 306–309.

⁷⁴ Wariboko, “Faith Has a Rate of Return.” ⁷⁵ Lee, “Prosperity Theology.”

The discourse of Pentecostal prosperity theology as engaged by different scholars such as David Maxwell, Ebenezer Obadare, Birgit Meyer, Simon Coleman, Amos Yong, Asonzeh Ukah, Naomi Haynes, Nimi Wariboko, Lovemore Togarasei, and Deji Aiyegboyin can be placed on a continuum. On one end of the spectrum, scholars are optimistic that the prosperity gospel, and its power to format cultural orientation toward capitalism, offers an ethic of empowerment that fosters upward mobility in African contexts where the public bureaucracies tasked with providing the social infrastructure for collective uplift are either inefficient or markedly absent.⁷⁶ Thus, churches provide educational, medical, economic, and social benefits to their members who invest the capital they receive into wealth-generating enterprises. In addition to the strong sense of identity formation the churches provide, they also energize the entrepreneurial instinct of those who want material success as proof of their immaterial faith.⁷⁷ On the other end of the spectrum are scholars who, having weighed the neoliberalist bent of the prosperity gospel and how it has made Pentecostal Christians unwitting propagators of society's demise through their encouragement of primitive accumulation and their reactionary attitude toward capitalist predation, dismiss its value for navigating a path to prosperity for Africans. Whether the prosperity gospel has generated the ethic necessary for galvanizing Africa to development or not, the business savviness of these faith enterprises is worth acknowledging. Their many successes as social reproducers reflect their pragmatism in assessing the spirit of their times, conducting market research, and employing tested business practices in the enterprise of church growth.

Pentecostals have never been a monolith, and the quest for power through economic means was not initially the defining trait of the faith movement. They initially aspired toward asceticism and were far more

⁷⁶ Aiyegboyin, "A Rethinking of Prosperity Teaching in the New Pentecostal Churches in Nigeria"; Coleman, *The Globalisation of Charismatic Christianity*; Haynes, "Pentecostalism and the Morality of Money"; Maxwell, "Delivered from the Spirit of Poverty?"; Meyer, "Pentecostalism and Neo-liberal Capitalism"; Obadare, "Raising Righteous Billionaires"; Togarasei, "The Pentecostal Gospel of Prosperity in African Contexts of Poverty"; Ukah, "Those Who Trade with God Never Lose"; Wariboko, "Pentecostal Paradigms of National Economic Prosperity in Africa"; Yong, "A Typology of Prosperity Theology."

⁷⁷ Heuser, "Charting African Prosperity Gospel Economies," 8.

conscious of an afterlife.⁷⁸ They made a conscious choice to reject the way of the world and retreat into social enclaves where they would not be morally tainted by worldly influences.⁷⁹ When still a novel movement, they tried to flatten out divisive differences by subsuming divergent personalities under the all-encompassing Pentecostal identity.⁸⁰ With the economic squeeze and the crushing poverty that befell Nigeria during the turbulent years of the '80s and '90s, more people turned to God to meet their economic needs. Salvation was no longer about the soul, but urgent material needs as well. Over time, the capitalist imperative that underwrites the prosperity gospel yielded to the desire for the “finer things in life” such that even Pastor Enoch Adeboye, the General Overseer of about the largest congregation in Nigeria – and possibly Africa – recently lamented,

The most worrisome thing I see (about the future of Christ) among the younger ones is that majority are beginning to forget that Jesus is coming back again. In our younger days we were always expectant of the coming of the Lord. And in fact, we used to greet ourselves in that direction. We were always looking forward to when the Lord would come back. We also always prepared for the rapture and we ensured we did not do things that would make us miss rapture. But today people are more concerned about prosperity. They are beginning to forget that we have a home in heaven.⁸¹

The prosperity gospel indeed changed the moral temperature of the church. Those whom the early Pentecostals looked down upon as “ungodly” because of their attachment to worldly groups have become the ones to dominate the church. The bejeweled outsiders who were

⁷⁸ Marshall, *Political Spiritualities*, 76.

⁷⁹ Under the social and economic conditions of the Nigerian 1970s when the country was awash with “petro-dollars” and the corruption that typically attends extractive economies, most of those in the earlier wave of Pentecostals shunned flamboyance and worldliness, and practiced an ethic of self-denial. In appearance and in quotidian practices, they were expected to live a life that contrasted with the rest of the social culture and was driven only by faith. Some churches proscribed the television, saying it was the devil’s box. They also spurned wealth in all its forms, preferring to focus on the imminent second coming of Jesus. Komolafe, “The Changing Face of Christianity”; Pierce, *Moral Economies of Corruption*.

⁸⁰ For instance, they called themselves “brothers” and “sisters,” and stridently denied worldliness. Gaiya, *The Pentecostal Revolution in Nigeria*.

