

## 2 “What Islamic Devils?!”: Power Struggles, Race, and Christian Transnationalism

Pentecostalism’s incursion into the political arena has been a well-documented part of the contests by Islam and Christianity, the dominant religions in Nigeria.<sup>1</sup> With an almost equal number of adherents distributed across the nation, the two forces counterbalance each other’s excesses.<sup>2</sup> Their long histories within the country means they shaped the foundations of modern Nigeria, and the nation’s structures have calibrated their relational terms as permanent mutual contestants.<sup>3</sup> By mutually acting as foils, both have situated themselves as political constituencies whose forces are equally interpenetrated by geospatial politics. Their reciprocal tensions and politics of encounter have shaped their trajectories.<sup>4</sup> Both Islam and Christianity, in a cycle of perennial contest for dominance, mutually appropriate each other’s techniques of worship.<sup>5</sup> Driven by the conversion impulse, they both also confer religious leaders with political legitimacy (and vice versa) and ultimately blur the boundaries between faith and politics.

Pentecostalism would not have been as impactful as a mainstream practice if, as religious studies scholar Matthews Ojo submitted, it had not presented itself to Pentecostals “as an alternative centre of power to solving human needs.”<sup>6</sup> But, over time, as the message imbricated into the normative order, its practices also intertwined with the hegemonic formation in society. As the Pentecostal movement raised a vast army of the Lord’s redeemed, they inevitably attracted social and political actors who needed their cultivated legitimacy to extend spheres of power and authority. Political leaders, seeing a blossoming site filled

<sup>1</sup> Falola, *Violence in Nigeria*; Kenny, “Sharīa and Christianity in Nigeria”; Kukah, “Religion, Politics and Power in Northern Nigeria”; Rasmussen, “Christian-Muslim Relations in Africa.”

<sup>2</sup> Adogame, “Politicization of Religion and Religionization of Politics in Nigeria.”

<sup>3</sup> Vaughan, *Religion and the Making of Nigeria*.

<sup>4</sup> Akinade, “Cross Meets Crescent.”

<sup>5</sup> Obadare, “The Muslim Response to the Pentecostal Surge in Nigeria.”

<sup>6</sup> Ojo, “Pentecostalism and Charismatic Movements in Nigeria.”

with people whose religious impulses could be readily corralled into political gains, moved in to appropriate the charismatic authority of pastors.<sup>7</sup> Astute Pentecostal leaders fraternized with politicians to realize the dominion theology they preached and prayed about in their churches. This symbiotic relationship where pastors consecrated government decisions and the government officials, in turn, conferred political legitimacy on pastors and inevitably ran them against the forces of Islam, another political faith practice equally invested in political power.

In Chapter 1, I indicated that both 1993 and 1998/9 are significant dates in the political history of postwar Nigeria. Here, my study in Pentecostal political theology notes that 2015 was equally significant because a rupture occurred in the political ecology Pentecostal leaders had steadily built over a sixteen-year period. After a Muslim candidate defeated a Christian president who was backed by many Pentecostal pastors in the 2015 elections, political alliances changed and the network of power they had enjoyed was disrupted. For all the much-vaunted theo-political influence of Pentecostal pastors and for which they have been canonized as “Africa’s big man,”<sup>8</sup> and a shadow political institution,<sup>9</sup> the 2015 electoral outcome showed the limits of their influence. The election marked a time when Pentecostal power and influence was vigorously contested along with the general election. The “Christian” presidential candidate lost the election to a Muslim, and that meant a redistribution of political power among the new cadre of winners. Having lost the direct access to the highest political authority, they switched to the other mode of performing power—the marginal and oppressed.

For those who had openly supported the Christian candidate, the electoral loss also meant the rollback of some of the gains they had made as a dominant social group in the country. Considering that the politics of spirituality in Nigeria is also intertwined with ethnic identity, the loss of democratic influence that followed the loss of the election was double-layered for those who committed to a side based on religious and

<sup>7</sup> This political elites’ appropriation of a social order built through religious ethos is not quite new. In colonial era, the British took a similar turn with Islam and in northern Nigeria to extend their rights to rule the colonized country. Here, I defer to Wariboko’s exploration of religious relations in Nigeria and how their politics engendered state formation processes. Wariboko, *Dynamics of Muslim Worlds*.

<sup>8</sup> McCauley, “Africa’s New Big Man Rule?” Also see Adedokun, “Pastocracy.”

<sup>9</sup> McCauley, “Pentecostalism as an Informal Political Institution.”

ethnic identities. The years of implanting their Pentecostal values into the social ecosystem suffered a setback. One of the ways they reoriented their desire for power was support for Donald Trump, the forty-fifth US “Christian” president. He was seen as a centripetal figure of Christian institutional forbearance, the one around whom people could anchor their political spirituality and identity politics pending reascendance to political power in their own country. Their turn to Trump is significant for exploring how power identity seeks out other means to maintain its dominance even while inhabiting the position of the embattled. One of the ways they have gone about this has been to look outside their national shores for the dominant power.

There is a growing genre of literature that investigates political theology in the age of Trump, a president whose alliance with US evangelicals negates the doctrine of the constitutional separation of church and state. These studies locate the Christian support for Trump as an imperative of white nationalism. One of such accounts is Katherine Stewart’s investigative study of the Christian Religious Right in the USA, *The Power Worshipers*. Her study reveals a political movement that comprises a network of interests converge around the political vision of reinstating America’s Christian origins. She describes the movement as “Christian nationalism” to capture the overlapping sentiments of politics and religion that drive those involved. According to her, Christian nationalism is a political ideology that,

promotes the myth that the American republic was founded as a Christian nation. It asserts that legitimate government rests not on the consent of the governed but on adherence to the doctrines of a specific religion, ethnic and cultural heritage. It demands that our laws based not on the reasoned deliberation of our democratic institutions but on particular, idiosyncratic interpretations of the Bible. Its defining fear is that the nation has strayed from that once made it great. Christian Nationalism looks backward on a fictionalized history of America’s allegedly Christian founding. It looks forward to a future in which its version of the Christian religion and its adherents, along with their political allies, enjoy positions of exceptional privilege and power in government and in law.<sup>10</sup>

This group’s ambition of domination, of course, predates Trump and like Nigerian Pentecostals, what they too want is power. If power is the ability to make things happen, people who seek to take over power in

<sup>10</sup> Stewart, *The Power Worshipers*.

the name of religion also understand the necessity of (re-)arranging the world order in the image of their faith. Achieving this means effective organizing, and liaisons with other power brokers to ensure their representatives are plugged into strategic public positions to influence the social ethos. These efforts do not stay within their national borders, rather they spill over into other places where their influence extends through their missionary activities, media houses, and outreach programs.<sup>11</sup> Through these networks, they spread not just the message of Christ but a conservative agenda, an instance which resulted in the harsh “kill the gay” law in Uganda.<sup>12</sup> With modern media technology, the circulation of their conservative ideas has become much easier.

Following Stewart, I call this relationship between evangelical Christian nationalists in the USA and Nigerian Pentecostals “Christian transnationalism” and it describes a shared devotion to keep America Christian as it supposedly was at its founding, and for Christians in both countries to continuously enjoy privileged positions and power. Donald Trump is a node that connects this mutual desire. The public sphere where both meet consists of a carved out moral space – the Internet – that, in generating an ethos of support for their candidate, also abjures complex nuances of identity politics in their respective countries and center conversations around Christian political power. For Nigerian Pentecostal Christians, having someone who represents them in power is crucial to maintaining their power identity. If nothing else, a “Christian” president triumphing, albeit in another

<sup>11</sup> In episode four of *The Family*, an American web television miniseries that examines a conservative Christian group – known as the Family or the Fellowship – with prominent influence on American politics, one of their members talked about traversing Africa to evangelize as representative of Christianity and American government. Rep. Mark Siljander (R-MI) met with Libyan’s dictator, Muammar Ghaddafi. Senator James Inhofe (R-Oklahoma) also talked about meeting Nigeria’s brutal dictator, Sani Abacha, in 1997, and telling him that Jesus loved him. With the soft power of Christianity, these evangelical representatives eased the way for political relations and subsequent influence on those African leaders. Also, see Marishane’s article on religious right and US foreign policy; “Prayer, Profit and Power.”

<sup>12</sup> Kapyka Kaoma has written about the ways US evangelical right-wingers ideologically mentored Ugandans to write the bill. See, for instance, [www.pri.org/stories/2013-11-15/how-american-evangelicals-made-life-unbearable-gays-uganda](http://www.pri.org/stories/2013-11-15/how-american-evangelicals-made-life-unbearable-gays-uganda); [www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2013/12/uganda-passes-law-punishes-homosexuality-life-imprisonment/356365/](http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2013/12/uganda-passes-law-punishes-homosexuality-life-imprisonment/356365/)

country, alleviates the shame of being tied down by their nation’s leadership failures, activates the fantasy of being a chosen people of God, and overall, nurtures their identity of power.

Trump’s claims of fulfilling a vision of Christian domination defies his country’s secularism and liberalism to offer them a representation of their faith in the highest political office in the world. One writer explains the Christian investment in US politics saying,

America is the leading supporter of Christian missions in the world today. While the American government may not invest a dollar in missions, the Evangelical community in America does. In fact they invest massively in mission outreaches to various communities and countries in Africa and whatever affects them will ultimately affect us. If the liberal ideologies of the Democratic Party take over America today, that nation would be sold to unrighteousness and the words of scriptures would be fulfilled on them: righteousness exalts a nation and sin is a reproach to its people (Proverbs 14:34). It is righteousness that brought America to where she is today and sin will bring her down. If America goes down, mission support to African countries will deplete also and this will affect outreaches to unreached areas here. So America’s politics is our own politics also.<sup>13</sup>

Such sentiments demonstrate a vicarious realization of power identity through Trump.

