

# **Media and religious competition among Yorùbá Christians and Muslims**

**Karin Barber and Paulo Farias**

Work in progress.... please do not quote

## **Introduction**

Recent intensification of competition between Islam and Christianity has been conducted, in Nigeria, through an explosion of media propaganda. Pamphlets, booklets, video dramas, television programmes, newspaper columns, posters, car stickers, and tracts have been tirelessly produced and disseminated both by Christian and by Muslim groups. There is good reason to believe that the availability of new media in the 1980s and 90s - especially film, video and desk-top publishing - encouraged religious competition by opening up new public spaces which had to be filled by one side if only to prevent their colonisation by the other. It was common to see posters inviting Christians to trust in Jesus being countered, across the street, by others announcing that Allah is the way. Muslim leaders urged the wealthy members of their congregation to sponsor television shows and video dramas in order to prevent the media from being completely dominated by Christian evangelical productions; while Born-Again Christians championed the output of ever-more programmes and publications with the ultimate goal of creating an environment from which the "ungodly" had been completely expelled by the sheer critical mass of "godly" texts.

The media also encouraged an expansion and intensification of religious discourses by offering new resources for the imagination of the supernatural. Film and video could show spiritual forces engaged in warfare, with a concreteness foreign to "traditional" religious representations and with filmic effects well beyond the scope of live theatrical performance. Print media expanded the resources of the imagination in a different way - they rarely made use of visual imagery, but they provided expanded spaces both for argumentation and for personal exhortation and communion.

Media competition between Islam and Christianity, however, has not taken a confrontational form. Emulation and sharing of repertoires is present alongside mutual self-differentiation and distancing. Shared public space appears to have encouraged the sharing of idioms and formats. Christian and Muslim video and television drama draws on a single repertoire of images and narrative elements; and it is nowadays common to see advertisements for innovations like Muslim all-night vigils where the faithful are invited to "come and meet Allah": "something which was never seen before", as one Muslim pointed out. While Islamic scholars and polemicists are adept at producing reasoned (and primarily defensive) arguments against Christian doctrine in their pamphlets, the more widely accessible Muslim video and television productions never mention Christianity. The Christian media - whether print or electronic - likewise ignore Islam. Instead, both turn their attention to a third party, a common enemy known in the Nigerian press as "ATR": African

Traditional Religion. Seething with horned Lucifers, red-fanged witches, and evil spirits that can impersonate schoolgirls and run international empires of evil, ATR is not recognisably African or traditional (or even religious). It is an amalgam of images drawn from horror films, church-sponsored drama, and the booming Yoruba popular commercial film industry. There is no doubt, however, that it is a powerful idiom with great explanatory appeal to present-day Muslims and Christians labouring under unprecedented social and economic pressure. Its extreme scenarios correspond to fundamentalist calls for extreme vigilance, purity and religious exclusiveness.

But though the media offered expanded opportunities for religious argument and representation, and encouraged an intensification of Muslim and Christian groups' self-projection into public space, it is equally important to take account of the ways that the Christian and Muslim groups themselves shaped and characterised the media according to their different agendas. The Muslim groups, as we shall show, understood media in a fundamentally different way from the Born-Again Christian groups.

### **The archive**

This discussion is based on an archive of ephemera - a collection of print and media texts assembled in the course of a collaborative project involving ourselves and two colleagues from SOAS - John Peel and Louis Brenner - which set out to investigate the role of the media in the constitution of new religious publics in Yorùbáland. The aim was to cut a narrow but deep slice into contemporary social history in western Nigeria. We selected a particular geographical focal point (the suburb of Ìbàdàn called Agbowó) and a particular temporal frame (1996-9, the duration of the project funding but also, as it turned out, the last and darkest three years of military rule before General Obásanjó - converted into a civilian - became President of the first elected government in Nigeria for 16 years.) The 1990s were not only marked by ever deepening financial crisis, recession and disorder; they were also a period during which the long-standing live-and-let-live cohabitation of Muslims and Christians in western Nigeria - which is evenly divided between the two faiths, and formerly remarkable for the non-politicisation of religion - unravelled into ever more strident and polarised competition and antagonism. An array of increasingly evangelical, uncompromising Christian sects emerged to confront an increasingly purist Islam. At just the same time, new media technology became widely available, notably desk-top publishing and video tape; and with the proliferation of states and the crumbling of government revenues, the long-established medium of TV became fragmented and vulnerable to private interests. Thus the explosion of religious activity, led by Born-Again Christians, coincided with unprecedented means for colonising and exploiting public space.

