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## **Pentecostal or Born Again?**

### **The Relevance of Demarcation Practices for the Study of Nigerian Christianity**

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#### **Abstract**

In recent years, the label "Pentecostal" has been applied widely and rather unquestioned to churches in Nigeria. Yet, in the 1990s and 2000s, a proposal was issued to study Nigerian Pentecostals in terms of their most common designation on the ground as the "born again" movement. Building on this approach based on observations from fieldwork in southwestern Nigeria, the article argues that the identification as "born again" was much more common than "Pentecostal", which held almost no significance on its own and did thus not really distinguish groups from each other. The emphasis on the "born again" experience, however, was widespread but also served to demarcate "real" or "committed" Christians from "corrupted" ones. This demarcation was upheld against mission churches, white garment churches and especially traditional healing practices as the source of the supposed "corruption". The article thus contends that even the study of "born again" Christianity, though based on field observations more compelling than that of "Pentecostalism", needs to consider the concrete and contextual boundaries drawn to establish identities such as "born again" and/or "Pentecostal".

Keywords: Pentecostalism; African Christianity; African Traditional Religion; Evangelicalism; Anglican Communion; Islam; Nigeria. (p. 59)

#### **Introduction**

Pentecostalism has taken an important place in academic research about Nigerian Christianity – one could even say it has almost become its sole focus. Yet researchers have applied different labels over time. One of the first instances, in which the term "Pentecostal" was applied with reference to Nigeria among other African countries, was in the discussion of the US-American influence on the new African Christianity in the 1980s. Paul Gifford analysed Reinhard Bonnke's Fire Conferences that took place all over Africa, and their US-American financial and ideological support. He came to the conclusion that "anything distinctly African is being (or soon will be, particularly after the Fire Conference) more than neutralized by the American connection" (Gifford, 1987: 79). This American influence he deemed "Pentecostal". Against this pessimistic position, Matthews Ojo stressed the existence of new organizations and churches since the 1970s even before Bonnke's conferences and claimed that much

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like African Theologians had demanded for decades, these were testament to an unfulfilled need within Nigerian Christianity, the need for “indigenization” (Ojo, 1988). To stress this contextual aspect more clearly, he labelled them “the charismatic movements” characterized by evangelistic zeal, “warmth, freedom and spontaneity in worship services” (ibid.: 176), contrasting their transdenominational drive with US-American and British Pentecostal mission churches.

In the 1990s, Ruth Marshall shifted the focus of Pentecostal studies in Nigeria suggesting that these churches should be labelled – according to the most common identification on the ground – as the “born again” movement (Marshall, 1992, 1995). Like Ojo, she stressed the commonality between the different new churches she had studied. Yet, for her, the core of this commonality was their emphasis on conversion as becoming “born again” (Marshall, 1995: 244). She later placed this common theology in the framework of a political theory of identity production (Marshall, 2009). Since then, however, most of the research dedicated to Pentecostalism has not problematized self-identification versus academic definitions in the same way. Though Nimi Wariboko has drawn on Marshall’s theory by referring to Pentecostal identity as “fluid” and its limits unstable and in need of constant re-affirmation (Wariboko, 2012: 142–3), he and Ebenezer Obadare after him have adopted the designation of certain churches as “Pentecostal” rather naturally and unquestioned, either referring to theology, ethics and/or political studies (Wariboko, 2012, 2014; Obadare, 2018). (p. 60)

This development may be due to the growing academic influence of US-American or European Pentecostal churches and Theologians on Pentecostal studies who have thus become the most important intellectual interlocutors for Nigerian Pentecostals. Such, “Pentecostal” seems to be a global category ascribed to and appropriated in the field of Nigerian Christianity. However, the question of what exactly sets Nigerian Pentecostalism apart within the specific Nigerian context and how and why “Pentecostal” should be used rather than the “born again” label, which according to Marshall, is the locally more prominent identification, remains mostly unanswered. This becomes even further complicated by a sub-debate about how to grasp the impact which Pentecostalism has on the practices of other churches, specifically the former mission churches, recently called “Pentecostalization” (Nkwoka, 2000, 2010; Burgess, 2017).