In forthcoming sections, I will track the historical patterns of Nigerian politics at key historical junctures to show how the politics of the Nigerian Pentecostal Republic is not contained within provincial national borders. With globalized modern technology having facilitated congregating across previously impenetrable borders, Pentecostals’ performance of their religious politics far more readily crosses the Atlantic. The face of Christianity might have long changed from that of the white European to encompass the humans of other worlds,<sup>14</sup> but there are also non-whites in other parts of the world protective of maintaining Christianity’s whiteness due to the efficacies of its accrued power. In their engagement, they look beyond whiteness as color to engage with it as a trope that corresponds with political and spiritual power.

At this point, a caveat is necessary. Not all Pentecostals/Christians or people of southern Nigerian heritage are Trump supporters. There are always significant differences in the politics of faith and the allure of

<sup>13</sup> Deji Yesufu, <http://mouthpiece.com.ng/evangelicals-support-of-donald-trump/>

<sup>14</sup> Sanneh & Carpenter, *The Changing Face of Christianity*.

political personality. However, it is a fact that Trump has a following in Nigeria, and it is connected to the ethnic and religious politics of the 2015 election. Nigerians supporting Trump is particularly ironical because while majority of native black Americans perceive Trump and his white followers as irredentists, some black Africans adore him and this perplexes many Western commentators who think his demeaning comments toward them should have discouraged their partisanship. What these Western writers miss is that Trump is also a beneficiary of Nigerian Pentecostals’ resentment against former president Barack Obama. These Christian classes have not only historically identified with the American evangelical establishment, but also jointly saw Obama’s liberalism – for instance, his support for same-sex marriage (and the subsequent Supreme Court victory for the LGBTQ groups that advocated their right to marry), bathroom culture wars, and what they perceived as his pandering to the Muslim countries and communities in the USA – as a threat to Christianity, whiteness, and the civilizing force they have always associated with these identity categories. These Nigerians are empathetic members of the Republican Party in the USA, and anyone who visits the comment pages of social media sites of media like CNN; the social media pages of the White House and Donald Trump; right-wing media, Breitbart and others, will typically find them echoing the denunciation of the evils of “liberals,” Democrats, and the “fake news” of mainstream media. On the 2020 Election Day, some of them held a rally for Trump in Nigeria. An elated Trump tweeted the video saying, “A parade for me in Nigeria, a great honor!”<sup>15</sup>

To clearly narrate the formation of these dynamics, I go back a little to chart the Nigerian political terrain, and how sentiments and sensibilities build up along other identity axes such as Pentecostalism. I start with a quotation by one of the pastors of the biggest churches in Nigeria, Bishop David Oyedepo, the presiding pastor of Living Faith Church (aka the Winners’ Chapel). It is an excerpt from a previous sermon and prayer charge on Islam and Boko Haram terrorism held months before the crucial 2015 election. He said,

All the northern forces that are sponsoring these uprising and killings, I decree the curse of God upon them.

<sup>15</sup> <https://punchng.com/us-election-trump-hails-parade-in-nigeria-says-great-honour/>

Come on, pray in the spirit everybody! Pray in the spirit, open fire, call down the Holy Ghost fire to descend on the camp of the enemy! Enough is Enough!

What demonic devils! What Islamic demons!

If Nigeria waits for the church to rise, Nigeria will disappear as a nation.

I was even told from report that they were targeting this church. I said what? Even if I was asleep, if you see anybody here kill him! Kill him and spill his blood on the ground. I am saying that to you! What nonsense! What devil! You think our God is an idol? I declare their collaborators cursed. I decree their sponsors cursed!

Must the north continue to rule? What devils!

God has anointed me to lead a revolution against the Islamic jihadists and as the Lord liveth and as the anointing of Jeru-Baal that's on me, we declare them extinct in the name of Jesus! Amen!

You catch anyone that looks like them, kill him! There is no reporting to anybody. Kill him! Pull off his neck! And we spill his blood on the ground. What nonsense!

Every agent of destruction in Government today, call fire down on their head, call fire down on their head.

Everyone sponsoring evil against the nation, let your fire fall on him!

They said why Christians should say they could defend themselves.

Hold it! What stupid statement.

Why shouldn't Christians say they could defend themselves? So, they should watch for you to put a knife to their necks? You think we are dummies?

Don't mistake only those in politics as in power.

The anointed in the Lord are the ones in power. By divine ordination, don't mistake that. There was a king in the land, but Elijah was determining the events of the nation.

If I say it will not rain here for three years, it will not drop.

What nonsense!<sup>16</sup>

## Islam as the Devil Synonym, and the Politics of Deliverance

Despite the shifts in Pentecostals' fortunes, diabolization never goes away. The specter of imminent demonic attack is regularly conjured to wage spiritual battles, enact practices that contest power, and confirm power identity. Demonic specters are a teleo-affective use of language

<sup>16</sup> [www.premiumtimesng.com/news/top-news/220482-living-faith-church-reacts-video-showing-founder-oyedepo-urging-members-kill.html](http://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/top-news/220482-living-faith-church-reacts-video-showing-founder-oyedepo-urging-members-kill.html)

and imagery that fuels bipolar narratives and enforces borders when religious faith ventures into other spheres such as politics or popular culture. The image of the devil figure, now universalized by religious and nonreligious actors, is a timeless resort for Christians who want to confront an existential threat within an era and legitimize a favorable social order.<sup>17</sup> The naming of the demon itself is accusative, rhetoric that activates a persecution complex by instantly framing a polarizing identity of good “us” vs. bad “them.”<sup>18</sup> What might evolve with time is the dramatization of exorcism from the social body or the Christian’s physical body. The drama of the eventual expulsion of the devil tells us what fear haunts the people at present and the kinds of rituals they are amenable to collectively carry out to expel the agents metaphorized as demonic from their union. Demons are “forged in the crucible of collective weaknesses, misshapen by national ambivalence toward the political system . . . readily projected toward external sources which are then conjured as evil and defined as public enemy.”<sup>19</sup> The rhetoric of demonization is thus an important indicator of the resentment building in the society and the level of instigation of violence possible with the people.<sup>20</sup>

The aforementioned sermon by Oyedepo on Muslims in Nigeria as devils and demons vividly illustrates the politics of demonization. It demonstrates the flexible uses to which the demonic can be rendered in a context where majority religious authorities are fighting for the control of state power. Diabolizing Islam, as both political theorist Ruth Marshall and religious studies scholar Matthews Ojo show us, is not entirely new in Nigeria’s political history. In her study of Nigerian Pentecostalism, Marshall copiously demonstrates how the fear of the demon of an “Islamized government” has always haunted the nation, and “both the Born-Agains and Muslim reformers conjure the devil in the name of each other.”<sup>21</sup> Oyedepo’s describing political contenders as “Islamic devils” that ought to be defeated was similar mobilization agenda. The church assembly is about the most political

<sup>17</sup> Kotsko, *The Prince of This World*.

<sup>18</sup> Normand, *Demonization in International Politics*.

<sup>19</sup> Ivie & Giner, “Hunting the Devil.”

<sup>20</sup> Dawson, “Black Power in 1996 and the Demonization of African Americans”; Smiley & Fakunle, “From ‘Brute’ to ‘Thug.’”

<sup>21</sup> Marshall, *Political Spiritualities*; Ojo, “Pentecostal Movements, Islam and the Contest for Public Space in Northern Nigeria.” Also see Ogbu Kalu’s narration of these intertwined histories: Kalu, *Power, Poverty, and Prayer*.



space for this kind of manipulation because that is where pastors can “provide interpretative maps for understanding cause, effect, and possibility in the world.”<sup>22</sup> Given the context of Boko Haram terrorism Nigeria was facing – bombs going off in some parts of the country and killing people – the sermon alerts his congregation to the precarity of Christian life in the Nigerian political order. When replayed in the context of the 2015 election, it was an urge to weaponize their ballots.

For the Nigerian context, personifying a rival other as the devil is rather significant because belief in the dark, foreboding, and possessive transcendental force of evil is not merely metaphoric but familiar and instinctive to the church audience that regularly congregates to pray against its activities. Due to the experiential nature of Pentecostal belief, temporal events acquire a sacred import and secular history is rendered through the registers of spirituality and the radical evil of demonic activity.<sup>23</sup> As Pentecostals negotiate the contradictory impulses to love their neighbors as themselves and also survive antagonistic social conditions, they are caught in the throes of eternal vigilance of their neighbors’ true nature.<sup>24</sup> Within the social context of Nigeria where religious differentiation could become a matter of life and death, the theology of loving and being at peace with one’s neighbor clashes with the reality of survival. Therefore, the Nigerian believer, “forever scans her neighbors for a detailed reading of their true spiritual state.”<sup>25</sup> Labeling them as demons is the judgment of the x-ray: they are a radical, resident evil due for destruction. With a name and a silhouette in the minds of the congregation, the enemy is rendered “visible,” “monstrous,” and a “full-fledged resistance of the mind, spirit, and body,” is enabled.<sup>26</sup>

The auditorium where he preached that sermon, Faith Tabernacle, sits a huge congregation of 50,000.<sup>27</sup> In the middle of the church is an expansive altar on which Oyedepo walked back and forth as he addressed his congregation, priming their feelings with reminders of the country’s historical injustices. The church, now on their feet, segued to the prayer session where Oyedepo’s voice over the lavalier microphone – sometimes throaty and sometimes raised to a high pitch as he exhorts the congregation with a metaphorization of Islam

<sup>22</sup> McClendon & Riedl, *From Pews to Politics*. <sup>23</sup> Bloch, *Visionary Republic*.

<sup>24</sup> Wariboko, *Nigerian Pentecostalism*. <sup>25</sup> *Ibid.* 267.

<sup>26</sup> Portier-Young, *Apocalypse against Empire*.