The project intended to look at what happened as a result of this conjuncture, over a short time period but in detail. It intended to look at both Christian and Muslim activity, and to focus on their relations - of competition and emulation - rather than just at one side, as has been more commonly done. The project's research fellows set out to do a trawl of newspapers, magazines, video tapes, audio tapes, television programmes, leaflets, tracts, pamphlets, car stickers, posters and any other medium used by religious groups to debate or proselytise - in English, Yorùbá or Arabic.

Their main area of operation was Agbowó, but some material was collected in other parts of Ìbàdàn, and in Ìlorin and Lagos as well.

Our first consideration, in establishing this archive, was to attempt to retrieve not just the material texts themselves, but also their uses and their meanings to producers and consumers. One vital dimension of the project was the mapping of public space - marking the mosques, churches, bookshops, meeting rooms, and prayer-grounds of Agbowó - in which the texts were displayed, circulated and used; and another was the pursuit of information about Christians' and Muslims' reading and watching habits, their attitudes to the media and to religious and secular messages, and the store they set by different kinds of texts in their devotional lives. Thus the archive is intended to be read in conjunction with the findings of interviews, questionnaires and reports on participant observation, which give at least an approximate and preliminary sense of the social life of the texts we have collected.

Collecting across the whole range of media and genres revealed that there is both interaction and a division of ideological labour between them. An exclusive focus just upon video drama, or just upon religious newspaper columns, would give a narrow and unbalanced view of the repertoires of arguments and discourses circulating among Muslims and Christians: similarly, concentrating only on the English-language press would be to privilege one style of religious argumentation over a different - more synthesising and inclusive - style found in the Yorùbá-language "culture"-oriented newspapers. Even within a single genre, there are subdivisions according to the target audience: as Mike Bamiloye explains in a pamphlet he wrote to justify the use of drama for evangelisation, "when a message is strictly for the believers and the church, you do not present it before a public audience" (Bamiloye 1997:13). Likewise some Christian pamphlets are written for fully-committed fellow-evangelists, some to galvanise less active Christians to evangelical action, and some to recall backsliders or encourage those who are struggling with their faith. Among Islamic texts, some are written for scholars and assume erudition in Arabic as well as English and Yorùbá; others are simple instruction manuals for neophytes. Looking at both sides of the competition and at a range of media and genres also reveals the important fact that none of them, whether Christian or Islamic, appears to be preaching to the unconverted: Christian pamphlets occasionally speak of the "unreached" (pagans and Muslims) but only in the third person, as a potential target for evangelisation, and not as addressees. Muslim texts address only Muslims. Thus the archive's assemblage, by a kind of drag-netting procedure, was intended to yield a sense of the trends, available concepts, prevalent arguments, what can and probably cannot be thought, what are the horizons of this public discourse, how it is segmented, where the barriers and blockages are, and where the potential points of growth. But because we are still in the process of analysing the data, this discussion will focus only on pamphlets, video drama and a Muslim television serial.

