

## CHAPTER SIX

### RELIGIOUS REVIVAL AND THE STATE: THE RISE OF PENTECOSTALISM

Pentecostalism formed the most important religious movement that swept through Nigeria's Southern and Middle Belt states starting in the 1980s. It evolved from mission Christianity and African-initiated churches in the wake of the political ferment of the 1950s, grew exponentially during the national upheavals of the 1960s and 1970s, and further expanded because of the consequences of neoliberalism in the 1980s and 1990s. Jacob Olupona, a leading scholar of Christianity in Nigeria, argues persuasively that despite its deep religious roots, Pentecostalism is essentially a manifestation of and response to the complexities of modern transformations in the country:

Pentecostalism is a phenomenon inseparable from modernity and should be seen as complementing the increasingly cosmopolitan character of business, ideas, and people. Studies in Pentecostalism should not only consider the issues of origin—that is, where and when Pentecostalism began—but also should address the influence of the movement on individuals and society.<sup>1</sup>

In his book *Nigerian Pentecostalism*, theologian Nimi Wariboko makes the critical connection between Pentecostalism and the material conditions of local people, arguing that the “Pentecostal epistemic” reveals a dialectical process between transcendence and temporal, sacred and profane, local and global, engaging major themes that are emblematic of Nigeria’s rapidly changing society.<sup>2</sup> 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. Consequently, Pentecostalism, despite its evocative piety, provides a pragmatic and moral response to the crisis of statism and neoliberalism.<sup>3</sup> Wariboko provides a compelling analysis of contending Pentecostal doctrines, distinguishing between various traditions including Holiness and Prosperity and showing how this remarkable religious movement transformed Nigerian public life, especially since the attainment of independence in 1960.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, the renowned scholar of African Pentecostalism Ogbu Kalu argued that many social science—especially sociological—approaches to the study of Nigerian Pentecostalism are limited in their analytical perspective because they fail to seriously engage the religious experience of adherents of Nigeria’s Pentecostal movement. He called for a greater engagement with religious beliefs and traditions.<sup>5</sup> Concomitantly, Ruth Marshall focused on the explicitly religious manner in which Nigerian Pentecostals interpret political developments and the manner in which they express their political opinions and activities.<sup>6</sup> Lamin Sanneh contends that one of the major issues facing new African Christian movements such as Nigerian Pentecostal movements lies in the inability of the secular state to effectively engage the religious questions that are central to the everyday lives of local people.<sup>7</sup> In this context, Pentecostalism provides an important medium for the articulation of religious, social, political, and economic conditions that shape local people’s aspirations in contemporary Nigerian society. Consequently, Simeon Ilesanmi perceptively observed that Nigeria’s Pentecostal movement reflects a complicated religious, social, and political process that is integral to the making of modern Nigerian society. He notes that Nigerian Pentecostalism “does not constitute an homogenous movement, but is rather the sum of a number of succeeding waves, each of which draws upon and transforms that which has gone before.”<sup>8</sup> As the crisis of the Nigerian state intensified in the 1980s, Pentecostal Christianity did not only fill the gap left behind by the state, but also provided a powerful critique of the state’s custodians. In its engagement with the wider Nigerian state and society, this movement has complicated the structural imbalance between Christians and Muslims in the three major Nigerian geopolitical regions that feature signifi-

cantly in this study: the core North (the Hausa-Fulani region), the South-west (the Yoruba region), and the Middle Belt.

### Holiness Pentecostals in Historical Perspective

Nigeria's Holiness Pentecostal movement grew significantly in the context of the challenges confronting Nigerian society following independence in 1960.<sup>9</sup> Its followership grew exponentially during the Nigerian-Biafra Civil War (1967–1970) because the fluid theological structure of Pentecostal movements freely adapted to the disruptions precipitated by the war.<sup>10</sup> Equally significant was the fact that in the Igbo-speaking areas of southeastern Nigeria, the epicenter of the civil war, local people moved toward syncretistic prayer houses that combined Christianity with indigenous cosmology. In addition, the influence of mainline Protestant and Catholic churches eroded in southeastern Nigeria because many major Western countries, especially Britain, supported the Nigerian Federal Government's opposition to Biafra's insistence on secession from the country. More importantly, the war severely disrupted missionary work in Biafra-controlled areas and undermined the integrity of some established missionary institutions in Northern, Western, and Mid-Western states. In a context of national crisis, it is not difficult to see how and why indigenous religious beliefs would interact with forms of charisma, creating new "social control models" in a moment of great uncertainty and insecurity.<sup>11</sup> Consequently, the crisis precipitated by the civil war encouraged the growth of "antistructural" Christian movements that had been a feature of Nigerian Pentecostalism, especially during the upheaval of the late colonial period.<sup>12</sup>