<sup>27</sup> <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/542154.stm>

as demonic – called for violence against Islamic terrorists. He roused their psychic energies toward action. Oyedepo, a well-known preacher of dominion theology, interspersed his political commentary in the prayer session with tongue-speaking and prophetic declarations, a code-switching that suggests crossing natural and supernatural realms as he spoke to the church. The bishop's characteristic animated manner of speaking to the church, plus the urgency of the situation he was describing, and in the context of prayer, combined to prime the congregation to be amenable to the rendering of Islam and terrorism as thoroughly inhuman enemies who must be destroyed.

Prayer, especially the one of spiritual warfare that Oyedepo enjoins his audience to unleash, makes militants out of otherwise loving Christians.<sup>28</sup> It is,

an exercise by which Pentecostals vigorously summon spiritual powers from the Holy Spirit to “violently” attack every enemy and obstacle blocking their progress or causing any form of suffering in their lives. It is executed with the dedication of warfare, creating an enactment or performance of the struggle for higher levels of human flourishing . . . Spiritual warfare is the discourse that in praying about something also prays on the fact that it is praying about the ongoing prayer itself. Spiritual warfare manifests prayer and, at the same time, itself.<sup>29</sup>

An intensely psychic and physical activity, spiritual warfare prayer works on the minds and the body of the congregant. In the intensely focused moment of spiritual exertion where the vivid image of God vanquishing the forces of evil is conjured by a massive congregation such as the one Oyedepo superintends, people's convictions are aligned with a stated or underlined political agenda. Prayers are spiritual means of accessing power; the sheer physicality makes the body a channel to both draw and exercise power.

More than a corporeal activity, the components of the message is also significant. He frames the narrative as an urgent contest for the future from the grip of totalizing Islam. The message went viral in 2015, before the general elections in which the stakes of victory had been raised so high it subsumed all other issues of social development under the binary of Christian vs. Muslim, and northern vs. southern Nigeria. The sense of

<sup>28</sup> Marshall, “Destroying Arguments and Captivating Thoughts.”

<sup>29</sup> Wariboko, “Pentecostalism in Africa.”

urgency that underwrote the message was not only in objective terms, but messianic as well. The Pentecostal conception of messianic time, based on the idea of how much time they have left before the second coming of the messiah, infuses their activities with a sense of urgency as they approach end-time.<sup>30</sup>

The sermon combined messianic time with objective time, and made general elections urgent, one in which the fate of Christians would be decided. By asking, “Must the north continue to rule?” he dredged up lingering sentiment about the history of northern Islamic hegemony and their dominance of spheres of power before Pentecostals became a competitor. Using biblical registers, he could describe Islam as a monstrosity in ways that would instinctively tell his listeners that they were dealing with an opponent with an exceptional capacity for destruction. He instigated them to see their prayers as a call for justice denied through the instruments of juridical power and calling for graphic violence inscribes this vividly. Asking them to pray was also urging them to see how much the moral responsibility to save the country from the grip of Satan rests on their spiritual and civic participation.

Framing political issues around demonic paradigms was not without basis in material reality. He was also speaking to extant reality and potently politicizing it so that his congregation could make sense of the oppressive powers whose confounding brutality and lust for power, seemed to have transcended human capabilities. By 2015, Nigeria had been badly depressed by insecurity. The devastating forces of Boko Haram terrorists were routinely carrying out terrible violence, bombing churches (and later, mosques too) and other public places. They ransacked villages, murdered people, and went as far as capturing Nigerian territories for themselves and planting their flags on them. It did not help the country that the national security crisis happened under the watch of president Goodluck Jonathan, whose administration lacked the efficiency to curtail the crisis and chalked down its helplessness to an insidious Islamic agenda by those who had lost power in the previous election, 2011, and who swore to make the country “ungovernable” for him.<sup>31</sup> Oyedepo’s message resonated

<sup>30</sup> Marshall, *Political Spiritualities*.

<sup>31</sup> For a study on Boko Haram, please see: Adenrele, “Boko Haram Insurgency in Nigeria as a Symptom of Poverty and Political Alienation”; Akinola, “Boko Haram Insurgency in Nigeria”; Awortu, “Boko Haram Insurgency and the Underdevelopment of Nigeria”; Bappah, “Nigeria’s Military Failure against the

ahead of a critical national election where the political forces of Christianity and Islam were aligned against each other, and the victory could determine who owned the soul of the nation.

As I outlined in the Introduction, due to the evil the autocrats wreaked on both the polity and the body of its inhabitants, particularly during the repressive years of the military that comprised northern Muslim leaders, people forged imaginative links between political power, evil forces, and Islam. As most of the religious violence in Nigeria happened in the northern part of Nigeria (and with near-zero consequences for the perpetrators), the idea of Islam as a form of malevolence supported by official power is engraved in the mind of the Christian public. With their rule and domination over Nigeria's politics for a long time, Muslims have formed an almost impenetrable fraternity around their intersecting ethnic and religious identities such that political power became metonymized with "northern Muslim."

When the last military dictator, Sani Abacha, died in 1998, one of his political captives, Olusegun Obasanjo, a former military ruler, was released from jail. He left prison publicly proclaiming to have become a born-again Christian. He won the presidential election the following year. The myth of his trajectory from prison to palace was similar to that of Joseph in the Bible. His handlers correlated this coincidence of Bible narratives and unfolding biography to create a "theocratic class" around Obasanjo; they packaged him as a "Pentecostal president."<sup>32</sup> As president, Obasanjo dutifully performed rituals such as building up the chapel in Aso Rock (the presidential villa) and naming pastors as his spiritual advisers.<sup>33</sup> Obasanjo also publicly associated with organizations like the Christian Association of Nigeria, Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria, and made several pilgrimages to the "Redemption Camp" of the Redeemed Christian Church of God, one of the largest regular gathering of Christians in the world.<sup>34</sup> By publicly reckoning with Pentecostal

Boko Haram Insurgency"; Comolli, *Boko Haram*; Gilbert, "Prolongation of Boko Haram Insurgency in Nigeria"; Okoli, Chukwuma & Iortyer, "Terrorism and Humanitarian Crisis in Nigeria"; Weeraratne, "Theorizing the Expansion of the Boko Haram Insurgency in Nigeria."

<sup>32</sup> Obadare, "Pentecostal Presidency?"

<sup>33</sup> <https://allafrica.com/stories/201011220110.html>

<sup>34</sup> Ukah, "Pentecostalism, Religious Expansion and the City."

pastors and their congregation in the eight years of his presidency, he helped Pentecostals to also inscribe their ethos into the political sphere and roll back the many years that Islam had done the same while in the seat of power. Christianity, or specifically, Pentecostal culture, became the defining paradigm for the nation’s “vision for moral leadership, a form of public influence that is shaped by ethics and faith while also being powerful and respected.”<sup>35</sup> Having inhabited the presidential villa, Pentecostal culture also percolated to other public spaces where its values could create meanings that rule social life. By centering famous Pentecostal preachers in his governance, he also created the conditions that made it possible for Pentecostal culture to demarcate the boundaries of politically symbolic activities and frame the contours of collective subjectivity. With such glorification, the rituals of their faith practices became the loom through which their habits, values, visions, ideas, ideals, and ethics were woven into the fabric of daily life. The Muslims, concerned they would be upstaged in public life, quickly moved to counterbalance the rising Pentecostal influence. In 1999, one after the other, governors of the states in the northern regions of the country launched Sharia law in where they held sway.<sup>36</sup>

By 2003, Obasanjo’s presidential term was rounding off. He followed the unwritten law of alternation in Nigerian politics that, for instance, a southern Christian would be succeeded by a northern Muslim. Obasanjo campaigned vigorously for Umaru Yar’Adua, the candidate who not only fulfilled these criteria but with whose family dynasty he also had a relationship. The incumbency factor helped Obasanjo muscle Yar’Adua into power through an election fraught with massive irregularities. With the ascendance of Yar’Adua, the Muslims were back in power, although it was not to last. Yar’Adua, it turned out, had a terminal illness. Elsewhere, a president with such a debilitating condition would have walked away from the office to give his country a chance to move on without him. However, in Nigeria, relinquishing power was to deprive a geopolitical zone and a religious bloc of their turn in public office. The crass level of shenanigans that Yar’Adua’s inner caucus resorted to keep his dying body in the office at all costs showed the ridiculous extent political actors in Nigeria would

<sup>35</sup> Lindsay, *Faith in the Halls of Power*.

<sup>36</sup> Kalu, “Sharia and Islam in Nigerian Pentecostal Rhetoric, 1970–2003”; Kalu, “Safiyya and Adamah.”

go to retain power. As Yar'Adua's handlers fought to preserve his presidency, others began to look forward to a possible conclusion to a bizarre tale. Their eyes rested on the vice president, a Christian from southern Nigeria, whose name, ironically, was "Goodluck Jonathan."

The name "Goodluck" encoded the myth of Jonathan's political trajectory. He was a deputy governor in oil-rich Bayelsa state in southern Nigeria when the governor, Diepreye Alamayeseigha, was removed from office for corruption, thus paving the way for him to become governor. In 2003, this unassuming character, self-effacing to the point of self-negation, was selected as a nonthreatening counterpart to Yar'Adua, who was equally lacking in charisma. Jonathan was hand-picked because power brokers thought he would not usurp the president.<sup>37</sup> The arrangement worked well enough until fate – and good luck – decided otherwise. Yar'Adua died in 2010, and Jonathan became the president. This development upset the pattern of presidency alternating between northern and southern regions of Nigeria.