### **Pamphlets**

Pamphlets were clearly being produced in great numbers in the 1990s. The archive contains 133 of them, ranging from flimsy 8-page leaflets a few inches square to glossy, well-produced books of over 100 pages. The vast majority of them - 104 out of the 133 - were produced by and for a variety of Christian groups, ranging from long-established organisations such as the Scripture Union to individual charismatic

preachers. Both Christian and Islamic publications were overwhelmingly published within Nigeria, and by Nigerian authors, though there were proportionally more imported texts, and more texts written by non-Nigerian authors even if printed in Nigeria, on the Muslim side. The Muslim pamphlets came from further afield than the Christian ones, and tend to be older. One Islamic booklet, a prayer instruction manual in Yorùbá, is dated 1928 (though it is obviously a reprint of more recent provenance than this), and only four are dated 1995 or later. The Christian pamphlets are not only far more abundant, but more recent and more likely to have been published and printed in Ìbàdàn. Of the Christian pamphlets, over 60% were published in 1995 or later and thus were at most a couple of years old when our researchers bought them, and 86% were published in 1990 or later. And more than half were published in Ìbàdàn. It is the Christian groups, then, which predominate in the production and dissemination of religious print texts there.

One of the limitations of the project's narrow time-frame is that we do not know for sure whether the abundance of brand-new Christian publications available in Ìbàdàn between 1996 and 1999 represented a sudden upsurge in activity, or whether earlier periods had been equally productive and the older pamphlets had simply sold out or been replaced by newer ones. Since marketing and distribution are neither centralised nor highly controlled, however, it seems unlikely that, if there had been prolific booklet production in the 1980s, these older booklets would all have been sold out or systematically cleared from the bookshops by the mid-1990s. It is much more likely that there was indeed a huge upsurge in print publication in the mid-1990s. In spite of the worst economic conditions that people could remember ever having experienced, at least one kind of book production in western Nigeria was not just surviving but in all likelihood expanding - and expanding by leaps and bounds. It was not necessarily profitable or even commercially viable - many Christian missions supported their "outreach" and propaganda activities, including their publications, with donations collected from their congregations, and many pamphlets were distributed free. But it was certainly a thriving enterprise.

How was this spectacular productivity managed? The Christian pamphlets' publication data show that there were almost as many publishers as authors, and that many of these publishers in turn used one of a large number of local printing firms to print the texts, design the covers and bind or staple the booklets. There were some large religious organisations which had their own publications division and their own presses, among them the Scripture Union, the Baptists' Convention, and Capro, a missionary group devoted to evangelising the "unreached" in northern Nigeria. These published a range of texts by different authors. But most of the Christian "publishing houses" were apparently set up by individual charismatic preachers or evangelists solely as an outlet for their own writings. Some of them were equipped with their own printing presses, for example Dr D.K. Olukoya's Mountain of Fire and Miracles Ministries and G.F. Oyor's God-Will-Do-It Ministries, in which case they might also occasionally publish booklets by other authors under their patronage. But most relied on a commercial printer. The most prolific author in the collection is Aminat Kikelomo Alli, a Muslim woman who became converted to Christianity as she was actually on her way to Mecca on pilgrimage. She founded a mission which had several branches or chapters outside Ìbàdàn; she published her large output of books - there are eleven of them in our collection - under the imprint of "Field Mission

Evangelical Ministries". She used two different local firms to print them; one of these, Feyisetan Press, did jobs for a number of other evangelical publishing houses too. The very prominent evangelist and prolific author, Pastor E.A.Adeboye<sup>1</sup>, published his books through different "publishing houses" (again, these seemed to have been his own one-man creations) but always gave them to Feyisetan to print. In general, however, there is very little overlap, every publishing outfit going to a different printing firm. A few of these clearly specialised in Christian texts (Eternal Praise Printers, The Anointed Group of Printers), but most appear to be the kind of small-scale, all-purpose printing firm that has been ubiquitous in Western Nigeria since the 1940s.