With the crisis of the 1980s and 1990s (see chapter 5), the deliverance doctrines of Pentecostalism gained momentum, attracting millions of disillusioned Nigerian Christians.<sup>13</sup> As Pentecostal leaders denounced the political alliances that had produced the insecurities of this period, their membership moved further away from prevailing social networks to form distinct moral communities. In many instances, religious practices transformed social orientation. Engaging innovative methods of responding to the material and spiritual needs of their growing adherents, Holiness churches contested the public space as the exclusive domain of secularism.<sup>14</sup> While materialism remained a function of everyday life, it was repackaged into specific Christian rules: prosperity flowed from personal moral integrity and not the economy of favors, and rewards come in both this life and the next. Leaders of mainline Christian denominations who had been preaching "progress" since the colonial era were "disarmed" because of their connection to the discredited political and social

order.<sup>15</sup> Thus, leaders of Holiness groups denounced the old churches for their “traditionalism, the sustenance of the heritage from the missionary ancestors, [and] encrusted patriarchy.”<sup>16</sup> In response, mainline church leaders responded rigidly to this moral challenge, imposing new codes of discipline within their ranks. Indeed, in many cases, mainline church leaders treated the younger generation who were attracted to the revivalist message of Pentecostalism as rebellious upstarts and in some cases expelled them from their churches.

A younger generation of charismatic clerics led the movement’s remarkable growth and creative energy. Political independence in the early 1960s had seen thousands of young Nigerians in higher education, and with four new universities established between 1960 and 1962, university enrollment grew significantly in the years immediately after independence, particularly in Southern areas.<sup>17</sup> Many young people who had grown up with connections to African independent churches (AICs) such as the Aladura Church, with its syncretistic rituals, were attracted to the revivalist theology of the Pentecostal movement.<sup>18</sup> But despite this attempt to distance themselves from AICs, Olupona perceptively observes that “Pentecostal practices surreptitiously reflect traditional forms of African religious spirituality, including speaking in tongues, possession by the Holy Ghost, and an emphasis on the proximate, this world salvation, as evidenced by a focus on materiality, prosperity, and pragmatism.”<sup>19</sup> Indeed, several notable Pentecostal churches traced their roots to AICs: for instance, in 1969 prominent Pentecostal church leaders such as Stephen Okafor, Raphael Okafor, and Arthur Orizu left Aladura churches to form the Hour of Freedom Evangelical Association, which grew rapidly in Igbo communities after the civil war.<sup>20</sup> Similarly, when a schism appeared in Christ Ascension Church, Mike Okonkwo, another prominent Pentecostal leader, led a group of “young rebels” and founded a Pentecostal church, the True Redeemed Evangelical Mission; in 1986 Okonkwo became the president of Nigeria’s powerful Pentecostal national umbrella organization, the Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (PFN).<sup>21</sup> More importantly, a network of evangelical students’ organizations in Southern and Middle Belt states expanded the scope of the three dominant Christian spiritual associations in Nigerian universities—the Student Christian Movement (SCM), the Scripture Union (SU), and the Christian Union (CU)—in the first decade after independence in 1960.

The SCM had come to prominence in the 1940s, with returning Nigerian graduates from British universities, including Igbo statesman Sir Francis Akanu Ibiam and Yoruba leader Theophilus Ejiwumi; the latter had mentored many of the first generation of Christian students at the University of Ibadan. From

the early 1960s, SCM branches were formed at the newly established University of Nigeria campus in Enugu and the University of Zaria (later Ahmadu Bello University). Indeed, as the only interdenominational Christian student organization in Nigerian universities, the SCM had established vibrant branches in the newly established Universities of Ife, Lagos, and at the Nsukka campus of the University of Nigeria by the mid-1960s.<sup>22</sup>

By contrast, the SU, established in England in 1867, arrived in Nigeria in 1884 as a nondenominational evangelical movement. It almost disappeared in Nigeria during the Second World War, and was revived by the evangelical fervor of several British teachers in the 1950s. Nigerian university students seized the helm of the SU resurgence by the early years of independence, and the movement grew significantly in the country's institutions of higher learning and secondary schools. In the 1970s the movement shifted focus to its Pilgrims' groups, established a vibrant youth evangelism program, and published a vast literature to propagate the faith among Nigeria's growing educated class.<sup>23</sup>

Similarly, the CU has its roots in Nigeria's colonial past. It began in 1910, having broken away from the SCM "for being spiritually and ethically tepid."<sup>24</sup> In the early years of independence, the CU grew in popularity, spreading at the University of Ibadan; the University College Hospital, Ibadan; the University of Lagos; and the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. By the late 1970s, CU had established the Christian Students' Social Movement of Nigeria, seeking to "enlighten [young] Christians on the possibility of their influence in national life."<sup>25</sup> With support from faculty mentors as chaplains, dedicated CU students actively recruited new members. In January 1970, the Tuesday Group, a CU-affiliated Pentecostal prayer network at the University of Ibadan, formed the World Action Team for Christ, spreading its message of intense Bible study, strict moral rectitude, and baptism in the Holy Spirit. In addition to forming the Calvary Ministries—an evangelical arm extending into Northern states—the group organized numerous retreats to deepen the faith among its members and spread its message throughout the country.<sup>26</sup>

An inadvertent tool for the evangelization of the Holiness movement among educated young Nigerians arrived in the form of the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC), a one-year mandatory program for national integration imposed by the Gowon regime in 1973. As evangelical NYSC recruits arrived at their postings in various regions of the country, they formed national evangelical organizations such as the Fellowship of Christian Students, New Life for All, and the Nigerian Fellowship of Evangelical Students. By the mid-1970s, NYSC evangelical members had established ten ministries in the Northern

and Middle Belt cities of Jos, Kaduna, Kano, and Zaria, further projecting a Southern Christian consciousness into Northern and Middle Belt states. In the words of Kalu:

Initially, these fellowships served as the ministerial formation sites. . . . The young people walked on foot along the railway line from one town to the other preaching, sleeping in open classrooms, without money, and dependent on the hospitality of strangers. They trusted that God would miraculously meet their needs. The millennialist beliefs added urgency to their evangelism and inspired one and all to be agents of God's work in these end-times.<sup>27</sup>

Significantly, these student movements served as a catalyst for the charismatic churches that proliferated during the economic and political crisis of the 1980s and 1990s in many urban Nigerian areas.