Marshall’s theory of Pentecostal subjectivation leaves us with the sense that “Pentecostal” is a constantly re-produced collective and individual assertion of identity (Marshall, 2009: 45–50; Wariboko, 2012: 142–3). But how exactly do we then study “Pentecostals” as distinguishable group? Much of Marshall’s theory hitches on the Foucauldian philosophical concept of “practices of the self” as practices reifying and transforming identities (Marshall, 2009: 45–6). This theory allows her to make a number of interesting observations about the religious politics of Pentecostalism, but also takes away from her concrete observations of Nigerian Christianity and the demarcations that were affirmed with the label of “born again” (cf. ibid.: 51–91). In this article, I will therefore focus on demarcation practices within Nigerian Christianity and the contextual significance of labels such as “Pentecostal” and “born again”. The article is based on my field research in Ibadan, Nigeria during the years 2015 to 2017. Contrary to most research done within Pentecostal studies, I paid special attention to the dynamics of ascription and self-identification in a broader interplay of Christianity, Islam and traditional practices. Thus, my fieldwork included more than just individual “Pentecostal” churches but aimed at getting an understanding of the larger picture. Against this background, I will argue for the importance of considering the ways in which the subjects we study become significant as distinguishable group identities within their particular local contexts.

Therefore, I will at first analyse the ways in which the label “Pentecostal” is used, in order to, second, contrast them with the more popular and distinct “born again” narrative. Third, building on Marshall’s hints at demarcation practices in the born again movement, I contend that born again Christianity has been made visible in the national context by its (p. 61) rejection of Islam and traditional practices, specifically healing practices. This aspect of rejection, in fact, was the most relevant demarcation in my field. This supposedly distinct identity, however, was constantly threatened by the similarities with

regards to the pervasiveness of healing and deliverance practices across religious and denominational boundaries. I argue that this may, in turn, serve to understand why the status as “born again” needed to be re-affirmed continuously and thus became all the more relevant to Christians in the field.

### **“Pentecostal” among Christians in Ibadan**

I base my argument largely on my fieldwork from 2015 to 2017 in a neighbourhood of approximately 10,000 inhabitants in the southeastern part of the megacity Ibadan in Southwestern Nigeria. Considering my material, the label “Pentecostal” almost played no role as a distinction from other Christians or non-Christians. It was mentioned very little and if it was brought up at all, it held very little significance on its own, being subsumed under “born again”, “Christian” or the likes. I want to demonstrate this first with the example of the local congregation of Deeper Life Bible Church (better known in Nigeria as Deeper Life), a nationally popular megachurch and one of the founding members of the Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria.

The members of the Deeper Life congregation laid emphasis on their “born again” experience but much less on them being “Pentecostal” or belonging to a “Pentecostal” church. One of the pastors recalled his “becoming born again” in terms of leaving the Methodist Church and joining first the Scripture Union (SU) in his school days and then Deeper Life:

I was in the Methodist church but I didn’t know the Lord. I only know what we do but the inner conviction and personal salvation is not there. So I got born again through the SU and the SU has no church, it is just an interdenominational organization. It was the Deeper Life people that organized the December retreat. I joined them. From there, I started fellowshipping. (Interview, April 2016)

Being asked whether many in his school’s SU group had also joined Deeper Life, he affirmed that it had, in fact, been the majority of SU members and that the rest had attended other “Pentecostal” churches saying: “All the churches they went to were Pentecostal. Actually we don’t have anybody that went to an orthodox church and that is also encouraged from the SU” (interview, April 2016). He remembered (p. 62) that the Scripture Union had encouraged its members to attend churches apart from what he called “orthodox” churches by which he and others in the field most commonly identified the older mission churches. Thus, he came to associate his “born again” experience with a break from the mission churches. Within this narrative, the label “Pentecostal” had very little distinct meaning beyond its association with “born again”, a fact I will pay more attention to in the following section.

As my fieldwork indicates, the missing prominence of the name “Pentecostal” also coincided with a missing significance of the practice of speaking in tongues which as initial evidence of a spirit baptism has been a very common theological definition of Pentecostalism. Recently, scholars like Allan Anderson have criticized that it is a far too narrow definition and as such excludes most of the churches and organizations outside of the US and Europe that he and others study as Global Pentecostalism (Anderson, 2007: 61; Anderson et al., 2010).<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, the Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria lists “speaking tongues” in their “articles of faith” saying: “We believe in the baptism of the Holy Spirit as received by the Apostles accompanied by speaking in tongues as the initial physical scriptural evidence subsequent to the new birth and the sanctification experience” (PFN, 2016). Yet, this is only one of a longer list of “articles of faith” most of which seem rather unspecific Protestant or might even be thought of as “Evangelical” with the first articles being the affirmations of the Holy Bible as God’s word, of the divine trinity, of salvation through Jesus Christ’s sacrifice alone, of water baptism by immersion, of the

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<sup>2</sup>. Within this scholarship, there is a discussion about the kind globality that makes Global Pentecostalism. Allan Anderson has argued for the global character in terms of diverse global origins whereas Michael Bergunder, for example, has pointed out, drawing on the work of Gayatri Spivak that any search of such origins is a project of “strategic essentialism” and as such deeply ideological in nature (Bergunder, 2010: 56–58). According to Bergunder, researchers have to be conscious of their own (political) contexts.