Many of the Muslim pamphlets were published by Islamic organisations established to disseminate knowledge about Islam. One of these - the Grand Council for Islamic Affairs in Nigeria - is a large pan-Nigerian organisation with many interests and functions, including the sponsorship of video dramas, TV serials and radio broadcasts. Another, the Ahmadiyya Muslim Mission, represents the interests of a specific (and contested) branch of Islam. There are also smaller Islamic centres for the study of Arabic and Islam which publish instructional and scholarly texts in Arabic and Yoruba of various levels of difficulty: two such are the Darun-Nur Arabic/Islamic Cultural Centre in Ilorin and Al-Hajj Adam al-Iluri's Centre of Arabic and Islamic Studies in Agege, Lagos. Other organisations are more explicitly devoted to argumentation against Christianity: for example, the Islamic Education Trust (which published *Jesus, a Prophet of Islam*) and the Islamic Conscious Group of Nigeria (*Answer to the Question "Who Is This Allah?"*). Al-Hajj Adam al-Iluri's Centre of Arabic and Islamic Studies in Agege used its own printing press to publish al-Iluri's writings and those of his disciples at the Centre. But most of the Islamic organisations, like most of the Christian ones, used commercial printers – often, however, with names that signalled an Islamic orientation (e.g. Ibrahim Kewulere Islamic Press, Nas-Tunmobi Printers, Allahu-Sati Printers and Binders). A higher proportion of Muslim than of Christian publications named only a printer, not a publisher. It seems clear that the publishing house name was a form of "branding"; and both Christians and Muslim respondents commented on the fact that the fragmentation of the Christian community into rival charismatic sects and movements made them more active in advertising themselves and their output. The spur of religious competition, it seems, may have been sharper within the Christian fold than between Christian and Muslim.

What we are looking at, then, is not the growth of a formal publishing industry but a proliferation of individual ventures made possible by desk-top publishing facilities (some books, in addition to a publisher and printer, name a typesetting or computer graphics firm) and the artisanal printshops which, like the rest of the western Nigerian informal economy, can produce small batches of products quickly and cheaply. Nonetheless, a growing professionalism is in evidence, especially in the Christian publications. Nearly three-quarters of these carry ISBN numbers and full publication data. This appears to be a relatively recent trend, and some prolific authors – Alli and Adeboye among them – have not yet joined it; while, strikingly, four-fifths of the

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<sup>1</sup> Pastor Enoch Adejare Adeboye, the General Overseer of the Redeemed Christian Church of God and President of Christ the Redeemer's Ministries, was frequently mentioned as an inspirational preacher and writer by the respondents to our questionnaires.

generally older Islamic texts are devoid of ISBN numbers, and some do not give date or place of publication either.

Accompanying the new professionalism of many Christian operations is a certain showiness and propensity to advertise the other products and activities of the mission concerned. The back pages of Francis Wale Oke's booklet *Don't Lose Your Focus* (1997) advertises a list of 20 other books, 19 audio and 19 video tapes: there is much overlap in the titles, showing that a publishing house may seek to produce the same "message" through a variety of channels simultaneously. Bro Kunle Adigun's *The Weapons of Our Warfare* (1996) lists 10 other books by the same author and also carries several full-page adverts for individual titles from this list. In some cases, the oral message came first and was transcribed and published only after being distributed on tape, for example Lawrence Osagie's *How to Handle Obstacles and Oppositions in Life*, whose back page advertises 9 audiotapes and states that the book is a transcript of one of them. Dr Chris O. Nwakanma's *Prosperity Identity* (1996) advertises 40 other books by the same author and also notifies the reader of the revivals, seminars and Bible Training available from his mission. Others advertise music instruction and certificate courses in evangelism. Biographical information on the back cover not only advertises the author and vouches for his or her personal credentials (usually as a devoted husband or wife, and parent of several delightful children), but also sometimes mentions the fact that he or she has regular TV and radio programmes and edits religious magazines. Many authors give their addresses, often with painstaking explanations of how to find the house: follow-up personal contact seems to be considered an important possible outcome of the buying and reading of a text. A Christian booklet or pamphlet, then, is often part of a bigger, multi-media operation and one of its functions is to testify to the success and effectuality of that operation.