Now thrust into an arena he would probably never have dared to enter on his own strength, Jonathan became a figure of Biblical myths: the archetypal David the shepherd boy whom God chose as king ahead of his older and more experienced brothers. The myth of the name "Goodluck" (and his wife's name was Patience) proved irresistible for mythmakers and Christian religious leaders who touted the miracle of his rise from being a lowly deputy governor in a backwater state in southern Nigeria to occupying the most powerful office in the land. His ascent became stuff of legends and church sermons. Beyond the realm of myths, however, was also the management of political realities. Jonathan came into power by chance. He had neither clout nor godfathers, and his unassertive demeanor did not help. To survive the treacherous waters of Nigerian politics, Jonathan turned to one constituency whose visibility in the public sphere, economic strength, and moral backing could become a viable source of support: Pentecostal leaders.

To a lesser degree, Jonathan also had to hold on to an ethnic identity to survive. He was known to be Ijaw from the south-south region of

<sup>37</sup> In a sense, Jonathan was also what Wariboko called a "counterfoil choice," one where the custodian of a society includes in a set of choices to delimit possibilities and manage collective identity. By showing someone a negative, they enhance the motive for choosing what they have deemed as the "positive" choice. Wariboko, "Counterfoil Choices in the Kalabari Life Cycle."

Nigeria, the fourth largest ethnic group (but which gets swallowed up by the triune dominant ones: Hausa/Fulani, Igbo, and Yoruba), so his handlers conferred an honorary Igbo identity on him by calling him “Azikwe” after Nnamdi Azikwe, the African nationalist who was Igbo. They gave him the name to expand his ethnic identity to cover more regions in southern Nigeria.<sup>38</sup> For southeasterners (mostly Christians) who adopted Jonathan as “Igbo,” the politics of identity is also layered with ethnic sentiments that encompass survivalism and memory-making in post-civil war Nigeria. Jonathan took the template of a religionized political identity even further by building his public identity around being Pentecostal. As the 2011 election approached and he signified his intention to run, he cultivated a more acute Pentecostal identity. Like Obasanjo before him, he visited the “Redemption Camp” where he not only requested prayers so he could govern with divine wisdom, but for the first time in the history of Nigeria, a president knelt before the pastor for those prayers. The image of President Jonathan, humbled before God and a man of God, splashed on the front pages of almost every national newspaper the following day. For a multicultural nation where, for some, kneeling is part of a tradition of respect to an authority figure and for others, kneeling before a fellow human is virtually forbidden, his act generated some furor. However, the differences were moderated by a shared Christian identity and the biblical frame of reference that kneeling is a symbolic act of humility, self-surrender before divine authority, and consecration. Thus he became the “anointed candidate,” the one God had chosen to be president.<sup>39</sup> Although there were other contributing

<sup>38</sup> His middle name was also Ebele, a name borne by the Igbos of southeastern Nigeria. The mistake of assuming that because he had a name that was common among Igbos, that he had to be Igbo, is one of the ways ethnic identity gets weaponized in Nigeria for the sake of power.

<sup>39</sup> In the Bible, to be “anointed” was to be doused on the head with oil as a ritual of consecration by God either for priesthood or kingship, but the term has crept into Nigeria’s political lexicon. Appropriated from Pentecostals’ use of it to describe divine consecration, “anointed” is now the go-to terminology for describing a political candidate favored by power brokers to hold a public position. Interestingly, the term has become so normative that scholars deploy it in academic texts without either contextualizing it or even acknowledging the irony. Fawole, “Voting without Choosing”; Mudasiru, “Ethnicity and the Voting Pattern in Nigeria’s 2015 General Elections”; Omenma, Onu & Omenma, “Factors Limiting Nomination of Women Candidates for Elections in Nigeria”; Omotola, “Godfathers and the 2007 Nigerian General Elections”;

factors, such as the power of incumbency, Jonathan handily won the election and would go on to become another “Pentecostal president” after Obasanjo.

Once in office, Jonathan sought ways to establish himself as a hero of a national myth, to develop a second body – *a la* Ernst Kantorowicz – that would fuse his physical body into the ethical realm of national life.<sup>40</sup> To achieve this transcendence entailed suffusing the nation with Christian symbolism especially as propagated by Pentecostals. As the myths are already available in the social imagination, Jonathan needed only to repurpose them to the body politic. For instance, in September 2011, months after he had won his first election and had been sworn in, he attended an interdenominational church service in the nation’s capital where he marked the fifty-first independence anniversary. By then, he was already being criticized for his slow approach to government, and confidence in the man that would bring good luck to the country was fast eroding. Jonathan responded to critics of his methods saying,

You have been praying for us but others will not even want us to move an inch, especially those of us who are politicians. But one prayer I will continue to request because if you listen to Nigerians or read their statements, some Nigerians still want the President of this country to be a lion or a tiger, somebody that has that kind of strength and force and agility to make things happen the way they think. Some others will want the President to operate like an army general or my Chief of Army Staff commanding his troop. Incidentally, I am not a lion, I am not also a general. Somebody will want the president to operate like the Kings of Syria, Babylon, Egypt, the pharaoh, all the powerful people that you read about in the Bible. They want the president to operate that way, the characters of the Goliath, unfortunately I am not one of those.

But God knows why I am here even though I don’t have any of those attributes, or those kinds of characters I have used as an example. But through your prayers God placed me here. The only thing I ask you to do for me and that is the prayer I pray every time, is for God to use me to change this country. I don’t need to be a lion, I don’t need to be Nebuchadnezzar, I don’t need to operate like the Pharaoh of Egypt, I don’t need to be an army general but I can change this country without those traits . . . . Somebody was

Sule, Mohd Sani & Mat, “Godfatherism and Political Party Financing in Nigeria.”

<sup>40</sup> Kantorowicz, *The King’s Two Bodies*.



asking, is Nigeria on an auto pilot? Meaning a plane without a pilot and I say Nigeria is being piloted by God himself.

It is not going to be easy because . . . there are Goliaths everywhere; very terrible Goliaths; the ones that can even kill their father and mother and even their children in order to stop government. So, we have these terrible Goliaths that are trying to frustrate us but surely with God we will conquer them . . . every Goliath has an exposed forehead. God will expose their foreheads to the stone of David.<sup>41</sup>

Jonathan’s public performance of faith was over-the-top and he reportedly made more high-profile visits to churches than hospitals and schools; he became the president who made churches his site of policy enunciation.<sup>42</sup> At some point, it was announced that he would lead 30,000 pilgrims to Israel for holy pilgrimage, the first Nigerian president to visit the Christian holy land.<sup>43</sup> On the trip, photographs of him and other political officials who accompanied him praying at several sacred sites appeared in several newspapers and blogs. *Christianity Today*, the American evangelical flagship magazine founded by Billy Graham, noted that he undertook the pilgrimage to pray for peace between Christians and Muslims in his country, sign an agreement with Israeli leaders on international flight schedules, among other matters to be discussed.<sup>44</sup> To also appease his Christian constituents who were repulsed by the debates about same-sex marriage debates taking place in the USA, he signed the notorious Nigerian “gay bill,” composed of laws so harsh that they are hard to implement properly.

While the “anointed candidate” narrative might have propelled Jonathan to office, it did not help him when the challenges of public office arose. During his tenure, Nigeria’s economic fortunes from the boom in global oil prices – Nigeria’s major export – did not translate to tangible gains for the majority.<sup>45</sup> Much of the gain was misappropriated by the elite political class that surrounded Jonathan, people whose incorrigible tendency toward corruption made it impossible for whatever policy conceived at the federal level to percolate to the people.

<sup>41</sup> [www.vanguardngr.com/2011/09/we-ll-conquer-goliaths-jonathan/](http://www.vanguardngr.com/2011/09/we-ll-conquer-goliaths-jonathan/)

<sup>42</sup> Ukah, “The Midwife or the Handmaid?”

<sup>43</sup> [www.algemeiner.com/2013/10/15/nigerian-president-to-lead-30000-christian-pilgrims-to-israel/](http://www.algemeiner.com/2013/10/15/nigerian-president-to-lead-30000-christian-pilgrims-to-israel/)

<sup>44</sup> [www.christianitytoday.com/news/2013/october/nigeria-president-israel-pilgrimage-jonathan-goodluck.html](http://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2013/october/nigeria-president-israel-pilgrimage-jonathan-goodluck.html)

<sup>45</sup> Adetula, “Nigeria’s Rebased Economy and Its Role in Regional and Global Politics”; Nwanosike et al., “Economic Development Dynamics in Nigeria.”

While most Nigerians remained as poor as ever, political actors, including known Pentecostal pastors, became richer and flaunted their wealth. It was an era in which the prosperity gospel became self-confirming. While pastors claimed the wealth with which they procured their private jets came from heaven above, people were not blind to how their association with politicians favored them. Pastors allegedly used their high-profile connections to political power for their ends. As Jonathan's administration became enmeshed in several high-profile corruption scandals and allegations of financial mismanagement,<sup>46</sup> pastors' conduct and relationship with him ultimately sped up their loss of credibility. They tanked their power to influence the public by once again anointing his candidature for a second term.

Again, there were other contributing factors to the angst against Jonathan. One of the major ones was the Boko Haram national crisis under his watch. Although the problem predated Jonathan's presidency, the situation peaked during his tenure. By the time the Chibok girls' kidnapping happened in 2014, and the incident became global news especially after Michelle Obama helped propagate the news with her photograph bearing the "bring back our girls" placard, Jonathan's failings became stuff for global headlines. His opponents weaponized every one of those foreign media reports against him. By the 2015 elections, when Oyedepo was openly riling up his congregation by urging them to pray against "Islamic devils" and their penchant for perpetuating themselves in power, the political terrain had changed so much that the political weapons of warfare wielded by Pentecostal pastors were not as effective as before. While the problem of Boko Haram might have been seen as part of an Islamic agenda by those who cannot survive without political power, the failure to quell it – as well as other economic failures and the problem of corruption – was also placed at the feet of the Christian president. The political agenda of demonization of Islam around the elections – a campaign run by pastors who had parleyed with politicians – had become indistinguishable from the devil they sought to exorcise, and was not quite as effective.