Lord's Supper as symbolic partaking and of the sanctification as the need for the saved to live holy lives. Only after these articles, speaking in tongues is introduced as the outward sign of the spirit baptism. Thus, it may be contended that the Pentecostal Fellowship tried to negotiate a lot of different theologies here, coming back to theological common places within Global Protestant Christianity like many of such articles of faith do. (p. 63)

In my research field, one of the few instances "speaking in tongues" was mentioned was also in a similarly long list. Prophet Victor,<sup>3</sup> the founder-pastor of a small independent church, told his congregation what they needed to do in order to "make God work miracles" (sermon, August 2015). According to him, they should "invite Jesus", develop "compassion" with others, "value the divine presence", act as "divine servants", "be obedient" and also be "pure" before he finally talked about "speaking in tongues". Even when mentioning "speaking in tongues", he categorized it under the rubric of "being filled by God", which he identified with the twofold sign of being able to quote God's word at leisure and being able to "flow in tongues". This combination, he claimed, would enable the audience to fight and rebuke the Devil.

In another instance, Victor referred to the "second baptism" which he associated with "speaking in tongues" as the second of three baptisms, the first by water, second by the Holy Spirit and the last and in this context more relevant being the third baptism "by fire" which he introduced as a divine testing process of "tribulation that God knows about" (sermon, July 2015). Both instances show that even when it was mentioned, "speaking in tongues" and/or the "spirit baptism" was of less consequence in the overall narrative. Prophet Victor prominently claimed to have converted many – both members of his church and beyond – through his evangelism and deliverance ministry. Thus, he and his members often insisted that their lives had considerably changed after they had heard him preach and had been delivered by him. Victor himself often drew on a rather drastic "born again" experience of having been converted in prison where he had served time for theft in the 1980s. In his sermons, he regularly recalled his time in an armed robbery gang where he claimed he had personally encountered "occult" practices. Accordingly, in Prophet Victor's church, the label "Pentecostal" was also less important than references he and his members made to "being born again".

The label "Pentecostal" also did not fully work as demarcation from the African Initiated Churches or Aladura Churches as they have been called in the Southwest Nigerian context (Peel, 1968). In the 1960s, J. D. Y. Peel studied the Christ Apostolic Church (CAC) and the Cherubim and Seraphim Churches, both of whom had become very popular since the 1950s, as indigenous churches, which he associated with the Yoruba name of Aladura, meaning "people of prayer". Yet, in recent times, a prominent Aladura church, the CAC, has shifted its position (p. 64) within Nigerian Christianity. In the local congregation of the Redeemed Christian Church of God, another nationally popular megachurch and also founding member church of the Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria, one of the pastors associated the beginning of Christianity and at the same time, the beginning of Pentecostalism with the well-known CAC Prophet Joseph Babalola saying: "In this part of the world, we are more interested in idol worshipping. Even Christianity is from foreign ... The first person to start Christianity here is Babalola, CAC prophet. He is the first person to start a Pentecostal church" (interview, March 2016). According to the pastor, Babalola (and not the "foreign" missionaries) had been the first to "start Christianity" in Nigeria. For him, this coincided with the beginning of Pentecostalism. This narrative, especially the emphasis on Babalola as "founder" of Nigerian Christianity, was not uncommon within my research, especially within the ranks of the CAC itself (cf. Olowe, 2007). Interestingly enough, this had also been the church the pastor quoted above had been ministering before he had joined the Redeemed Christian Church of God.

Yet, Pentecostalism was not always equated with the CAC. The pastor of the local CAC Church congregation, a former Anglican gone Pentecostal gone CAC, narrated his calling to the ministry in

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<sup>3</sup>. In this article, all the given names of interviewees are pseudonyms.