⁸¹ www.vanguardngr.com/2020/04/my-worry-for-this-generation-of-christians-adeboye/

once candidates for hell because of their worldliness became proof of divine benevolence. Today,

Pentecostal churches now count members of the upper class, military officers, top civil servants, and political and business leaders among their fold. The major denominations among them have complex bureaucracies, celebrity pastors, and often function as (or at least claim to be) agents of national development and sociopolitical redemption. They are increasingly emboldened by their successes to view themselves as divinely sanctioned change-leaders ushering in a new Africa.⁸²

The demographic of church membership is vast, cutting across generations and social classes. Thousands and thousands of churches of various cathedral sizes litter the entire southern Nigerian landscape, particularly in its urban centers where their advertising – huge electronic billboards with pastor’s faces – hits one on the face. Pentecostal churches have built – and are still building – virtually all the infrastructure of social reproduction: huge church auditoriums, media houses, universities, popular entertainment facilities, politics, gymnasiums, malls, schools, prayer cities, financial institutions, housing estates, science laboratory, printing presses, and publishing businesses. They demonstrate a promiscuous attitude toward absorbing forms, practices, and bodies into their fold from the spheres deemed “secular.” They treat spaces as dynamic and can site churches in cinema halls, nightclubs, and places similarly marked as “sinful” without being bogged down by the contradictions.⁸³ Dozens of megachurches have not only established churches in virtually every town and city across the thirty-six states of Nigeria, they also have multiple branches in other parts of the world from Africa to USA, UK, Europe, Australia, and even Asia. Pastors have become superstars, and their celebrity culture sometimes usurps artists on the popular culture scene. Politicians regularly corral pastors’ theological influence to win elections and maintain their hold on power. Pastors have become a part of the power brokerage economy, and they have become invested in worldly politics to the point their partisanship leaves them vulnerable to public criticism. Faith in God’s power to convict gets downplayed, and the coercive power of partisan politics is used to override personal decisions.

⁸² Wariboko, “Pentecostalism in Africa.”

⁸³ Adeboye, “‘A Church in a Cinema Hall?’”

Many of the most elaborate architectural buildings in Nigeria are initiated by large churches that need to enter the cluttered, yet intensely competitive, religious market. All over the country, especially in the major Nigerian cities, churches large and small keep springing up to cater to the ever-expanding Pentecostal population. In Lagos, for instance, there is an ongoing church-building project with architecture that is a high-rise, towering at the same height – or even above – the headquarters of corporate business organizations. During the celebration of the opening of a cathedral that was said could accommodate up to 100,000 worshippers at a time in the FCT in 2018, one of the men of God invited to speak at the occasion, Archbishop John Osa-Oni, boasted about the progress of the Pentecostal denomination, “We were called the mushroom churches, but today we are the much much room church.”⁸⁴

As Pentecostalism vigorously preached material success and widened its congregation, it also ostentatiously performed wealth, particularly through the activities of the pastorate at the higher levels of the church hierarchy. Pastors of megachurches have raised enormous amounts of money for their ambitious projects, some of which came from morally tainted sources.⁸⁵ The pastors of the megachurches themselves have become icons of dazzling wealth who boasted of the rains of divine blessings on themselves and their households, construing themselves as legitimate proof of the viability of the prosperity gospel. Church members, deriving empathetic pleasure from watching their leaders embody so much economic power, use material acquisition as a spiritual “point of contact” for their own aspirations. There are examples of the scandal where Christians were arrested for defrauding the business organizations they worked for and the investigators found that churches had received part of the stolen wealth either through generous donations to the church or to the pastors.⁸⁶

Paul Esupofu’s demonic encounter reenacted in *Abejaye* also shows people uprooted from their local roots, who migrated to other territories to nurture and be nurtured by the unaccustomed earth of other lands. As Nigerian Pentecostals migrated and took their God with

⁸⁴ www.youtube.com/watch?v=801HOJ-uzTw

⁸⁵ For instance, two of the top bankers indicted in the financial institution scandals of 2008, Cecilia Ibru and Erastus Akingbola, were top-ranking members the Redeemed Christian Church of God.

⁸⁶ Faleye, “Religious Corruption.”

them, they also formed a global diaspora of faith that, despite its particularistic differences, is like a spoken universal language that expresses the vision of Jesus Christ to gather his own as “one flock” under “one shepherd.”⁸⁷ In his theological-historical analysis of Pentecostal transnational routes, sociologist Waldo Cesar uses biblical accounts of the Tower of Babel and the Day of Pentecost as narrative paradigms to track humanity’s disunification from God and eventual reunification. In the respective biblical accounts of these two events, language is a motif of separation – when God separated people at the Tower of Babel by confusing their language – and reconciliation – when, on the Day of Pentecost, the disciples spoke in tongues and people of different countries heard them in their individual languages.⁸⁸ The unity that Pentecostalism has forged by transcending linguistic barriers across all nations, he says, makes it “the greatest expression of human communication.”⁸⁹