Matthews Ojo provides an insightful analysis<sup>28</sup> of a prominent Holiness church, the Deeper Christian Life Ministry (also known as Deeper Life Bible Church or Deeper Life), that traversed the Nigerian social landscape from the transformative years of the 1960s to the period of state decline in the 1990s. The founder of the Deeper Life Christian Ministry, William Folorunso Kumuyi, from Ogun State in the Yoruba Southwest, had been a member of various Anglican and Aladura congregations before converting to the Apostolic Faith Church in 1964. As a mathematics student at the University of Ibadan, Kumuyi was an active member of the CU and the SU. Following his graduation with honors in 1967, he earned a postgraduate diploma in education at the University of Lagos. It was from Kumuyi's Bible study group there that the Deeper Life Church movement emerged in 1973. Within two years, the group had become large enough to rent worship spaces and offices from the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG), by that time a well-known Pentecostal church. Deeper Life began holding retreats across Southern Nigeria and by 1980 was active in some Northern states. While distancing itself from the earlier charismatic movement, Deeper Life grew tremendously in the 1980s and 1990s. No longer a small evangelical network, Deeper Life transitioned into a full-fledged church by establishing a full-time staff, regular Sunday services, and formal organizational structure by the early 1980s.<sup>29</sup> Insisting on its unique evangelical Christian identity, Deeper Life members embraced strict moral codes that shaped their corporate identity, distinguishing them from the plethora of Pentecostal churches that dominated the religious landscape in the 1980s and the 1990s.

The case of the RCCG, Nigeria's most prominent Pentecostal church movement by the early 1990s, provides another compelling illustration of the far-reaching

impact of Holiness Pentecostalism in Nigerian society. Although Pastor Josiah Akindayomi had broken from AIC Cherubim and Seraphim in 1952 to found the RCCG, it was not until the early 1980s, just as Deeper Life gained prominence, that the movement expanded beyond its Yoruba base. In the 1960s and 1970s, RCCG members were sometimes looked down upon, identified with the perceived “fanaticism” of the SU, and pitied for their general poverty, a product of their doctrinal asceticism. The RCCG’s transformation from a regional to a national and even global church came after the appointment of Pastor Enoch Adejare Adebayo, a former University of Lagos mathematician and confidant of Pastor Akindayomi, as general overseer in 1981. Under Pastor Adebayo’s leadership, the RCCG embraced the strategy of earlier evangelical movements at university campuses and established a monthly prayer group, the Holy Ghost Camp. Embracing this general shift from fellowship-based Bible study to institutionalization through evangelism, the RCCG emerged as the largest Pentecostal church in Africa by the early 2000s. With its headquarters at the popular Lagos-Ibadan Expressway, the RCCG had, by the turn of the millennium, established about two thousand parishes in Nigeria, and had parishes in many African, European, North America, and Caribbean countries.<sup>30</sup>

The RCCG’s statement of faith reveals a strong embrace of fundamentalist Christian doctrines drawn from the Old and New Testaments.<sup>31</sup> RCCG doctrines are defined in church manuals it publishes periodically. One such manual lays out the responsibilities of lay members to the church and defines steadfast adherence to church rules.<sup>32</sup> Church members are implored to fervently pray for their leaders and church missionaries. RCCG members are required to generously give from their financial resources and professional expertise to the church.<sup>33</sup> Such codes of conduct are binding on church staff members, too: a similar RCCG manual spells out qualifications for them, ranging from being born again to attributes needed for spiritual holiness. Staff members are charged with various activities central to the mission of the movement, such as submission to duly constituted authorities, personal hygiene, appropriate dressing, and commitment to Christian fellowship.<sup>34</sup> We now turn to an analysis of the Prosperity movement, the second type of Pentecostal church that has dominated the Nigerian Pentecostal movement since the 1980s.

### The Rise of Prosperity Pentecostalism

Just as Holiness Pentecostal churches were growing in prominence, the mid-1980s brought another major development: a new trend among evangelicals that later would be known as the Prosperity Pentecostal church movement.

Significantly influenced by the charismatic style of postwar American evangelical churches, this movement harbored notable theological differences with the older Holiness movement, reflecting important distinction on the conception of the relationship between the believer and the world around him or her. In notable cases, Prosperity theology connects spiritual excellence and moral uprightness to the believer's material well-being. As the Word comes from a God of abundance, to be worthy of it one must give abundantly. To win converts to the movement, Prosperity churches sell goods and services, offer retreats, and market their message against the backdrop of neoliberalism.<sup>35</sup> Similar to their Holiness forebears, the ranks of Prosperity followers were predominantly young and relatively well educated. Unlike the earlier revival movements, however, Prosperity churches emerged from the onset with strong institutional frameworks. Furthermore, while mainstream churches and, to some extent, Holiness churches appear rigid, Prosperity churches freely adapt to Nigeria's changing conditions.