CAC somehow different, saying:

I am Anglican by birth. I was born there and that is where I started as a chorister in 1969, 1970 when I joined the choir. I also started my evangelistic call there. Gradually I was moving forward. It got to a time when God said I should not work with Anglican anymore ... I had worked around in the Pentecostal churches before I landed in CAC according to God's directive. (Interview, July 2015)

In this passage, he rather stressed a discontinuity between the "Pentecostal" churches he had worked in and the CAC. Looking at his pastoring role in the CAC now, he even emphasized the aspects CAC had in common with the Anglican Church stressing that he had gone to an official church seminary and had been "ordained fully" to do everything from baptism to burial – as, he supposed, would have been the case if he had stayed in the Anglican Church. Thus, concluding from my research material, the demarcation of "Pentecostal" as opposed to the *Aladura* movement seemed to be rather unclear. CAC could be presented as the beginning of Pentecostalism as indigenous Christianity and could also be set apart and presented as established church equal with the Anglican Church. (p. 65)

Where the African Initiated Churches were rejected at all, it happened under suspicion of traditional practices. However, these suspicions were never explicitly pointed towards the Christ Apostolic Church but rather to the locally very popular "white garment churches" – Cherubim and Seraphim (C&S) as well as Celestial Church of Christ – which were most commonly identified by their white dressing. This became visible even in the practices of Prophet Victor who was very adamant about having good relations with most churches so that he would be invited to preach and evangelize there. Talking about a recent "crusade" he had held in Christ Apostolic Church, I asked him about other churches and again specifically about "white garment churches". He then told me that he was invited by all kinds of churches naming also the Anglican and the Methodist Church. Yet, he distanced himself and these churches from the white garment churches saying: "Most of them have those dirty activities. So they don't like somebody who will come and expose what they are doing or open the eyes of the members to what they are doing" (interview, April 2016).

His suspicions were also reflected by those who claimed to belong to white garment churches. The founder-prophetess of a small C&S congregation encapsulated the discussion saying: "In other churches, they think maybe in C&S, they are herbalists. That's why they used to count all of us as an herbalist. But we are not!" (interview, April 2016). She emphasized that no one in C&S needed traditional healers or "herbalists", if their faith was "strong enough" thereby re-iterating and thus countering a theme common within the "born again" narrative. In all churches, faith healing and/or deliverance were widely practised. Yet, there was a clear division between "white garment churches" and others. This demarcation, however, was not established via "Pentecostal" but by accusing such churches of traditional practices.

Two brief observations arise from this first section: The label "Pentecostal" was hardly referred to in the field. When mentioned, it seemed to be less distinct from "born again" or "Christian" and thus, at least in the field, could not make visible a distinguishable group. Traditional theological demarcations of a Pentecostal distinction, like speaking in tongues, also were clearly subordinate in doctrine and practice. If there was a demarcation to other Christians at all, it was established with reference to the "born again" status and traditional practices, especially healing practices. (p. 66)

### **"Born Again" among Christians in Ibadan**

The emphasis on the "born again" experience was very common among Christians in my field. This observation was also made by Ruth Marshall who began to study Nigerian Pentecostal churches in the 1980s (Marshall, 1992, 1995, 2009). In the mid-1990s, she already put forward the thesis that "[d]espite important doctrinal differences, all Pentecostals identify with the central act of conversion in which the individual consecrates his or her life to Christ, atones for past sins and becomes 'born again'" (Marshall,

1995: 244). Like her, I found an emphasis on the “born again” experience in churches like Deeper Life, which also served as a prominent example in her analysis.

I already discussed the “born again” reference the Deeper Life pastor made in the section above. He was by far no exception. Most of the Deeper Life members had grown up in mission churches, mostly the Anglican and the Methodist Church, both of which are still very dominant within local Christianity. Many members associated their “born again” experience with retreats Deeper Life had organized in the 1980s. A female civil servant recounted:

Initially I was going to Anglican Church and later I heard the Word of God. Some missionaries came to my village. They preached the Word of God ... By then, they are non-denominational. But later they started building the churches and I joined them. The crusade was in 1980. I was born again in 1980 and I joined the church that very year. (Interview, April 2016)

In the civil servant’s memory, “born again” and joining the new church, Deeper Life, were inevitably connected. Only by associating it with a break from her old life and old church, she could assert her “born again” experience as the defining factor of her current life. Beyond these more individual stories, I also met a more “official” or institutional focus on being “born again” and what it should entail in Deeper Life. On a Sunday morning, the visiting district pastor made a rather dramatic example to clarify the commitment he expected from the audience, the local congregation:

A young woman gave her life to the Lord Jesus Christ and she was a firm Christian preaching the gospel all about, in fact calling the entire family, her parents “Come to the Lord!” It got to a point the father said “Our foundation is Ifa [traditional healing and divination] now – they worship idol ... We have paid the sacrifice. We have brought out cowry. We have brought out kernel for your ministry and you now say you are a Christian. Never! We rather destroy you than allow you to live!” ... As they were (p. 67) beating her, she was saying “I belong to Christ! I will rather die but I will tell the whole world about Christ!” (Sermon, April 2016)

This most dramatic story was presented to be a guiding example for the congregation regarding the commitment their “born again” status should imply. They should become “new persons” and should not allow themselves to be “corrupted” by any traditional practices. This “corruption” was to be most efficiently avoided with a clear break from the churches, mostly the mission churches that were thought of as “easily corruptible” or “less committed” than Deeper Life.