The Muslim publishing operation is clearly not as slick. The pamphlets tend to be on poor quality paper, poorly printed, and less frequently bound with the shiny polychrome covers that are common in the Christian pamphlets. None of them advertises video or audio taped versions of their "messages", nor do they display the biographical information about the authors which is so often an important part of the Christian self-projection. Nonetheless, considerable expertise goes into Islamic publishing. The presses are able to handle complex texts in English, Arabic and Yorùbá, separately and in combination. For while the Christian publications are predominantly in English (only 4 out of 104 are in Yorùbá), the Muslim pamphlets are linguistically varied: twelve are in English, six purely in Arabic, two in Arabic with English additions, three in Yorùbá, three in a combination of Yorùbá and Arabic, and one in all three languages. Some of the Islamic publishers have built up substantial lists of titles, which – as in the Christian pamphlets – are listed at the back, sometimes with information about Islamic bookshops where they can be obtained. (The Islamic Education Trust advertises 21 other titles at the back of the anonymous *Let Us Reason Together*; the Daawat-ul-Islamiyyat Book Centre list nine other books available from them; while an individual, Alhaji Abdul Baki Mohammed - the "senior teacher" at a Qur'anic school in Ìwó, and author of a 10-page treatise in Yorùbá on female seclusion - lists five other works by himself.) Thus while the Muslim print production appears to be slower-moving and less showy than its Christian counterpart, it is not inert: there are organisations active in generating texts, specialist

printers to produce them, and a network of outlets through which they are disseminated.

The Christian pamphlets are almost all projected as personal message from an inspirational spiritual leader to his or her actual or potential followers. They address the reader on an intimate, private and domestic footing. They are concerned with the reader's personal life, problems, doubts and fears. They lay much stress on relationships – with husband or wife, but even more with Jesus and God. The language may be rousing, exhortatory, commanding, or friendly and consoling: whatever its tone, it is always directed to the reader as an individual, pictured as responsible for the spiritual welfare of his or her (monogamous, nuclear) family but always acting on his or her own inner spiritual vision and consciousness of God. It assures the reader of success. This is sometimes presented as literal, material success, and there are books that give helpful advice about prayerfully passing exams, managing one's finances and gaining promotion (e.g. *How to Succeed*, and *You can live debt-free*). But more often what is offered is a metaphorical or sanctified success, the outcome of spiritual growth. *Breaking Limitations* tells the reader "What God wants for you is to make it. He wants you to flourish and fulfil His plan for your life" (Jaiyebo 1996:11); the way to achieve this is through a change of attitude ("Apply the force of patience" (ibid.:24)... "don't focus on what you don't have" (ibid:28)... "get organized... step out in faith" (ibid: 31)). This inner change can be facilitated if you "talk it over with God" (ibid: 15). But there are formidable forces, both internal and external, ranged against the individual. *Destroying Satanic Manipulations* warns "The havoc caused in various families by evil manipulations are numerous. Millions of people are victims and precious marriages have been broken as a result" (Ofoegbu 1998:v). However, "the prayers contained in this book are enough to deliver anybody under the manipulation of the devil". *Spiritual Warfare and the Home* explains that "The world is not a playground, it is a battlefield" (Olukoya 1996a:2), and that "The best entry point of the enemy is through those closest to you" (ibid.: 3). Deliverance is from one's own past inheritance as well as from contemporary enemies: *Pray Your Way to Breakthroughs* offers "prayer points" to assist with "defeating evil inheritance": "I refuse to inherit any evil load from my ancestors in Jesus' name...I cut off every evil communication link with dead, ungodly relatives in the name of Jesus... Lord Jesus, wash away with Your Blood the repercussion of any unclean money spent on me by my parents" (Olukoya 1996b:80). The Christian pamphlets almost without exception cite verses from the Bible and expound them to support their points. But hardly any of them are concerned with Biblical scholarship, doctrine, law, theology, history, the Christian community at large or debates within Christianity. Hardly any of them mention Islam unless - as in the cases of Aminat Kikelomo Alli and Paul Jinadu – the author is a convert from Islam, in which case the experience can be related as personal testimony. Varied as they are, the Christian pamphlets have clearly established a definite repertoire and range of themes and discursive strategies within which they almost unfailingly operate.

The Muslim pamphlets are quite different in orientation and scope. There are three distinct kinds of text: scholarly disquisitions on language, literature or history (including those in Arabic); elementary works of instruction on the basics of Islamic worship; and polemical, often very well informed arguments against Christianity.