One of the first Prosperity churches was Benson Idahosa's Church of God Mission in Benin City, Edo State's major city. This was followed by Patrick Ngozi Anwuzia of Zoe Ministry International in Lagos and Tunde Joda's Christ Chapel, the last of which emerged on the national scene in 1985 and inspired the foundation of the Household of God Fellowship led by Kris Okotie and Powerline Bible Church. Other prominent Prosperity pastors include George Adewale Adegboye of the Ever Increasing Word Ministries (also known as Rhema Chapel, founded in 1987), and Alex Adegboye of World Alive Ministries, founded in 1993.<sup>36</sup>

Midsized churches of a tempered message, mediating Holiness and Prosperity strains, also sprang up in the turbulent 1990s.<sup>37</sup> These churches include Bishop Mike Okonkwo's Redeemed Evangelical Mission, Francis Wale Oke's Sword of the Spirit Ministries in Ibadan, and Tunde Bakare's Latter Rain Assembly in Lagos. Among the most successful of this hybrid type are megachurches such as Overcomers Assembly in Lagos and Bishop David Oyedepo's Living Faith Church Worldwide,<sup>38</sup> also widely known as Winners Chapel International. Living Faith's transformative religious and social roles has consistently responded to the pressing needs of local communities at a time of great uncertainty following the enduring economic crisis posed by neoliberal reforms since the 1980s. This powerful megachurch provides critical social services in education and health care, as well as support for building business enterprises.<sup>39</sup> Taking off in 1986 after the start of the Word of Faith Bible Institute, Winners' Chapel is a formidable religious and social force. The movement's student groups are active at over sixty university campuses throughout Africa. Bishop Oyedepo followed

his initial success with the World Mission Agency and African Gospel Invasion Program that sent evangelical aid to many African countries. Winners' Chapel has collaborated with the Gilead Medical Center to provide medical resources to local people.<sup>40</sup> Thus, articulated in clearly defined educational and humanitarian commissions, Bishop Oyedepo's Living Faith Church has responded to Nigeria and several other African countries' educational, health care, and social welfare crises with comprehensive and efficient services in education, health care clinics, and many humanitarian projects. The church's educational institutions include two private universities, Covenant and Landmark, each of which has a comprehensive curriculum in the arts, humanities, sciences, social sciences, business, agriculture, engineering, and technology; a group of leading secondary schools, known as the Faith Academies, that spread across Nigeria and several African countries; and fifty-seven excellent elementary schools in Nigerian communities and several major African cities, notably Dar esalam, Tanzania, and Mombasa, Kenya.<sup>41</sup>

Moreover, from the onset, Living Faith Church Worldwide has actively provided humanitarian assistance to communities ravaged by war and natural disaster, such as Rwanda and Liberia, as well as humanitarian assistance to the Nigerian Red Cross and impoverished communities in Koma Hills in Adamawa State.<sup>42</sup> To underscore the significance of the church's educational and humanitarian mandate, Bishop Oyedepo in retrospect observes:

Years ago, I caught a caption on one of my trips to the United States which to me was a fundamental philosophy behind the greatness of the American nation. It reads "America the home of the free, land of the brave." Truly only the brave ever become great. It is bravery that begets greatness. It is not just a dreamers world anymore. It is the darers world. It is bravery that moves men [and women] to think the unthinkable, dare the undareable and move the immovable.<sup>43</sup>

Rosalind Hackett further provides an insightful case study of the Mountain of Fire and Miracles Ministries (MFM), a deliverance church within the arc of the Prosperity gospel movement. Founded by molecular geneticist Dr. D. K. Olukoya, this church boasted one hundred thousand worshippers at its Sunday service by the beginning of 2000, and millions more members throughout the world. Hackett interrogates Pastor Olukoya's deliverance doctrine, arguing that it focuses attention on bad foundations, wastage of life, links to evil, and even family curses. To cure these spiritual ailments, Pastor Olukoya recommends "high-voltage prayer," specific intonations that invoke Jesus's name to save the afflicted from their "contamination" and ward off evil spirits. Such

teachings describe the danger of everyday life in militaristic terms, empowering the afflicted to fight their own battles. Dark forces aligning against Christ and MFM are fought with continual prayer, tithing to the church, and numerous testimonials.<sup>44</sup>

Since holding onto their vast wealth is important to church leaders, Prosperity churches tend to have centralized administrative structures that rely on family members and trusted associates to oversee the management of their enormous resources.<sup>45</sup> There is the concern, however, that while Nigeria's Prosperity theology can inspire believers to transform their lives, they also focus excessively on material conditions. Nevertheless, Prosperity churches are remarkable actors in contemporary society and have served as critical engines for development since the economic downturn of the 1980s and 1990s.<sup>46</sup>

In sum, Holiness and Prosperity forms of Pentecostalism have thrived in the context of state crisis, especially in the aftermath of the civil war in the late 1960s and neoliberalism, starting in the 1980s. The dynamism of Nigeria's Pentecostal revolution, with its intersecting social and political currents, is connected to changing local conditions. As a new generation of Christians responded to a turbulent era in Nigerian society since independence, Pentecostal churches provided institutional framework to engage the uncertainties of Nigeria's complicated social and political conditions.