Again, a caveat: While there is a degree of opposition to Nigerian Pentecostal leadership's angling to be a part of the inner machinery of the government and the corrupt exchanges that are perpetrated there, these ecclesiastical authorities are still highly respected by their

<sup>46</sup> Ojo, "Looting the Looters."

members. They are Christianity’s ringside tickets to the arena where the dividends of democracy are distributed. As the “men of God,” they embody the idea of the “man of the people” – in the way provincial representatives in the executive and the legislative arms of government never can – because they represent a constituency of people who identify by their faith in a supreme being. That puts the pastorate well above politicians who are supposed to represent all and sundry, and that also contributes to making pastors a sacred vehicle for the moral refurbishment of a debilitated polity. Even their fraternization with elite politicians and corrupt bigwigs is considered to have spiritual efficacy, a viable means of expanding God’s kingdom in a world full of the threatening other.

When it turned out that Jonathan’s opponent in the 2015 election was going to be Muhammadu Buhari, a Muslim from northern Nigeria and a former military dictator (1983–5) who had thrice run for the presidency (including in 2011 when Jonathan defeated him), the campaign for the Christian president became an urgent one that urged people to vote to stave off an impending “Islamization agenda.”<sup>47</sup> Buhari was perceived to be an Islamic bigot once reported to have told fellow Muslims in northern Nigeria to never vote for a non-Muslim (one of the several reasons he had never been popular outside his northern enclave). He was also seen as a northern Muslim revanchist who would complete the Islamization agenda begun by two former Nigerian military dictators, also Muslims from northern Nigeria, Generals Ibrahim Babangida and Sani Abacha.<sup>48</sup> The autocratic leadership of the duo of Babangida and Abacha, and their unapologetic pandering to northern Muslim interests, had long propagated sentiments of cynicism, distrust, and disaffection against Buhari and the religious/ethnic ideologies he embodied.<sup>49</sup>

The anti-Buhari campaign took on a transnational dimension as well. The Islamists’ threats and terrorism were taking place in Nigeria and also in the traditional Christian stronghold like the

<sup>47</sup> Onapajo, “Politics and the Pulpit.”

<sup>48</sup> Babangida upgraded Nigeria’s status in the Organization of Islamic Countries from “observer” to full membership in 1986 while Abacha, in 1997, made Nigeria a member of the D-8 Organization for Muslim Co-operation. Faseke, “Nigeria and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation”; Obinna, “Violence in the Name of God.”

<sup>49</sup> Falola, *Violence in Nigeria*.

USA.<sup>50</sup> Nigerians plugged into right-wing narratives about Obama being a secret Muslim who was yielding to Islamists in the Middle East. When Obama invoked the Leahy Law to refuse to sell ammunition to Nigeria to prosecute the Boko Haram war, they imagined he wanted Islam to thrive in Nigeria at the expense of Christianity. They also echoed the grudges of American Christians who claimed they were losing the moral grounds of their faith because of the legalization of same-sex marriage, gender-inclusive bathroom wars, legal battles about baking cakes for gay weddings, the accusations that people were no longer free to say “Merry Christmas,” and overall, that the tyrannical reign of political correctness being used to censure dissenting opinion. These perceptions oversimplified the complex ideological issues at stake in American culture wars. Still, these Nigerians bought wholly into the distress of American evangelicals who complained that the Christian ethos, integral to the founding of America, was being erased.

Nigerian Churches not only resounded the campaign against the said looming “Islamization agenda,” they became some of the strongest political evangelists as the election date drew closer. One pastor, Bosun Emmanuel, a member of Christian Association of Nigeria, made and distributed tapes where he had narrated how countries like Turkey and Syria used to be Christian territories but are now dominated by Muslims due to lack of vigilance by the Christians who once occupied these places.<sup>51</sup> His conclusion was that a similar fate awaited Nigerians if Buhari was allowed to win. The scare-mongering about a looming Christian displacement on the political scene met with a lot of pushback from Buhari’s supporters who were, by now, no longer just northerners but southerners and Christians (including Pentecostals) who said they could no longer stomach Jonathan’s incompetence.<sup>52</sup> Buhari’s support gradually extended to cover the southwest, a region that had roughly an equal number of Christians

<sup>50</sup> For instance, the terrorist attack in San Bernadino in 2015; Chattanooga in 2015; Boston bombing in 2013; Fort Hood attacks in 2009; Little Rock killing in 2009.

<sup>51</sup> [www.youtube.com/watch?v=5FhYpKbKusQ](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5FhYpKbKusQ)

<sup>52</sup> [www.pmnnewsigeria.com/2015/04/18/pastor-bosun-buharis-jihad-and-christianity-in-nigeria/](http://www.pmnnewsigeria.com/2015/04/18/pastor-bosun-buharis-jihad-and-christianity-in-nigeria/); [www.vanguardngr.com/2014/11/pastor-bosun-emmanuel-political-red-herring/](http://www.vanguardngr.com/2014/11/pastor-bosun-emmanuel-political-red-herring/)

and Muslims, and also concentrated almost all the mega Pentecostal churches in its territory. While a quantifiable number of Christians in the southwest stayed with Jonathan, an appreciable number of Muslims devolved toward Buhari partly because of religious sentiment. Among the many fracture lines the election exploited and deepened was the religious divide in southern Nigeria, and the ethnic divide with northern Nigeria. Most religious leaders did not declare their religious interests upfront, but by directly or subtly encouraging their members to vote for a candidate, they indicated their partisanship alliances. The southwest region was also where the swing votes were going to come from, and, therefore, it was targeted heavily for religious manipulation by various interested groups. The masterstroke came when Buhari selected as his running mate, Yemi Osinbajo, a pastor with RCCG, and also a lawyer and a professor. Thus, Buhari undercut the specter of “Islamization agenda” that had hung over his imminent presidency. He gradually became acceptable to Christian constituencies and some of their leaders who began to endorse him.<sup>53</sup> By the time President Goodluck Jonathan announced to the country that he would be visiting a different church every Sunday to the election, it was too late. He had lost a chunk of the Christian/southwestern votes to his opponent who chose a pastor as his vice-presidential candidate.

A few days before the election, Obama made a video urging Nigeria to vote wisely in their elections and shun violence. Even though he did not commit to any candidate in the video, his intervention was interpreted as using his moral authority to subtly urge Nigerians to change their incumbent government.<sup>54</sup> Therefore, when Jonathan lost the elections, the first time in Nigerian history where the incumbent was unseated, Obama took part of the blame for foisting a northern Muslim on Nigerians.<sup>55</sup> Buhari, now the new president, turned out to be equally incompetent in fighting the corruption he promised to tackle. His cardinal campaign agenda – to combat insecurity, refurbish the

<sup>53</sup> [www.christianitytoday.com/news/2015/april/christian-case-for-nigeria-new-muslim-president-buhari.html](http://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2015/april/christian-case-for-nigeria-new-muslim-president-buhari.html)

<sup>54</sup> [www.politico.com/story/2015/02/nigeria-presidential-election-goodluck-jonathan-muhammadu-buhari-115190](http://www.politico.com/story/2015/02/nigeria-presidential-election-goodluck-jonathan-muhammadu-buhari-115190); [www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2018/mar/21/cambridge-analytica-ruthless-bid-to-sway-the-vote-in-nigeria](http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2018/mar/21/cambridge-analytica-ruthless-bid-to-sway-the-vote-in-nigeria); [www.premiumtimesng.com/news/159014-governor-nyako-accuses-jonathan-administration-genocide-northern-nigeria.html](http://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/159014-governor-nyako-accuses-jonathan-administration-genocide-northern-nigeria.html)

<sup>55</sup> [www.pulse.ng/news/local/fani-kayode-ex-minister-writes-on-john-kerrys-unadulterated-garbage/fbrp3rd](http://www.pulse.ng/news/local/fani-kayode-ex-minister-writes-on-john-kerrys-unadulterated-garbage/fbrp3rd)

economy, and reduce corruption – barely scratched the surface of Nigeria’s problems. Under his watch, Nigeria became the country with the highest number of poor globally. A nepotistic leader, Buhari ran a divisive government, and accusations of an Islamic agenda picked up again as Buhari appointed his northern Muslim kin to “juicy” public positions.<sup>56</sup> Despite his posturing about being an ex-general who understood the tactics of war, he did not have an answer for Boko Haram either. The violence and massacres continued, and the public resigned to the fact that the perennial war against terrorism was merely an excuse for the corrupt political elite to siphon funds out of public pocket. The anger and disappointment of Jonathan’s supporters at their loss extended to Obama, who they believed must have despised Nigerians so much that he imposed an incompetent Buhari on them.

When the Nigerian economy started tanking and Nigerians became massively impoverished for reasons that included both the dynamics of global economic forces and sheer ineptitude on Buhari’s part, Jonathan supporters became Trump supporters in Nigeria and ascribed part of the blame of the nation’s misfortune to Obama’s meddlesomeness and supercilious attitude toward Africa.<sup>57</sup> Had he not jinxed the country with his subtle support for Buhari, they reasoned, they would be better off.<sup>58</sup> When another round of insecurity problems arose in the form of herdsmen believed to be of Fulani ethnicity engaged in ethnic cleansing

<sup>56</sup> In Nigerian parlance, a “juicy” public office is a bureaucracy that controls large finances and, as such, gives room for financial mismanagement and corruption.

<sup>57</sup> Obama was also disliked for the way he was perceived to have treated Africa with disdain. As the US president, he visited Ghana (and not Nigeria) and much of his speech was to lecture African leaders in a manner they consider berating. His “gay agenda,” constantly raising the issue of LGBTQ rights, was also irritating to them because they found it infantilizing.