The scholarly works mostly come from university departments of Arabic, and include a bilingual Yorùbá-Arabic study of popular Islamic songs in Ìlorin; two books demonstrating that Yorùbá and Hausa each had their origins in Arabic; a reasoned discussion of the history of religious tolerance in Nigeria, and another on “The Friday Question”, explaining, with many bibliographic citations and footnotes, why Friday as well as Sunday should be a national work-free day; and several Arabic texts edited and made available for Nigerian students of Arabic language and culture. The works of practical instruction are most likely to be in Yorùbá or Yorùbá-Arabic, and are illustrated with diagrams or photographs. Even these elementary works stress their basis in scholarship, as attested by the title *Afini mona irun kiki ti a yo jade ninu orisirisi iwe eko Esin Islam fun gbogbo akirun* (Guide to Islamic prayer, extracted from all kinds of instructive books on the Muslim religion, for all those who pray). The polemical works of argumentation are informed by a detailed knowledge of the Bible, which is cited against itself, sometimes vehemently and sometimes wittily. One of these, in Yorùbá, is a compilation of citations from the Bible and the Qur’an to demonstrate that Prophet Musa (Moses), Prophet Issa (Jesus), and Prophet Mohammed were all true Muslims – but “Ise iyanu Mose ju ti Jesu lo” (the miracles of Moses exceeded those of Jesus), because “Iye eniti Mose fun ni onje je (600,000) ogbon-oke, iye eniti Jesu si fun ni onje (5,000) egbedogbon, e wo iyato ti o wa larin mejeji” (The number of people that Moses gave food to was 600,000, the number that Jesus gave food to was 5,000, look at the difference between the two) (Adediran 1988:52). *Let Us Reason Together* subjects the Bible to a critique in the form of a series of pointed questions about revisions to the Biblical text and its authenticity, as well as the concepts of original sin, the Trinity, and Jesus as the son of God: “Can the Unbegotten (God) beget an Unbegotten?” “Is there only One God? Is Jesus God? If so, is God Jesus? If so, was God a Jew and a carpenter? Is Jesus the son of God? Is the son of God, God? If so, is God the son of God? If so, is God His own son?” (anon. 1992:4,5).

Most of these polemics seem to be undertaken in a spirit of defensive pre-empting of evangelical Christians’ lines of attack. Ahmed Deedat, the well known South African Muslim propagandist, wrote a pamphlet printed in Nigeria entitled *Combat Kit against Bible Thumpers*, which glosses “Bible Thumpers” as “Christians like the Jehovah’s Witnesses etc. who harass Muslims in their own homes”. (Another of Deedat’s pamphlets shows, in a strip cartoon, exactly what a Muslim should say to the importunate Jehovah’s Witness: “I will get my wife to prepare a glass of strawberry flavoured caustic soda. Are you prepared to drink it? Your own scripture says that ‘them that believe’ can do it.”) (Deedat n.d.:13).

The pamphlets, then, reveal broad differences in the purpose and orientation of religious print publication. The Christian writers are offering personal messages to inspire and empower the individual worshipper and draw him or her closer to the charismatic preacher. The Muslim writers discuss public issues, disseminate Islamic scholarship, offer impersonal instruction on the universal tenets of Islam, and engage in argument with Christianity. Although they do not address Christians directly, their texts are dialogic in the sense that they are informed about Christianity and offer Muslims strategies by which to argue with Christian evangelists. This dialogic character is signalled by the frequency of question-and-answer formats and point-by-point comparisons. Neither the Christian nor the Muslim pamphlets ever directly

address the third religious presence in Nigeria – the pagans or “traditional worshippers”. The Muslim pamphlets scarcely mention them. The Christian ones recast the spirits and powers of indigenous religion as Satanic forces, assimilate them to the demonology of world Christianity, and comprehensively condemn them while still entertaining them (in this gruesomely mutated form) as enemies to be reckoned with.