### Constructing a Pentecostal Public Sphere

As the globalization of markets and media systems intensified in the 1990s, the ability of Nigerian authorities to shape moral and political discourses in local communities further eroded, giving Pentecostal movements ample room to extend their influence in national and transnational contexts. With access to resources derived from global networks, leaders of Pentecostal churches are less dependent on the custodians of the Nigerian state, allowing their members space to take charge of their social conditions.<sup>47</sup> Nigeria's Pentecostal movement has been at the center of shaping the country's public sphere in the global era, and it is well integrated with global popular culture, media, institutions, and technology. For example, popular American culture, notably African American expressive culture, has shaped how Nigerian evangelical churches disseminate their messages in both Nigerian-based churches and Nigerian diaspora branches that have sprung up in many British and US metropolitan areas since the economic crises of the 1980s and 1990s.<sup>48</sup> As Ebenezer Obadare notes, the growing influence of these external agents in shaping the style and doctrines of Nigeria's evangelical churches is indeed a reflection of "the weakening of the

state and its institutions, [which translates] into freer access by foreign religious groups and personalities to their local counterparts. . . . The major external players in this respect have mostly come from the United States, the global influence of whose charismatic televangelists has become an academic staple.”<sup>49</sup>

This trend was particularly expressed through Nigeria’s media networks, starting in the 1980s. With regard to television and audio media, Pentecostal churches were not the first to use these critical media to evangelize; however, they pioneered their use as medium of mass proselytizing by exploiting vast industrial networks around the production, distribution, and consumption of gospel cassettes, videos, and CDs.<sup>50</sup> Reflecting on some of these developments, Kalu notes three factors that encouraged Pentecostal churches to use media to shape Nigerian public discourse:<sup>51</sup> the liberalization of the Nigerian state radio since the 1970s; the growth of television in Nigerian cities in the 1980s; and the influence of American televangelists on Nigerian Pentecostal pastors in the 1980s.<sup>52</sup>

The evolution of popular music and the global diffusion of musical genres exemplify these trends. Mainline Protestant and Catholic missionaries had long suppressed local musical trends because of their customary expression, but by the 1960s the “vernacularization” of music, liturgy, and media progressed together. Evangelical movement in the earlier years of Holiness Pentecostalism used popular musical trends to increase spirituality while avoiding the materialism of Nigerian society. Embracing popular musical genres initially took some adjustment for many Nigerian Pentecostal churches. For example, dances viewed as sensual were replaced with Pentecostal-friendly variants such as the “holy shuffle.” Similarly, where original lyrics praised indigenous deities, evangelical musicians replaced them with instrumentals or tunes extolling the deliverance of Christ and the glory of God. This reshaping of popular musical trends to fit the message of local evangelism, helped by the general liberalization that dominated the early 1990s, threw the field open for entrepreneurs to capitalize on changing religious structures. The music industry became both a product and an agent of the Pentecostal revolution.<sup>53</sup>

Pentecostal churches’ increasing use of the media since the 1980s was further reflected in the globalization of television, the explosion of the Nigerian film industry, and access to the Internet. For instance, in the 1990s Pastor Ashimolowo’s Kingsway International Church Center had programs broadcast in twenty-one European countries, while God Digital (formerly the Christian Channel Europe) hosts the God Channel, the Revival Channel, the Worship Channel, and others reaching across Western Europe and into many African states. Similarly, a Pentecostal film industry developed into a range of subgenres,

including religion-based dramatic forms, secular movies with heavy religious overtones, religious music videos, documentaries, and sermons. All these initiatives were designed to promote Pentecostal ministries' mission in an entertaining way. Mount Zion Faith Ministries International paved the way from Ile-Ife, when it made the first Nigerian Christian motion picture in 1994 and led the Nigerian Pentecostal film industry. Finally, Pentecostal churches' websites have created forums where members can interact with one another and have served as tools for proselytizing. Though their effectiveness has been questioned—some observers note that sustained strategies of proselytizing still depend on the personal interaction that is at the core of the Pentecostal witnessing tradition—these social-media efforts are invaluable in expanding the scope of Pentecostal church groups.<sup>54</sup> Nevertheless, the modernist implications of the Pentecostal church movement cannot be overstated, as eloquently noted by Ilesanmi:

Its media-savvy pastors-cum-superstars regularly fill airwaves with their preaching and gospel music, and creating a new publishing niche for their tracts and manuals on self-improvement. Youthful congregations fill modern airconditioned tabernacles and chapels for all-night services. They come in search of the latest blessing and to participate in Christianized popular culture.<sup>55</sup>