However, I also encountered the “born again” narrative in the mission churches, though under a slightly different premise. There, it served to stress a need for a “renewal” and thus a re-commitment to the faith while still remaining with the mission churches. This was the case with the Evangelical Fellowship in the Anglican Communion. In its gatherings, preachers emphasized that there should be a clear and visible cut between traditional practices and being a Christian. In this context, Evangelist Wole of the Fellowship reflected suspicions I often heard against the mission churches saying that “one can come to the church and still have fetish in his pocket” (sermon, June 2015). By “fetish in the pocket”, he most likely referred to the charms or medicine (*oogun*) readily available with the popular Muslim and traditional healers. Seeking such services was often equated with “leaving” or “corrupting proper Christianity”. A Muslim convert in Prophet Victor’s church recalled that she had been strongly reprimanded, when she had told him that her family and friends had encouraged her to seek out traditional healers for her problems: “Pastor responded saying ‘If you agree with your friends to do such thing, don’t ever come to this place [Prophet Victor’s church] again ... You will be coming to church and at the same time doing charms [*oogun*] again?! No, you cannot do this thing!’” (interview, August 2015). The “born again” narrative I encountered in the field was strongly antagonising traditional healing practices and I will return to this point in the following section. Suffice to say here that in the Evangelical Fellowship, the reason commonly given for leaving the mission churches in order to join

newer churches like Deeper Life was reflected upon and audiences were urged, much like in Deeper Life, to give up traditional practices, especially charms or “medicine” (*oogun*), in order to prove their commitment to Christ.

This call for a new commitment was embedded in the Evangelical Fellowship’s mission to “resuscitate dead churches” through evangelism campaigns all over the country (interview with executive members, June (p. 68) 2015). The leadership of the local Evangelical Fellowship group also stressed that they had a lot of competition. When due to a state assembly meeting, most of the members had left Ibadan premises, the remaining executive members still held their weekly prayer meeting as they feared attendees would “run away to another place seeking for the unknown God”, thus probably making reference to newer churches’ programmes that also took place regularly in the neighbourhood (interview, June 2015).

The Evangelical Fellowship can be seen as a typical case for the success of the “born again” label in Nigeria. The Fellowship was founded in 1960s Britain as Anglicans were confronted by demands for reforms and the threat of losing members, if those demands were not met. Some opted for the founding of separate Evangelical churches. The Anglican theologian John Stott campaigned for remaining in the Anglican Church and thus, initiated the Evangelical Fellowship (Stanley, 2013: 50). It soon branched out as an international organization, e.g. funding scholarships across the world for theological training in England (Graham, 2005). The Nigerian branch was inaugurated in 1978 in the Southwest of Nigeria (Nkwoka, 2000: 330; Burgess, 2017: 83), shortly after groups like Deeper Life had officially kicked off. Such, the Fellowship can be seen as a reaction to the proselytization by these new churches.

However, the Fellowship seems to have never had a very distinctly Evangelical identity in the sense of opposition to Pentecostal theology like “speaking in tongues”, which probably led Nkwoka to categorize it as “Pentecostal” (Nkwoka, 2010). Contrastingly, Burgess saw the Fellowship as a broader effect of the “Pentecostalization” of Nigerian churches (Burgess, 2017). Yet, as Marshall has pointed out and as I have shown above, the label “Pentecostal” is rather insignificant compared to the status of being “born again”. In this context of born again Christianity, the Fellowship seems to have been right at home, stressing mission, need for revival and renewal of faith and church. It may even have contributed to the strength and pervasiveness of the “born again” narrative. The fact that the status of mission churches was challenged as well as affirmed by born again Christians was also hinted at by Marshall. She found that mostly, it did not play a very important role where born again Christians worshipped and that they often still attended “mainline” denominations like Methodist and Baptist (Marshall, 2009: 81). Yet, at the same time, she also cited born again positions rejecting the supposedly “evil machinations” by traditional groups like the Ogboni within the Anglican Church (ibid.: 84). (p. 69)