Pentecostals have not only created a global formation, they – like the folks at the Babel Tower – are using the powers of unifying language of the spirit to build “a city and the tower.” On the day of the Pentecost, they spoke in tongues which were diverse but mutually intelligible, a symbolic interplay between differences, yet an identity built on sameness.⁹⁰ As Wariboko interpreted this event of Pentecost, ordinary folks were fired by the Holy Ghost and imbued with diverse gifts to go out and organize the infrastructure of the world; the relationality “marked by diversity, inclusiveness, invitation, equity, and new relationship-making power.”⁹¹ The “city and the tower” – synecdoche of empire-building with no prescribed limits – links Pentecostals from all over the world and inspires a global religious domination based on the interplay of a similar language yet different tongues.⁹² This flexibility of principles leads to a self-justifying habit of overpromoting capitalist ideologies and the unembarrassed display of money, wealth, and splendor, as co-signifiers of spirituality. The headquarters of the Pentecostal global empire may not be domiciled in a singular spatial location as, for example, the Catholics have Vatican City, but the vision of a holy city is individually embodied by Pentecostals who have formed a vast network of interdependent

⁸⁷ John 10:16, NKJV. ⁸⁸ César, “From Babel to Pentecost.” ⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Wariboko, *Methods of Ethical Analysis*. ⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Cesar, *From Babel to Pentecost*, 30.

local churches.⁹³ During this endless expansion to acquire an even broader stage on which to perform their power identity, Nigerian Pentecostalism acquired traveling companions that trimmed the sharp edges of its ideologies to be more accepting of the worldly as long as it expanded their sphere of authority and consolidated their hold on power.⁹⁴

Given how pervasive Pentecostal practices are, and how much its powerful ethos dominates the Nigerian social sphere, the ghostly quality in the return of the demon figure in *Abejoye* felt rather routine. The concept of demonic encounters seemed easy: the devil was too tame, too voiceless, and even too familiar to the deliverance minister for its capacity for evil to be considered radical. So why did demonic encounter become a matter of amusement? From its earlier tentative position, Pentecostalism has built up a network of middle-class members whose rise amidst the strangulating economic conditions of the society in the country and in the new world has been tremendous. Such feat necessitated self-proclamation, and the faith movement, through its prosperity gospel, has become one of the biggest propagators of the conquering power of capitalism and the freedom of consumption. In a social context where domains of religion, economics, and politics have mapped onto each other, their feat of success impacted even their representation of demonic encounters. Rather than narrate novel stories that prime people for an imminent victory that will displace established political authorities who repress the destiny of children of God, their formulaic restaging of a deliverance scene is a narration of a victory that already happened and needs sustaining with appeals to the tropes that made them great. The identity of Pentecostals as a people of power was more assured and though the fear of the devil works still through their imagination, when demonic figures appear, they could also be treated as objects of amusement and as playthings.

⁹³ Wariboko, *The Charismatic City and the Public Resurgence of Religion*, 172–173.

⁹⁴ For a study on African religious/Pentecostal transnationalism see: Adeboye, “Transnational Pentecostalism in Africa”; Adogame, *Religion Crossing Boundaries*; Adogame, “Transnational migration and Pentecostalism in Europe”; Asamoah-Gyadu, “Spirit, Mission and Transnational Influence”; Knibbe, “We Did Not Come Here as Tenants, but as Landlords”; Maxwell, “Christianity without Frontiers.”

Conclusion

This chapter has been a reflection on the power identity of Pentecostals through the stages of evolution within Nigerian social and political contexts, using the narrative elements of spiritual warfare in two television series across a span of almost three decades. These two accounts are similar, but their pinpointing different periods expresses the power identity through the politics of self-representation. Within the nation's troubled political sphere, they unleashed demonic characters through which they staged confrontations, expressed desires, and approximated their power as Pentecostal Christians. The consistency of narration from *Agbara Nla* to *Abejoye* shows how this sense of imaging self-identity has discursively solidified through years of performing power both in local and global contexts. The arc of Esupofa and Olayotan's character development from the early '90s when Nigerians dwelled in an unstable polity to the 2020s reflects the trajectory of the Pentecostal identity.

This unceasing power identity performance does not remove the factors that accentuate the Pentecostal desire for power. The country's perennial economic woes and political upheavals even within the context of democratic rule heighten the desire for power among Pentecostal subjects. The pursuit of power propels the performance of power – to attain it, sustain it, and become identified by it. As people continue to face precarious conditions, they develop even more apocalyptic visions to process the structures of their reality and their self-understanding as people of power gets heightened. In the next chapter, I will be looking at the performance of power identity through an analysis of electoral contests in both Nigeria and the USA, and what it meant for the Pentecostal and evangelical Christian power bloc transnationally.