Just as the new generation of evangelicals transformed the internal core of Pentecostal churches, so too have they altered these churches' relationships with the broader Nigerian public, especially since the late 1980s, when some leading Pentecostal ministers pushed for greater involvement of their movement in national politics. As Nigerian politics became more contentious in the 1980s and 1990s, socioreligious structures were politicized, and evangelical leaders began injecting their influence into the public sphere.<sup>56</sup> Idahosa, the leader of the Church of God Mission, was one such power broker in Edo State; and in 1992, the Rev. Peter Obadan, a prominent Pentecostal minister, was elected deputy governor in Edo State. The link between Pentecostalism (church) and the state (politics) was expressed in dramatic fashion in a statement attributed to Pastor Adeboye, RCCG's general overseer: the statement was widely publicized as prophesy of impending doom for Nigeria's military despot and the arrival of a new dawn in June 1998. General Abacha, the Northern Muslim military ruler, died suddenly, and military rule came to an end after Adeboye's prophesy; a presidential election (1999) ushered a civilian government into power, and Olusegun Obasanjo, a self-proclaimed Born-Again from the Yoruba region, became Nigeria's civilian leader.<sup>57</sup>

More important was the meteoric rise of the Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (PFN)—the movement’s national umbrella organization—in national politics.<sup>58</sup> By the time of its first biennial meeting in 1991, the organization had more than seven hundred registered affiliated member churches in Lagos State alone.<sup>59</sup> Within a decade of its existence, PFN had stamped its imprint on Nigeria’s public landscape with an active national president, an efficient secretary in Abuja, Nigeria’s federal capital, and many branches in each state of the federation. The PFN frequently hosts high-profile events to discuss matters of pressing national significance. Furthermore, PFN is a constituent member of the larger Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN). In comparison to CAN, PFN possesses stronger institutional cohesion and has a more affirmative voice in national debates.

Despite the tendency to cooperate on matters of mutual interests, especially on issues of political significance, major Pentecostal groups continue to function as autonomous entities with distinct religious and political agendas. Wari-boko, himself an ordained RCCG pastor, notes a clear distinction between his church (RCCG), Deeper Life, and Winners’ Chapel.<sup>60</sup> This tendency for Pentecostal groups to pursue distinct agendas can be attributed to their independent evolution since the 1960s.<sup>61</sup> Thus Allan Anderson, in broader African context, notes, “Pentecostals are more important than Pentecostalism: the local dynamics of change and interpretation are more important than any overarching unity among different groups.”<sup>62</sup>

With a focus on a theology that stresses rebirth and the free-forming spirit of the Pentecost, “Pentecostalism seeks to transform the mental and material cultures of communities and challenges extant religious structures as it seeks to transform the religious landscape.”<sup>63</sup> In this context, Pentecostal churches have created a distance between themselves and AICs because of the latter’s expressive reflection of indigenous religious practice. Furthermore, mainline church members, according to Kalu, are dismissed “as benchwarmers who have lost the power of the gospel that was very real in the early Jesus movement.”<sup>64</sup> To be sure, Pentecostal churches inscribe charismatism within a particular evangelical tradition, but their emphasis on “history in the present” leads to antagonism with mainline Christianity.<sup>65</sup> As Kalu notes, “Just as Augustine, Luther and Calvin variously taught, experience of the *charismata* exists outside established dispensation, and thus spiritual rebirth necessitates new medium and methods of receiving it.”<sup>66</sup> With these factors preventing a broad Pentecostal alliance, growth continued through the 1990s—but further splintering of the movement took place.<sup>67</sup> As Pentecostal churches grew in response to the destabilizing effects of

neoliberalism in the 1990s, older Holiness churches questioned the perceived excesses of the Prosperity gospel and the proliferation of theologies that make prophetic claims and emphasize a pervasive demonic world.<sup>68</sup>

However, Pentecostal churches, irrespective of theological orientation, have posed important critiques of societal norms. On matters of gender, for example, Pentecostalism's fluid structure and doctrines provide ample space for empowerment and innovation. With the entrenched power of a male hierarchy in mainline Protestant and Catholic churches, mainline churches had largely left women ambivalent, keeping even elite women away from the leadership of their churches. In the Pentecostal movement, however, some notable female pastors, such as Archbishop Dorcas Siyanbola Olaniyi and Dr. Stella Ajisebute of Agbala Daniel Church and Water from the Rock Church in Ile-Ife, have played important roles in the movement since the 1980s. Both leaders are well educated, with doctorates in microbiology, and both have been eloquent voices for leadership roles for women in the Pentecostal movement.<sup>69</sup>

Finally, the exponential growth of Pentecostal churches has occurred alongside the resurgence of Islamic reformist movements, notably Izala (see chapter 5), since the 1980s. Inevitably, this has led to major confrontations, especially in non-Muslim areas of Northern states and in the Middle Belt,<sup>70</sup> where competition for converts had historically complicated social relations and rapidly changing demographic conditions have intensified communal tensions between predominantly Christian “indigenes” and Hausa-Fulani Muslim “settlers.” With a movement away from the purification of the interior of the Christian community to conversion of local communities,<sup>71</sup> a network of groups known as the Northern Christian Association had intensified evangelization in Middle Belt and Northern non-Muslim minority communities starting in the 1970s.<sup>72</sup> Ultimately, this fervor of Pentecostal evangelism came up against the strong missionary impulse of Northern Muslim reformists who utilize the media, technology, and other methods to propagate the Muslim faith. For example, although Northern Muslim reformists had debated whether it was halal to read the Qur'an on the radio well into the 1960s, by the 1980s they had built a significant television and radio presence—as well as a film industry in Kano (Kannywood)—to counteract the expansion of the Pentecostal movement in Middle Belt states and in Northern states with substantial Christian populations, such as Kaduna and Niger States.<sup>73</sup> Indeed, even in the Yoruba states where it is widely believed that Christians and Muslims have historically forged common grounds of peaceful coexistence, Obadare has argued that Islamic reformism has taken on the strong proselytizing fervor often associated with Pentecostal churches. This trend, he contends, is beginning to