Considering voices like this, Marshall stated that the born again identity also depended on its confrontation of tradition which was, rather paradoxically, constantly re-affirmed as such by the vigorous rejection practices of born again Christians (ibid.: 77–8, 88–9). Yet, this was not her main focus as she built a rather elaborate theory of born again identity as produced through practices of subjectivation and technologies of the self (ibid.: 45–7). She thus ultimately centred born again Christianity on the idea of the self working on the self. Tradition, more or less, was then only an effect of that process. However, based on my observations from the field, I want to place the born again subjectivation into the network of other identities it is demarcated from. I argue that beyond a self-production, born again Christianity relies on the construction and visibility of traditional practices, especially healing practices, in whose creation it also participates. Reflexively, this relation also makes visible distinct groups and churches as “born again” competing to be the discourse’s most ardent voices. This distinction is drawn and perpetuated against mission churches and white garment churches as “corrupted” Christianity, but moreover and especially, against traditional healing practices as the source of this “corruption” of faith.

## The Demarcation Practices of “Born Again” against the Dangers of Traditional Continuities

The urge to be “born again”, of course, is not per se a new issue within Nigerian Christianity. Instead, the argument is that precisely due to its significant Christian history, it can be so relevantly and efficaciously employed in the Nigerian context today. However, it is also re-affirmed as such constantly by its re-occurring usages. Christians often trace it back to the Bible itself, where Jesus explains to Nicodemus that one needs to be born again in order to “see the kingdom of God” (Jn 3.3) and that it has to be a birth “of water and of the Spirit” (Jn 3.5). Yet, I would argue that “born again” has been translated and thus adapted to different contexts over time. In the process, its connotations have also changed significantly. Considering new contexts, the question needed to be answered that if one was “born again”, what was one “born again” from exactly? What constituted the threat of the “old” coming back? This had a relevant impact on the demarcation and definition of “born again”.

Arguably, up until the 1950s, tradition in Southwestern Nigeria was embedded in the conflict between new mission-educated elites and traditional elites in the employ of the colonial government who both tried (p. 70) to gain more authority within the colonial system and from the 1920s on, also campaigned for independence. It became visible as traditional practices only in the rejection of the Aladura and Reformist Sufi movements from the 1930s on (Peel, 1968; Reichmuth, 1998) and especially with the 1950s Alatinga movement which supported by Christians and Muslims alike, claimed to be able to find witches who in the course had to submit traditional cult objects as objects of their witchcraft (Morton-Williams, 1956). Shortly before their demise, the Alatinga movement went on to destroy traditional shrines.

Reacting to this development, the Austrian-German couple Susanne Wenger and Ulli Beier, who had come to Nigeria to teach at the University of Ibadan re-established shrines across the country and within their arts’ movements, helped raise a new anti-missionary and anti-colonial intellectual elite among them the famous Chinua Achebe and Wole Soyinka (Probst, 2009; Telegraph, 2011). Though Wenger and Beier are often located within the indigenous arts, it seems that they also had a spiritual or religious interest in traditional practices. Sources claim for example that Wenger’s fascination of Yoruba traditional shrines and cults started after she was healed by a traditional healer (*babalawo*) from a case of tuberculosis that had riddled medical practitioners (Walker, 2008). Their friend, the French photo-ethnographer Pierre Verger also enthusiastically wrote about his “re-birth” as “Fatumbi”, a name given to him through the divination practices of Ifa (Verger, 2004: 199; Lühning, 1999). At the same time, traditional practices were also academically re-framed as African Traditional Religion in the new universities, the Religious Studies Department at the University of Ibadan becoming a leading voice in this matter (Parrinder, 1954; Idowu, 1973).

In the 1960s and 1970s, political regionalization disputes were reinforced by linguistic and anthropological studies that focused on Yoruba tradition. Sayings associated with the divination practice of Ifa were raised from folklore to Yoruba theology or philosophy (cf. Bascom, 1943; Prince, 1961; Hallen and Sodipo, 1986; Hallen, 2006). In the process, these sayings were put into writing (Bascom, [1969] 1999; Abimbola, 1977) and given a status similar to other holy scriptures with scholars today discussing its original meanings much like Christian Theologians do with the Bible (cf. the debate about women in Ifa: Abimbola, 1997; McElwaine Abimbola, 2016; Oyewumi, 2016). Ifa was increasingly perceived as the authoritative interpretation of Yoruba tradition (Abimbola, [1997] 2003). This was supported by transatlantic links with African practices in Brazil known as *candomblé* that had been facilitated in the 1950s by Verger who (p. 71) had been hired by the Institut Francais d’Afrique Noire to investigate the origins of the Brazilian practices (Verger, 2004: 199; Lühning, 1999: 81).