### **Video and television**

Video became widely available in western Nigeria in the mid-1980s, and by the early 1990s locally-made video drama cassettes were being sold in every motor park and supermarket. Drawing on actors and actresses trained in television drama as well as on thousands of stage performers from the live Yoruba popular theatre, now in decline, Yoruba video drama quickly established itself as a major genre. The rapid expansion and success of this form was described in the Nigerian press as the "video rave", and was accused of being opportunistic, meretricious and inartistic. A sub-genre that was especially popular was the drama of the occult - featuring witches, wizards, ancestral curses, vengeful deities, magical medicine, incantations and diviners. These dramas were often ambivalent about their subject matter, sometimes condemning characters who dabbled in the occult and sometimes confirming that "traditional" spiritual beings cannot be mocked. Religious groups tapped into this existing tradition and had to make relatively few changes. Many of them tell the same stories, but end by showing how Islamic or Christian prayer can overcome the forces of evil. As you will see, the resources of Christianity and Islam brought to vanquish the ATR are themselves magical:

VIDEO EXAMPLE 1: Egun Aimo

VIDEO EXAMPLE 2: Abinu eni

The forces of evil are always extreme, in order to demonstrate in the most powerful way the triumph of the faith. And the enemy is always exclusively ATR.

### **Divergence in Muslim and Christian orientation to the media**

Looking across the spectrum of uses of genres and media, however, it can be seen that there is an overall difference of orientation and emphasis between the Born-Again Christians and the Muslims. The Muslim propagandists are centred in literate argument and their print publications - though less profuse than the Christian ones - are their principal focus of attention. Text is associated with scholarship at the higher levels and basic instruction at the lower levels. Their production of video dramas is relatively scanty (there are only five examples in the archive). A much more common use of video and audio tape, and of television air-time, is the presentation of recorded public sermons and Qur'anic exegesis (tafsir) by well-known Muslim preachers such as Al-Hajj Adam Al-Iluri. And even the video dramas, though they share so much imagery and narrative with their Christian counterparts, are actually less dominated by magic and the occult, and more likely to be organised around a rational critique of human actions. The Islamic media, then are predominantly discursive in mode. The Christian ones are predominantly phatic and theatrical, oriented towards communication of spiritual affect and miraculous demonstrations of God's power. Written texts are channels through which spiritual influences (and even

the Holy Spirit itself) can pass, and the electronic visual media are a site in which spiritual entities visibly engage in battle.

These differences can be better understood from Christians' and Muslims' own accounts of their relationship to the media. Many of the Christians, and especially the Born-Again Christians, spoke of the capacity of the Christian media - including print publications as well as video, film and TV - to "uplift" them and to "touch" them with the holy spirit. Almost all said they read Christian literature regularly. "There are a number of times I have been encouraged by reading Christian literature. God has also spoken to me from reading or listening to messages" said one Born-Again woman. Another described the experience of reading almost as a spiritual transfusion: "The above quotations have done mighty works in my life; the very day I read over the part in my book, the Holy Spirit removed every spirit of fear and timidity in me and replaced them with the spirit of boldness, that preaching in public and in buses on short and longer journeys gave me no fear". Television and video drama were an even stronger case of spiritual transfusion. One respondent praised "programmes which encourage and uplift me as if God spoke to me through the screen". Another said "Jesus is Lord in every situation including media projection through the air and deliverance occurs while speaking on the air, Demons in the air are cut off and those held by demons are set free".

Because they saw the media – including print publications – as having this capacity to work directly on the spirit, the Born-Again Christians were extremely vigilant about what they exposed themselves to. They were unanimous in condemning *all* secular media as worldly, Satanic, contaminating, and "unable to contribute to my personal spiritual growth". A number of them called for a wholly Born Again television station, so that they would be able to avoid the contamination of worldly programmes. Though they focussed especially sharply on ATR as a source of spiritual danger, they also conflated ATR with subsidiary dangers such as "Yoruba drama", "culture shows", late night films, pornography, Indian films, worldly music, fashion shows and beauty contests. The "traditional" dimension of ATR is revealed here as merging with the ultra-modern, imported blue film or American music video - inasmuch as they are all ungodly, they are to be rejected without distinction amongst them.