<sup>58</sup> There were also other minor contributing issues such as the role that former Obama campaign manager, David Axelrod, and his political consulting firm played in changing Buhari’s image from that of a ruthless dictator to an appealing one. <https://qz.com/368219/how-nigeria-challenger-buhari-went-from-ruthless-dictator-to-weak-leader/>; [www.buzzfeednews.com/article/rosiegray/firm-founded-by-david-axelrod-worked-in-nigerian-election-as](http://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/rosiegray/firm-founded-by-david-axelrod-worked-in-nigerian-election-as) Also, in August 2016, when Obama’s secretary of State, John Kerry, visited Nigeria, he pointedly ignored Christians and southerners. Instead, he met with President Buhari and the governors of the states in the northern regions. The meeting was hosted by the Sultan, the topmost Muslim political leader. The Christian described his meeting with a section of the country, many of them Muslims, as discriminatory and divisive: [www.newsweek.com/nigeria-christian-group-rails-against-john-kerry-divisive-visit-493796](http://www.newsweek.com/nigeria-christian-group-rails-against-john-kerry-divisive-visit-493796)

of rural communities, it was perceived to be part of the foretold Islamization agenda.<sup>59</sup>

When Trump emerged on the scene and proposed “a Muslim ban,” a policy that would restrict Muslims from some countries from entering the USA, his Nigerian followers were as excited as their American counterparts. Trump dredged up their resentment against the liberal values “browning” America, and which had culminated in the legalization of same-sex marriage. The eight years of the Obama government had given rise to nostalgia for a country where the religion of Americanism – a composite identity that subsumes all other categories and whose patriotic ideals are tested on loyalty to whiteness, Christianity, patriarchy, capitalism, and conservative ideologies – would recover from its seemingly waning influence. This longing for a return of Christian nationalism – defined as a cultural framework that encapsulates the “myths, tradition, symbols, narratives and value systems . . . that idealizes and advocates a fusion of Christianity with American civic life . . . assumptions of nativism, white supremacy, patriarchy, and heteronormativity along with divine sanction for authoritarian control and militarism . . . ethnic as it is religious”<sup>60</sup> – that gripped Americans also resonated in other places that had cultural and spiritualities to the USA. Like these Christian nationalists, other Christians elsewhere who subscribe to the “founding myth” – the tale and tradition invented in the late nineteenth, early twentieth century that America was founded as a Christian country and has grown precisely because of its Christian identity – find themselves equally invested in the future of the Christian faith in the USA.<sup>61</sup> When in January 2016, Trump complained in a campaign speech that Christianity was “under tremendous siege,” Christians were not pulling their weight enough, and if he were elected president, he

<sup>59</sup> Just like several Nigerian ethnic groups, Fulanis are not a monolith and they have Christians among them but such nuances are easily eroded in the oversimplification of politics where the elites among them like Buhari become symbolic devils. Also, the case of Libya – the aftermath of the Arab Spring and the US invasion that led to the death of Muammar Ghaddafi – bred another round of resentment. Often the story of the US invasion of Libya gets sequestered from the context of the Arab Spring and becomes emblemized as another instance of Obama’s malevolence against African stability.

<sup>60</sup> Whitehead & Perry. *Taking America Back for God*.

<sup>61</sup> Hall, *Did America Have a Christian Founding*; Seidel, “The Founding Myth.”

would represent Christians better and “Christianity will have power,” they were all listening intently.<sup>62</sup>

### “Don’t Mistake Only Those in Politics as in Power!”: Christian Transnationalism and the Pentecostal Republic

When historians sketch American political history along the axis of evangelical influence, they tend to think of these issues as self-contained within the USA. The rise of Trump supporters in Nigeria and a few other places in Africa challenges this assumption. Nigerian Christians too, particularly those whose ethnic identities intersect their politico-religious affiliation, constitute a following for Trump. This Pentecostal Christian transnationalism partly goes back to the alliances Nigerian churches and American Christians forged as far back as the 1970s when white American Pentecostal preachers started coming to Africa to evangelize.<sup>63</sup> While the relationship has largely waned since Nigerian Pentecostalism came into its own, Nigerians still take the outreach of their American counterparts as well-meaning. They are invested in America remaining “Christian” because the moral force of US evangelicals impacts Christianity in Africa. Christian congregations on the continent could – and would – continue to draw oxygen from the USA as long as Christianity thrives there.<sup>64</sup> Oyedepo’s words provides a clear insight into this mindset of vicarious empowerment by those for whom power is an identity: *it is not only those in politics that are in power*. Not everyone has to occupy a political position to be part of the network of power. Some will be in power through their faith, and as faith is a social identity, their performing their faith will be potently political.<sup>65</sup>

One Nigerian-based church leader, citing the scriptures, told me they support Trump because God uses the basest tools to fulfill his agenda so he could confound people already assured of their methods. God does not look for perfect people, he said. If God did, what would result would be a triumph of secular competence over divine agenda. He said Trump was God’s way of using the “undesirable element” to achieve

<sup>62</sup> [www.nytimes.com/2020/08/09/us/evangelicals-trump-christianity.html?smid=f&b-share](http://www.nytimes.com/2020/08/09/us/evangelicals-trump-christianity.html?smid=f&b-share)

<sup>63</sup> Corten & Marshall-Fratani. *Between Babel and Pentecost*.

<sup>64</sup> Deji Yesufu, <http://mouthpiece.com.ng/evangelicals-support-of-donald-trump/>

<sup>65</sup> Wald & Calhoun-Brown, *Religion and Politics in the United States*.



His perfect plan on earth. That way, the invisible hand of God at work would be more obvious. To choose someone more refined would undermine the glory of conquest that was supposed to go to God solely. Those like this pastor who were on the Trump train during electioneering because they saw a potential victory for Christianity shrugged off his excesses and even chalked it down to part of divine agenda. The morning after Trump won the election, one of Nigeria’s well-known pastors, the Senior Pastor of The Covenant Nation and Convener of *The Platform Nigeria*, Poju Oyemade tweeted, “I have read it in scriptures but now I have seen it; a united church in prayer governs world affairs. Evangelicals were united for Trump.”<sup>66</sup> It was, to them, a Christian victory, a resurgence of their earnest beliefs on a much bigger and shinier stage.

Since Trump won, the people of the Nigerian Pentecostal republic who repatriated moral citizenship to the USA have taken it upon themselves to be the defenders of his presidency in the same manner they would have done for a Christian president at home. For instance, they are the ones – going by their distinct Nigerian (sur)names – most likely to be found in the comments section of the social media pages of news network such as CNN declaring their blackness before registering their support for Trump. Some would preface their comments with, “I am black, but I support Trump because . . .” My reading of these supporters’ conscious and contingent identification with blackness is that they are partly familiar with the American discourse of race and also aware of Trump’s low popularity among native blacks in his own country. Therefore, their foregrounding their comments with their racial identity is to make Trump transcend the provinciality of white identity politics and give him legitimacy that spreads across races and nations.

Like American evangelicals, Nigerian Christians saw Trump as a repudiation of every demon that Obama had come to symbolize – multiculturalism and accommodation of Islam, the triumph of liberal values over conservative Christianity, the forfeiture of ground for whiteness and its closely allied Christian identity. To them, liberalism is a rearrangement of the moral order and they owe it to themselves to restructure the world to sustain free expression of the Christian faith as they have always known it. The invading forces of liberalism – Islam,

<sup>66</sup> <https://twitter.com/pastorpoju/status/796295987010617344>

secularism, multiculturalism, socialism, abortion, homosexuality, anti-family values – are all threats to Christianity. If allowed without pushback, it would culminate in a dystopic world where their faith and power identity would be relegated to the background. The Nigerian Christian demographic who wanted Trump to beat Hillary Clinton also wanted it because it would be a defeat of Obama himself, an erasure of his legacy, and pushback against what they saw as forces of Islamism exploiting western liberalism to inscribe their ethics on dedicated western/Christian soil. They were concerned about Islam in Nigeria, and also in western societies which they identify as Christian civilizations. Most of those I interviewed were also convinced that Trump was appointed by God to reverse *Roe v. Wade* and cancel gay marriage in the USA. One of them said to me, “Obama really set back Christianity in America by approving gay marriage and because of his love for Muslims. God has appointed Trump to correct all of it.”<sup>67</sup>

Trump won the heart of these Nigerians because they want their Christian values to remain etched in the public sphere, particularly those from south-south and southeast regions of Nigeria where Jonathan came from, and who also consider the loss of the presidency as part of a historical agenda of diminishing them. For the southeast region comprising Igbos particularly, the loss hit hard, and it also formed the basis for renewed agitation to separate from Nigeria. Buhari got to office in 2015, and he did not move to heal the wounds that resulted from that election. His divisiveness spurred people from the southeast to explore the option of breaking away from Nigeria like they tried to do in the 1960s. This time, they were led by Nnamdi Kanu, who started the Indigenous People of Biafra Movement (IPOB). Kanu was charged with treason and detained by the Nigerian government even after a court had granted him bail. While in jail, he wrote a letter to Trump (shortly after he won the election in 2016) asking him to intervene in their self-determination cause and “liberate enslaved nations” in Africa.<sup>68</sup>

Kanu and his supporters saw Brexit – which Trump supported – as proof of his moral investment in the self-determination of a people, and they thought he would extend the courtesy to them as well.<sup>69</sup> Although

<sup>67</sup> Personal interview.