In the late 1970s, these efforts were co-opted in a governmental attempt to unite the Nigerian nation. Thus, the second World Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture (known as FESTAC) with its opulent presentation of traditional groups, dancers and traditional rulers was made possible by Nigerian “petro-naira” (Apter, 2005). After a civil war had torn the country apart in the late 1960s, the Nigerian



military government under Olusegun Obasanjo was eager to find common ground in the independent “African” (including Black American) culture (ibid.: 45). Yet, and apart from the criticism that FESTAC had only served the (inter-)national elites (Falola and Heaton, 2008: 195), the government’s strategy also failed to co-opt a significant portion of Nigerian Christians and Muslims, which criticized the festival as “the revival of paganism” (Apter, 2005: 45; Marshall, 2009: 106).

Although this specific critique came from the former mission churches as well (Ojo, 2006: 75), its most vocal representatives were the newly founded/reformed churches like Deeper Life and the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG). For example, Enoch Adeboye, later to become general overseer of RCCG, founded Christ the Redeemer’s Ministry to plan counter-initiatives against FESTAC’s “idolatry” (Ukah, 2003: 101). Thus, churches like Redeemed and Deeper Life rose to be prominent critics of this form of national unification. The fact that the Evangelical Fellowship in the Anglican Communion was founded only a year after FESTAC in 1978 may point at fact how much the born again narrative was now shaped against this neo-traditional practice during that time specifically.

Though some Muslims and Christians were united in their criticism of FESTAC, the debates surrounding planned returns to democracy and revolving military rules drove most of them apart in the 1980s and 1990s. This was especially the case with the demand of a Federal Sharia Court of Appeal (FSCA) associated with an even broader discussion of the application of sharia law in general. In 1977/8 in preparation of the Third Republic, Yoruba Muslim and Christian members of the Constituent Assembly that had been employed with the task to prepare a new constitution were either not very vocal about their support or rejection of the FSCA or did not actually vote according to their religious backgrounds (Laitin, 1982: 423–4). Yet, in the late 1980s, again under military rule and still suffering from economic recession, the situation dramatically changed, when rumours spread across the country that the government (p. 72) under Ibrahim Babangida had joined the Organization of Islamic Conference and thus attempted to “Islamize” Nigeria (cf. Ibrahim, 1991; Hock, 1996; Suberu, 1997).

At the same time, the fear of secretive “occult” practices became a prominent topic in the Nigerian population (cf. Eni, 1987; Marshall, 2009: 245–64). After FESTAC, with the increasing prominence of the new critical churches, the visibility of traditional practices decreased significantly in the public sphere. Most of my informants in Ibadan only associated their grandparents whom they often had never met in person with traditional worship. Yet, the idea that the “site of sovereignty” seemed to reside “elsewhere” was acknowledged widely (Marshall, 2009: 171; Wariboko, 2014: 285). During that time, healing practices became popular, within Christianity but also as traditional healing practices – associated with the application of herbs and/or divination. Traditional practices were thus increasingly associated with the more visible traditional healing practices and rejected by Christians as possible “corruption” of faith. Both Islamization and fetishization (or witchcraft fears) were fuelled by the new churches and ministries which in the process, became popular in their opposition to Islam and traditional practices (Kalu, 2004; Hock, 1996; Eni, 1987; Marshall, 2009: 245–64).

The demand to become “born again”, thus, gained a public role as moral authority within Nigerian Christianity, which was acknowledged and affirmed by Nigerian politicians in order to mobilize the electorate at the turn to democracy in the late 1990s. An important example of this dynamic was the presidential campaign of former military dictator Obasanjo who was known to be supported by the military and traditional elites in the North (Danjibo, Nolte and Oladeji, 2009: 66). In order to stand a chance in the “Christian” south as well, the Baptist-born Obasanjo claimed to have had a “born again” experience, when he had been imprisoned in the 1990s (Ojo, 2007: 20). This rhetoric paid off: in 2003, campaigning for re-election, he was even endorsed as “divine candidate” by churches now considered important public players. Since then, their support has been crucial in Nigerian politics as has been pointed in Ebenezer Obadare’s latest publication (Obadare, 2018).