Like positive spiritual influences, the potential contamination is pictured as being akin to a physical contact. One Born-Again Christian said "Yoruba dramas where incantations are chanted may be a source of demonic invasion". Another commented "Such programmes should be avoided like plagues. There can be spiritual attacks through exposure to religiously evil TV programmes". The terror of demonic invasion is heightened by the sense that the interior of the person is in some way *continuous* with the electronic media: "What you hear is recorded in your brain and at your low ebbs the enemy might bring it to your mind and you begin to illuminate on them instead of thinking things that are heavenly" said one Born-Again respondent. "The heart is like a tape recorder" said another. Thus, to the Born Again Christians, both printed texts and the electronic media are channels through which benign and malign spiritual forces can pass directly into the human mind.

The Muslim respondents, by contrast – along with more relaxed Christians, those who did not claim to be "Born Again" – felt that the secular media were by and large a

good thing: educational, entertaining and informative at best, stupid or unpleasant at worst. And with regard to specifically Muslim print publications and media, Muslim respondents stressed above all their pedagogic value. The media are “a form of continuing education for fellow Muslims who need to be educated on the teachings of Islam”. One respondent watches the TV series *Ìwà Lèsin* “because it teaches what one feels one knows, but does *not* know, about Islam. It is very educative and in my opinion represents a modern way of putting Islamic teachings across”. Pamphlets which contain prayers and short quotations from the Qur’an are useful for young Muslims who “because of the school system have not been able to acquire much knowledge about their religion”.

Thus books and pamphlets, among Born-Again Christians, were assimilated to the category of the electronic media. They were channels for the transmission of spiritual influences, and could indeed be seen literally as *media* through which the Holy Spirit and demonic agents could “touch” or speak to the individual. Conversely, to Muslims, the electronic media were assimilated to the category of written texts. Video sermons, television programmes on Islam and even video dramas were an extension of the educational and discursive function of books. In *Iwa Lesin*, the immensely popular and ground-breaking Muslim educational TV serial, every episode begins and ends with an open page of the Qur’an containing the *ayat* that is dramatised in that week’s story, as a mallam’s voice chants the text in Arabic. In the course of the narrative, the leading character, a reformist Muslim preacher, expounds out its meaning. This technique of exposition was so successful that it was carried over into an Islamic Yoruba video film, *Inu Re*.

#### VIDEO example 3: Inu Re.

Thus the Muslim media become, at key moments, a written text, and the dramatis personae become both a demonstration of the text’s message, through their actions, and its oral exegetes.

One conclusion that we can draw from this is that there is no automatic and predictable “effect” or “impact” of the media in the domain of religious competition. The media offer new opportunities for the imagination and for argument, but the impact of the media depends on how they are taken up, and what they are taken to *be*. And this depends on features internal to the religious tradition.

A second, more tentative suggestion, which may have wider application, concerns the Born-Again Christians’ rejection of “Yoruba culture” along with everything else they describe as ungodly. There are evangelical Christian video dramas that support this perspective, rejecting as Satanic not only *òrìsà* (“gods”), diviners, and *jùjú* (magic) but all forms of “traditional culture” including *oríkì* (praise poetry) and other Yorùbá genres of oral art, music and dance. These were formerly, and until recently, the foundation of a common Yoruba cultural nationalism that united Christian, Muslim and traditional worshipper at least in some respects and for some purposes. By consigning all the arts of the Yoruba to the same rubbish-dump as ATR, they are demonising the very basis of Yoruba civil society. A new basis can be imagined, one that depends not on ethnic-nationalist culture but on citizens’ rights and obligations within a secular polity. As Mamdani (1996:34-5) writes

we need to move away from the ideal whereby politics must be an affirmation, even a mirror image, of culture, and begin to think of the autonomy of politics from culture.

But in Nigeria today, that prospect appears to be receding.

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