erode the vaulted tradition of religious accommodation and tolerance in the region. Obadare concludes: “We see a revitalized Islam forging a response to a surging and increasingly hegemonic Pentecostalism. This revitalization, which ostensibly involves the incorporation of the demonstrably successful aspects of Pentecostal prayer is, nevertheless, not simply mimetic. . . . What we in fact see at play is a dynamic reformulation of Muslim identity, against (1) the external pressure exerted by Pentecostalism, and (2) internal prompts which more closely echo a historical cycle of decay and renewal.”<sup>74</sup>

Pentecostal and Islamic reformist movements thus embody similar methods of propagating their faiths, despite their drastically different religious doctrines and perspectives on politics. Indeed, as previously discussed, following the turbulent decades after independence a new generation raised in the political culture of postcolonial Nigerian society has placed their faith in the competing visions of these two religious movements.<sup>75</sup> Extolling the reformist doctrines of these two movements to restructure the moral order of contemporary Nigerian society, Ruth Marshall insightfully argues:

While initially concerned with the revitalization or restoration of their respective religious traditions, and largely inspired by the intensification of transnational relations, both movements arise from within the same social classes, are products of post-colonial educational institutions, and seek to create moral and political renewal and order from the chaos of the oil-boom years through religious revival. Their competing projects were bound to clash, and constant provocation from both sides has meant that the bid for converts and for political representation has taken increasingly violent forms.<sup>76</sup>

Thus, although these two movements are different in many respects, they are both inspired by a “quest for justice” and the transformation of society.<sup>77</sup> Conceived in the vortex of rapidly shifting demographic and ethno-religious conditions, the recurring conflict between Muslims and Christians in Middle Belt and Northern states resonates in the structural tensions between the mission of Pentecostal and Northern Islamic reformist movements. Elaborating further on the consequences of these developments in Northern and Middle Belt states, Paul Lubeck notes:

What, then, had changed in the Middle Belt since Ahmadu Bello eliminated sharia criminal law in the compromise of 1960 (see chapter 4) in order to mollify Northern Christians? The answer lies in the politicization of religious identities among Christians and Muslims and, specifically, the

rising organizational power of CAN and the militancy of an evangelical and Pentecostal Christianity fueled by global networks. In 1970, “Pentecostals and charismatics *combined* represented less than 5% of Africans,” but by 2006 Pentecostals alone represented 12% about 107 million [quoted from Pew Forum 2006a]. In Nigeria, where Pentecostal growth is rapid and their voice increasingly assertive, they represented 18% of the population and 48% of all Protestants, roughly equal to Nigerian Catholics and Anglicans combined.<sup>78</sup>

Nevertheless, as Pentecostal and Northern Muslim reformist movements confront each other, adherents of the latter seek to reconstitute the juridical state around their perception of a proper Islamic society (see chapters 7, 8, 9), while followers of the former favor radically restructuring the world around them into a pious Christian community. In the context of Nigeria’s Middle Belt and Northern states, where Islam and Christianity are particularly integral to the rationalization of state power, the prevailing reformist ideologies of Pentecostal and Northern Islamic reformist movements has intensified the contradiction of the postcolonial nation-state. As the Pentecostal movement has transformed Nigerian society alongside the destabilizing effects of neoliberal reforms since the 1980s, this remarkable religious movement has had profound implications for the dialectical relations between national and transnational forces in the global era.

#### Pentecostalism: Transnational and Global Networks

Religious movements have always been important media for the articulation of African and black identity in African diaspora history, especially across the great waterways of the Atlantic world. As essential structure of society among African-descended populations in the Atlantic world, religion has not only engaged the quotidian issues confronting local communities, but has also responded to the vicissitudes of life among African diasporic peoples over the centuries.<sup>79</sup> Shaped by its own unique conditions, this trend persisted in the global era following the crisis of the state in many African countries in the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s. In the context of globalism, trends in Nigerian transnational experience were to be found in migration flows of various types and intensities, characterized by links between homeland and diaspora, reflecting complex processes of movements of people, ideas, cultures, and religions.<sup>80</sup> With regard to the intersection between Pentecostal Christianity and transnationalism in the context of neoliberalism, Olupona notes:

Theories of transnationalism and globalization are essential to understanding how movement of people and ideas across borders shape Christianity in Africa. Former paradigms of assimilation, secularization, and the loss of identity are no longer sufficient to explain the complex web of geographic, cultural, and personal connections that bind people and places. In an age of technological advancement where people often have ready access and movement across global space, immigrants can maintain ties with their homelands and participate in various global networks of people and institutions.<sup>81</sup>