<sup>68</sup> <https://dailypost.ng/2016/11/11/us-election-nnamdi-kanu-writes-open-letter-trump/>

<sup>69</sup> [www.voanews.com/africa/nigerias-biafra-separatists-see-hope-trump](http://www.voanews.com/africa/nigerias-biafra-separatists-see-hope-trump)

Trump has never spoken about Biafra or even about his foreign policy to any African country specifically, they continue to invoke Trump’s name in their activities.<sup>70</sup> By engineering such illusions of international support for their cause, they hold their supporters together and also stir their people to support Trump as both a potential helper of their cause, and a guarantor of the endurance of Christianity which most of the people from that region of Nigeria practice. An evangelist from south-eastern Nigeria that I sampled for this research told me that he has written more than 200 prayer points for Trump, and he posts them on a WhatsApp and Facebook prayer fora that comprises of Nigerians both living in Nigeria and in the USA. He said to me,

Trump has interests in protecting Christians from all over the world, particularly in Nigeria. I am of the Igbo tribe, the tribe that fought the Civil War from 1967–1970. Ever since then, we have been under oppression. Right now, the Fulanis, the leaders of this country, the militant and the Boko Haram, have stationed themselves in all the eastern parts of Igbo land and they are ready that the moment Donald Trump loses the election, they will come out and kill all the Christians. Donald Trump has warned the Nigerian president against killing Christians and that is why they are on a break now. That is why many people from this part of the country have a burden to pray for Trump. Every Sunday evening, many believers gather from 4–7pmn to pray for him. Sometimes we speak in tongues for two hours.<sup>71</sup>

To all the Christian supporters of Trump in Nigeria, regardless of their ethnic group, Jonathan was not the only one who lost the election: the Christianity that he represented lost too. That displacement of the ethical order that a Christian president embodies worries them, and they cling to what Trump does as the hope that their faith did not lose out entirely. The things Trump has been doing became a confirmation that God had selected him for the moral restoration of the USA. For

<sup>70</sup> For example, when Trump had a rally in Iowa in February 2020, IPOB shared a picture of Kanu sitting at the venue with a cap on which had been inscribed, “Make American Great Again.” Then they commended the leadership of the US Republican Party in Iowa for extending a VIP invitation to Kanu to attend the event, noting that he sat in “the VIP section of the arena reserved for the top echelon of the Republican Party in the state including the Iowa State Governor Kim Reynolds whom he met briefly.” [www.vanguardngr.com/2020/02/ipob-commends-us-over-kanus-vip-invitation-to-trumps-rally-says-leader-not-a-terrorist/](http://www.vanguardngr.com/2020/02/ipob-commends-us-over-kanus-vip-invitation-to-trumps-rally-says-leader-not-a-terrorist/)

<sup>71</sup> Personal interview.

instance, after Trump declared Jerusalem the capital of Israel, some of these Christians saw the development as the hastening of biblical prophecy and celebrated it as such. Mike Bamiloye (see previous chapter) shared on his Facebook page, a commentary that I reproduce below unedited.

DOES ANYONE TAKE NOTICE OF THE TRENDING WORLD NEWS?

JERUSALEM WAS DECLARED CAPITAL OF ISRAEL, BY DONALD TRUMP.

THE WHOLE OF ARAB NATIONS ARE NOW BOILING IN PROTEST . . .

THE ARABS ARE CLAIMING THE OWNERSHIP OF THE CITY OF JERUSALEM.

We are in a time when we need to pay more attention to Current news: Trump approved Jerusalem as the capital of Israel today, December 6, 2017.

Note: Both Israel and Palestine claim Jerusalem to be their Capital.

Truth: Jerusalem has been the Capital of the Jews from the time of King David in the Bible, until around Ad 35 to 70, when all Jews were forced to flee from Jerusalem to other countries.

What to Look out for in this Period:

There is going to be more increase of intifada, war of Muslim countries against the Jews and against America.

The Jews need to build the Last Temple Prophesied in the Bible . . .

The Temple whose building material has already been prepared could only be built in Jerusalem, the exact place of the Dome of the Rock, which the Muslims see as the only SURVIVING Share (shrine) of the Muslims in the Middle East.

Anything could happen between now and the end of Trump’s Presidency.

12 Major Events to Watch out For After This Meeting:

1. Moving Israel’s Capital To Jerusalem.
2. Building of the Last Temple in Jerusalem.
3. Rapture of the Church
4. The Great Tribulation
5. The Physical Manifestation of the AntiChrist
6. The 2 Prophets and Their Ministry.
7. The War of Armageddon.
8. The 1000 years millennial reign of Christ with the saints
9. Final Judgement of the dead and the living . . . total destruction of this sinful world and Satan & his kingdom
10. Emergence of the new heaven and the new earth

11. Believers being with God forever enjoying the presence and the glory of God forever
12. Believers Walking the streets of Gold . . . eat the fruit of the tree of life . . . while sinners (unsaved) spend eternity in hell fire with gnashing of teeth forever and ever . . .

(Please note that these events are not written in strict sequential order ie order of occurrence)

There is no time to waste so Let me start with you . . .

Beloved, you have heard it all. Win souls and turn them from destruction. Search yourself, examine your life and walk in line with the scriptures. See if there are areas in your life where you have gone astray, make amends and follow the word.

The end is at the door! Therefore, please share, it could save a life. God bless you!<sup>72</sup>

In the Nigerian Pentecostal performance of this transnational solidarity with a supposedly Christian president, African Americans sometimes become the battering ram of bigoted sentiments. The Nigerian Christians who spend a lot of time on the media pages of right-wing websites and news blogs that support conservative values eventually absorb and echo racist white people who claim black people vote for the Democratic Party – rather than the Republican Party that freed the slaves – so they could get everything free. They parrot some of these racist narratives in their support for Trump because they have only a superficial knowledge of the complex dynamics of race in America. Again, this is where the incoherence of logic and paradox of partisanship comes in: even though some of these Christians in Nigeria and the USA frequently hold up the Republican Party as pro-black because Abraham Lincoln, a Republican, supposedly freed the slaves, they also jump over that inconvenient part of history where the racial composition of both Democratic and Republican party changed because of the signing of the Civil Rights Act by President Lyndon Johnson. Some of my respondents said the Republican Party is better for black people in the USA because, “Were they not the ones that freed the slaves? Where were the Democrats to free the slaves? How come they are voting Democratic Party now?” These convenient elisions of history have

<sup>72</sup> [www.facebook.com/MIKEBAMILOYE/posts/10154880867671831](https://www.facebook.com/MIKEBAMILOYE/posts/10154880867671831), accessed July 9, 2020. At the time, the posts had 1.4k reactions, 2.7k shares, and 327 comments. Most of his followers on the page acquiesced with this position.

been a useful weapon to tout in their defense of their “Christian president” against the countervailing forces of Islam, liberalism, secularism, and the Democrats whom they perceived as anti-Christianity. They faithfully display their partisan support on social media, either their private spaces or others’ spaces, performing their Pentecostal citizenship within the limits of the possibilities available to them. By contributing to the idea that any attempts to hold this president responsible for any moral or political infraction – the impeachment episode, for instance, was deemed a liberal cum “mainstream” news network agenda against God’s chosen president – they uphold a social ecology that presumes the infallibility of a politician, and which ultimately creates an atmosphere for abuse of power.

After months of studying how Nigerians display their partisanship on Facebook, I also noticed that when media houses like CNN share news reports that are not favorable to Trump on their social media pages, they join other Trump supporters to vehemently attack news sites as “fake news.” Some of these commenters get a lot of “likes” and “loves” as they participate in the transnational politics of Christianity on news media pages. When I click on the profile of such a person on the social media pages of the news networks they comment on and scan their pages, most of the time, their posts are pretty consistent in their pro-Trump and anti-Buhari (their home president) sentiment. They criticize their home president and complain about the political systems of the country that produced such an incompetent leader. Often, I click “follow” on their profile page to keep tabs on their public comments over time. As a rule, I do not contribute to the discussions on their page. I merely observe their public narration of self through their posts, and these do not always have to do with politics although their religious sentiments come up frequently. After a while, I find that they have accrued other followers whose profile pages say or show they live in the USA. These Nigerians and the Americans mostly do not seem to have mutual friends, so there is a high likelihood that they became “friends” and followers the same way I did: by following the comments of those Nigerians on globally accessible news pages to become their social media followers. When I run through the profile pages of those in the USA too, I find they are mostly white people whose pages are splashed with pro-Christian, pro-Trump, pro-guns, pro-capitalism, anti-abortion, anti-socialism, anti-immigrants, anti-liberal, anti-mainstream news, anti-Democrats and, during the COVID-19

pandemic, anti-mask rhetoric. These Americans, as I observe in their interactions with Nigerians, regularly show up on posts that have to do with Trump (especially during the impeachment saga), Democrats vs. Republicans, and Christianity (no, they do not interfere in issues of local politics when these Nigerians criticize their leaders). Their contribution to discussions usually ranges from bashing Obama and Hillary and their fellow “globalists,” liberals and liberalism, and even praising God for Trump who now guarantees Christianity for them.

On this world’s largest playground (the Internet, that is), where they have found one another, the dynamics of their interactions makes it hard to track where the pro-Christianity sentiment stops and where the tendency toward clout-chasing – especially one that aligns strange white people looking for like-minded black people to reassure themselves of their racial liberalism – stops. Nevertheless, they jointly play politics of debating to ultimately generate an atmosphere favorable to Trump. American Christians who seek out these Nigerians seem to appreciate their stumbling on the right kind of black people who “get it,” who are not trying to immigrate to America, and whose solidarity for Trump satiates their own desire for transnational alliance as well. This sentiment particularly served them well during the impeachment saga when these Nigerians were some of the loudest voices in support of Trump. They prayed for him and denounced the Democrats in caustic language for daring to work against divine agenda.