It is exactly against this historical context that the call to be “born again” became relevant again and again in Nigerian society. Yet, how did this affect the vigorously rejected traditional practices? Interestingly enough, they were rejected and affirmed at the same time. Many healers in my field claimed

that they had only taken up to learn healing practices after they had visited the new churches founded in the 1980s (interviews, (p. 73) June 2015, April 2016). Two Muslim healers told me individually that they had grown up in Muslim families and had not had much knowledge about healing practices before they had become apprentices of healers that were not necessarily Muslims themselves. Both had gone to study healing practices due to their own failing health or failing businesses. Healing practices as professional endeavour can be traced back to the 1920s in Yorubaland (Washington-Weik, 2009: 49–52). Yet, traditional healing has undergone many significant changes since that time. It has not only become more popular during the 1980s but it has also changed to be something one is initiated in irrespective of one's family background and one has to study with "professionals" rather than family members. Both Muslim healers claimed to have had an overall traditionally knowledgeable family but had still gone to study with known and popular traditional healers, some even situated outside of Ibadan. Healing has become a central topic within Nigerian society since the 1980s. In the field in Ibadan, some form of healing or deliverance was offered almost everywhere across religious or denominational boundaries, in churches, mosques, or with healers. Yet, it seems it is exactly this context that has reinforced the claim to be "born again" against supposed traditional practices as demarcation in this otherwise very similar field of healing practices. This emphasis of the "born again" status against traditional practices has made visible a set of churches that I have described in the chapter above. They rejected the former mission churches and white garment churches as "corrupted" forms of Christianity based on the suspicion that either the usage of traditional healing was tolerated or it was even included in the official church practices. Yet, most of all, they repudiated "traditional" healing itself. They thus discouraged practices very common among the population of Ibadan. In the field, healers pushed back against the demarcation by stressing that everyone – no matter their religious background – came to consult them and that if anyone tried not to consult them, it would ultimately hurt them as only they intimately knew the supernatural forces others only tried to battle.

Against this background, the call to set oneself apart as "born again" can be seen as an attempt to keep this competition at bay. However, beyond that, the "born again" status seemed to be used against dangerous continuities that at any given time, might obliterate the groups made visible by their vigorous demarcation from traditional practices as "born again". These endangering continuities were rejected and at the same time re-affirmed as these groups encouraged some form of healing and deliverance, often similarly secretive and private like traditional healing (p. 74) (Bachmann, 2017). This may serve to understand why there seems to be a need to constantly re-affirm and accentuate the "born again" status versus traditional healing practices in this particular context.

## **Conclusion**

The article prompts the question, whether we should still study Pentecostalism as a distinct research subject within Nigerian Christianity. This comes not only as potential criticism of other research projects but first and foremost my own as I have studied Pentecostals in the past without problematizing the label itself (Bachmann, 2017). I still feel that the term "Pentecostal" may serve a purpose to emphasize global entanglements and international networks when talking about individual churches (cf. Quaas, 2011; Premack, 2015). The problem is that we need to be aware that the designation "Pentecostal" may be limited to negotiating these (inter-)national links and may be used specifically to engage the growing network of Pentecostal studies, especially US-American or European Classical Pentecostals.

As I have shown from my research in the field, the label "Pentecostal" was rather insignificant in debates on the ground and thus did not set groups apart like, contrastingly, the "born again" narrative did. To study these groups as "Pentecostal" could only be justified by laying emphasis on specific international links to particular churches or by applying certain supposedly definitional essentials like "speaking in tongues" – though "speaking in tongues" also almost played no role at all in the field. The emphasis on the "born again" experience, however, made visible a few groups and churches as a distinguishable unit. Building on Marshall's hints at demarcation practices within the born again movement with observations

from my field, I argued that the “born again” narrative was used to demarcate “real” from “corrupted” Christianity and especially from the most common source of “corruption” in traditional healing practices. This was reinforced against the dangers of local similarities and continuities threatening this supposedly distinct identity with regards to the pervasiveness of healing across religious and denominational boundaries. This article, thus, tried to make the case for the consideration of contextual demarcation practices in order not to obliterate identities but to better understand the conditions under which they become significant. As such, this article has shown that the study of Pentecostalism can benefit from situating practices of demarcation in a wider field of religious identity politics spanning multiple denominations, making visible (p. 75) what local issues, practices, and ideologies are relevant for the identity politics of the so-called Pentecostal movement.

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### **Field Research Material Collected by the Author**

- Interviews with healers, trans. A. Akindolie, Ibadan, June 2015 and April 2016.
- Interview with executive members, Evangelical Fellowship in the Anglican Communion, trans. A. Akindolie, Ibadan, June 2015.
- Interview with pastor, Christ Apostolic Church, trans. A. Akindolie, Ibadan, July 2015.
- Interview with Muslim convert, Prophet Victor's church, trans. A. Akindolie, Ibadan, August 2015.
- Interview with pastor, Redeemed Christian Church of God, Ibadan, March 2016.
- Interview with pastor, Deeper Life Bible Church, Ibadan, April 2016.
- Interview with Prophet Victor, Ibadan, April 2016.
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