It would be useful to set the context for Nigeria's transnational Pentecostal networks by outlining the major features of globalization, especially as they affect a fragile African state such as Nigeria in the context of the economic and political crisis of the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s. David Held and Anthony McGrew explain that globalization is "a process in which events, decisions, and activities in one part of the world can come to have significant consequences for individuals and communities in quite distant parts of the globe."<sup>82</sup> They perceptively define globalization as a process "which embodies a transformation of the spatial organization of social relations and transactions [that can be] assessed in terms of their extensity, intensity, velocity, and impact, generating transcontinental or interregional networks of activity."<sup>83</sup> Focusing particular attention on the religious dimensions of this global and transnational process, Ilesanmi contends that globalization's major thesis "is that the world is undergoing an irresistible mutation, tending towards shrinkage and interdependence, in which the media, economy, religions, migration are playing active and mutually reinforcing roles."<sup>84</sup>

With the growing contradictions of global capital by the 1970s, economic globalization led to the privatization of public services, the search for cheap labor, crisis of too much accumulation and too little consumption, and the collapse of space and time by the early 1990s.<sup>85</sup> This volatile global economic condition has complicated Nigeria's entrenched neopatrimonial political system, exposing the fragility of the country's economic, political, and social institutions. In an environment of economic and political crisis, this development triggered new transnational networks, shaped by the migration of millions of skilled and unskilled Nigerian workers to various parts of the world starting in the mid-1980s. As we shall soon observe, Nigeria's Pentecostal churches would play important roles in the transnational process that resulted from these economic and political disruptions.

Responding to the economic crisis that goes back to the 1980s, Nigeria's skilled workers sought out new destinations in the United Kingdom and in other English-speaking Western countries, especially the United States and Canada, as well as in South Africa, Botswana, and Gulf states. These Nigerian professionals were largely products of the Christian missionary educational institutions of Southern and central Nigeria that traces its origins to the turn of the twentieth century (see chapters 1 and 2). While these skilled Nigerian professionals have brought in vast financial remittances to their Nigerian homeland, bridging government shortfalls in the provision of essential goods and services, the overall cost of their migration has been a massive net loss of human capital for the developmental imperatives of the Nigerian state.<sup>86</sup> Thus, this migration of trained professionals has led to a serious brain drain and daunting challenges in Nigerian society.

Indeed, this process had its structural foundation in the thousands of Southern and central Nigerian Christians who had left in large numbers to pursue higher education in American, British, and Canadian universities since the late 1960s. Most had been supported by scholarships made possible via Nigeria's petro-dollar of the 1970s and early 1980s. From the beginning, the objective of this higher-education enterprise was simple enough: obtain university education in Western countries and return to professional careers guaranteed by the Nigerian state. However, with a drastic decline in petroleum revenue, a growing debt burden, and a deepening economic crisis in the 1980s, returning to Nigeria became a less attractive option for many of these young Nigerians and their families. With the imposition of structural-adjustment policies in the late 1980s, another wave of Nigerian professionals migrated to the United Kingdom, United States, and Canada in the 1990s, bringing with them branches of Pentecostal churches from their Nigerian homeland.

Over the years, these churches became critical public spaces for collective social action for Nigerian migrant populations during this period of uncertainty.<sup>87</sup> Nigerian Pentecostal churches have responded effectively to the religious and social need of these energetic Nigerian professionals and have provided a framework for them to negotiate alien social environments in many British, United States, and Canadian metropolitan areas.<sup>88</sup> Consequently, transnational Nigerian Pentecostal churches are popular because they provide distinctive social networks for their adherents to explore economic opportunities and social mobility.<sup>89</sup> Itinerant Pentecostal evangelists travel widely to spread their message to Nigeria's immigrant congregations abroad. Conversely, financial resources flow from these immigrant congregations to support Pentecostal churches in the homeland. Indeed, many Nigerian Pentecostal evangelists are courted by

Christian organizations in Western countries to fill the gap in pastoral personnel, bolster Christian missionary work, and help sustain church membership in Western countries. This is indeed a moment of notable historical irony: African evangelists are moving to the West as carriers of the Christian faith. Olupona labels this process the “reverse missions” of African Christian evangelizing to secular Western countries in the age of globalization.<sup>90</sup> Olupona’s conceptualization of “reverse missions” further shows how Pentecostal doctrines transcend the narrow communal boundaries that had previously been the case for other charismatic churches, such as the AICs.<sup>91</sup> Thus, many Nigerian immigrant Pentecostal churches project a cosmopolitan image, appropriate to the ethos of transnational corporate bodies.<sup>92</sup> For example, Pentecostal immigrant groups such as the All Nations International Development Agency became important sources of humanitarian support in Nigeria in the early 2000s.<sup>93</sup>

From the above, it is clear that Nigeria’s Pentecostal movements have navigated complicated transnational pathways<sup>94</sup> in the course of their evangelizing mission. As major actors in Nigerian politics and society, religious forces are embedded in the structures that transformed modern Nigeria. The complex social and political manifestations of these religious forces would assume a central role in the Nigerian state and society during the Olusegun Obasanjo civilian administration, when twelve Northern state governments imposed sharia as the state religion. The implications, actions, interactions, and constitutional dimensions of expanded sharia are extensively analyzed in the rest of the book.