Even when confronted with the possibility that Trump, now as president, could not single-handedly revoke same-sex marriage and abortion laws without recourse to established instruments of jurisprudence, my respondents did not waver in their faith. They remained adamant that he would set America back on a path of righteousness. If he had enough power and time – and, according to someone, “If only the liberals will just let him be!” – he would achieve the divine plan. Not much else mattered than him winning back the ground that Christianity supposedly lost in the Obama years. When Trump overlooked the Leahy law and sold weapons to Buhari to prosecute the Boko Haram war, it only confirmed Obama’s malevolence rather than Trump’s lack of moral concern with internal violence in Nigeria. They get ecstatic when images of pastors standing with Trump in the White House are circulated. They excitedly share media reports of Trump attending anti-abortion rallies, his grandiloquent acts of signing superfluous laws that would “return” prayer to schools, and so on. They

consider these moves an affirmation of Christian resurgence in “God’s own country.” Interestingly, some privately think abortion should be a personal decision, but they also publicly support revoking *Roe v. Wade* to provide a valid moral basis for their Trump support. Not all, however, were simply deluded by religionized politics. Some say they are quite aware Trump is neither born-again nor even a model of Christian ethics, but as long as his presidency services the Christian cause, and keeps Islamic violence at bay in Nigeria and the USA, that is enough for them. To some degree, their inflexibility on issues of, for instance, returning prayers to school, is practical politics. African Christians’ experiences have taught them such consensual politics and privatized Christianity is a strategic error.<sup>73</sup> To be open and liberal is to risk their faith and social ethos being subsumed by the forces of secularism.

### ***Ayelujara*: Power Identity and Globalization**

The Yoruba word for “Internet” is *ayelujara*. Like many local words for modern artifacts and gadgets, it describes people’s encounters with modern realities and their grasp of its essence. *Ayelujara* considers the world as a unit where things seep into each other from the holes bored into its components. It is an image that is useful for thinking of the present globalized era, the internet technology as a part of the organization of the present world order, and how politics crosses the bounds of the nation-state to seep out at another end in ecstatic bursts of partisan support. This ongoing network of anxieties manages to set aside the exotic differences of race and nationality, the complicated and nuanced history of global anti-blackness, and the political realities of white nationalism invested in the idolized figure of Trump. As their ongoing histories, desires, and other similar proclivities seep out and are mutually absorbed, they become embodied performances through which they each influence cultural ecology and local politics. Thus, the performance of power identity forges connections that sustain the ethos of their power identity.

This support for a Christian president across the transnational divide feeds into two streams of sensibilities: one, it gives Nigerian Pentecostals still pained from losing power an anchor, a moral bearing,

<sup>73</sup> Sanneh, *Whose Religion Is Christianity?*



to stabilize despite their devastating loss of territory at home and central politics in 2015 until 2023. This stretch of time is because Buhari also won a second term in 2019 despite the efforts of Christians who supported his opponent (Atiku Abubakar, also a Muslim northerner but whose putative cosmopolitanism and strategic alliance with southern Christians could have overturned Buhari’s government).<sup>74</sup> Support for a US president whose public conduct can be insalubrious grounds its moral and ethical validation in policies such as anti-abortion, LGBTQ issues, and Christian values, and projects it on partisan and primal politics. The Internet has been particularly invaluable in forging these links, because it has provided a meeting room and deliberative spaces for people who would otherwise not have met. In the two forthcoming chapters, I will explore more of the roles internet technology has played in evolving the power configuration of Pentecostal leadership and what that development has meant for the people who see pastors, especially given the public role they play, as a repository of their power identity.

Now ubiquitous, the Internet brings Christians together from across the world to feed off each other’s strength and jointly mobilize against all the forces that stand against their faith – liberalism, Islam, and any other factors that impede the expansion and continuous realization of Christianity along with the identity complexes, be it race in the USA or ethnic validation in Nigeria. While people manage to live in peace with their neighbor, Islam and its potential for numbing violence is never far from their minds. The many histories of Islamic violence directly link to Nigeria’s political history where Muslim leaders and powerbrokers allow these acts of impunity to go unpunished. For Nigerians who have been imperiled by Islamic violence in all its forms, the assurance that an external moral figure protects Christians is invaluable. Also, such a leader’s close identification with power means they retain their power identity even when their local national Christian representative is not in power. There is perhaps also the understanding that Christianity will be anchored in the global south in the years to come, and they are already preempting that.<sup>75</sup> Nigeria, given its expansive population of putative 200 million people and still growing, will play a major role in this relocation of Christianity’s empire to the global

<sup>74</sup> [www.thecable.ng/oyedepo-why-i-accompanied-atiku-to-obasanjos-residence](http://www.thecable.ng/oyedepo-why-i-accompanied-atiku-to-obasanjos-residence)

<sup>75</sup> Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity*.

south. In some ways, both sides are looking into a mirror, seeing the moral and human resources both represent for Christianity, construing each other as the future mecca of global faith, and building a global identity of power.

Second, as I stated earlier, political Islam is imagined as demonic, and this is a politically potent aesthetic that depicts evil in its most monstrous form imaginable. By using a religious-related image that claws into the past and portends the future, a preacher like Oyedepo could adequately divine a vivid image of a malevolent power with an exceptional capacity for ruinous mischief. Through the horror its visage evokes, destructive political powers can be rendered as implacable and nothing short of annihilation or suppression would do. Those Nigerians invested in seeing America remain Christian fear that the liberalism that has already embraced Islam and homosexuality will diminish Christianity. For them, the threat of the devil is not a metaphor, it is reality. At some point though, it is pertinent to ask, as Achille Mbembe did, when “the demonic through which people divine the terror of their condition and state their desire for redemption becomes an indication of the dark politics of vengeance, suicide, and the ecstasy of score settling?”<sup>76</sup> Pastors who whip up demonic specters have personal interests in characterizing Islam as demonic. The demons work for their identity-building agenda, and that is why their liturgical activities need to be read against the wider grain of contemporary politics.

Another reason demonization works in cultural contexts where its myth is powerful is that it also helps instigate people to be willing to go as far as possible to exorcise the demons possessing the physical body and also manifest evils in the social body. They build, channel, and exercise their power identity through prayers of spiritual warfare with which they try to expel the devil. Beyond attacking demonic forces in prayers, people sometimes demonstrate flexibility in their identity politics to the point that the anti-blackness of white nationalism does not bother them. One of my respondents told me that he had no problems with white nationalism; after all, black and African people have had their own versions of nationalism. “Why can’t there be a white nationalism? Why discriminate against white people?” Another one said that he could empathize with the anti-immigrant rhetoric of Trump

<sup>76</sup> Spivak, “Religion, Politics, Theology.”

supporters because “too many black and brown people in America will just stain their country and destroy everything white people there have achieved.”<sup>77</sup> This shocking reductionism of history and the unawareness of the complexity of the racial identity politics that makes a black/African person consider fellow black (and brown) people as a blemish on “the clean edifice of white supremacy”<sup>78</sup> is troubling for those who live in a culture where race is an everyday reality. However, for these people who relativize racial relations with their own ethnic identity struggles, racial nationalism is only practical politics; that is, they insist America has the right to maintain control over its means of meaning-production by closing in on itself. By pushing back against liberal secular forces, they believe it would coherently fuse its myths into one that bespeaks the power and enduring authority of Christianity. To be an open-ended society where inconstant factors are being relentlessly introduced through immigration is to open the door to ideologies that militate against Christianity even if they have to resort to anti-blackness.

Definitely not the sole reason, but protecting Christianity is a key factor in the joint “possessive investment in whiteness”<sup>79</sup> through Nigerians and (white) American evangelical Christians who network their support for Trump, the emperor of a political order that stabilizes what could have been a drift in identity performance. For Nigerians particularly, proximity to whiteness in forms of identifying with the Republican Party, Christianity, and actual white people means they could also be pliant tools in the hands of murky racialized politics. For instance, when the Trump administration announced an immigrant visa ban on Nigerians, his biggest supporters on the decision were these Nigerians. For those who reacted with joy at the development, the ban was *schadenfreude* – it would only affect the elites who are the ones who could travel abroad anyway – while some others were appreciative of the development because it fed into the narrative they wanted to see happen: that Buhari the Muslim president was so incompetent, Nigerians were banned from the USA while he was president. Even when CNN analyst, Fareed Zakaria made a report on the visa ban saying that Nigerians were the perfect kind of immigrants that Trump should want in the USA for their level of educational expertise and

<sup>77</sup> Private interviews. <sup>78</sup> Gilroy, *Against Race*.

<sup>79</sup> Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness*.

work ethic, this set of people remained insistent that Trump did the right thing. On the CNN news pages on Facebook, they were the ones vehemently arguing that Zakaria's position was not borne out of love for Nigeria but simply a demonstration of the network's anti-Trump stance.

In wrapping up this chapter, I want to restate note that the politics of Christian transnationalism is the fallout of an era in Nigerian politics marked by religious and political grudges and also a reflection of how ideologies of culture wars transcend the bounds of nation-state in recent times. Facilitated by modern technological opportunities, these people mine global discourses of race for political exigencies through contingent racial identification politics that provides "black" support for Trump. Justification of white nationalist politics demonstrates a blindness to how racial politics has featured in global formations of power. For them, they are working to preserve a global Christian identity that feeds triumphantly on power and domination on the world stage. In the networking tactics that help sustain their power identity, they tend to downplay the complexity of race and racial situations in the USA. As long as the USA exists in their imagination as a global headquarters of Christianity, they will invest their energies in protecting it from secularizing forces. Respective Christians in Brazil and South Korea might not have much in common with Nigerian Pentecostals, but they understand and jointly relate to the universal symbolism of American evangelicalism. Because the Nigerian Pentecostals are joined by faith with others everywhere else through the USA, its president is treated as deserving of their (black) fealty. They offer it even when he denigrates their countries. As far as they are concerned, he is warding off the demons of Islamism, multiculturalism, secularism, socialism, and any other -isms that threaten their moral vision of both the USA and Nigeria, and his actions stabilize the threats to their power identity.