

Learning to be Redeemed:

Chrislam's Healing School in Lagos

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Abstract

This paper uses a case study of Chrislam (*Oke Tude*) – a religious movement mixing Christian and Islamic beliefs and practices that emerged in Lagos (Nigeria) about two decades ago – to explore the religious education provided by the movement's leader, Prophet Dr. Samsindeen Saka, with the aim of bringing about not only mutual understanding, but also a synthesis between the two world religions. Chrislam's educational role is studied against the background of the current crisis of the Nigerian post-colonial state. Since the state has cut back on or even stopped providing certain services, religious organizations like Chrislam have stepped in to offer services in the areas of education, social welfare, health and security. Nigeria's former capital Lagos, a megacity characterized by eroding socio-economic structures and increasing violence between Christians and Muslims, provides a challenging avenue to investigate this development. In addition to socio-economic and political factors, this paper argues that the rapid rise and spread of Pentecostalism in Nigeria and its increased presence in the public sphere contributed to Samsindeen Saka's engagement with religious schooling. Parallel to the new trend in Pentecostalism toward a higher level of intellectualization, Saka opened a Healing School, published religious books and pamphlets and converted his weekly sermons into "lectures". At a time when Pentecostal Christianity and reformist Islam are among the world's fastest growing religious traditions, this paper assumes that the expansion of Chrislam is part of a wider move toward what has been designated "Islamic Pentecostalism" in some of the recent social-science literature on religion.¹

¹ This paper is based on ethnographic field research conducted in Lagos between July and October, 2010, which was funded by the BMBF, the *Bundes Ministerium für Bildung und Forschung*, in Bonn, Germany under the auspices of the *Zentrum Moderner Orient* in Berlin, Germany. This paper has benefited from the research assistance and insightful comments of Mustapha Bello and the helpful suggestions of many colleagues, in particular Abubakar Momoh, Amidu Sanni, Lateef Adetona, Selome Kuponu, Danoye-Oguntale Laguda, Rijk van

Introduction

Over the past two decades, a wave of Christian and Muslim revivalism has swept through West Africa against the backdrop of intensified global flows, deepening socio-economic crisis, neo-liberal reforms and political liberalization. As Otayek and Soares (2007: 11-16) point out, with the political reforms and greater freedom of expression and association that followed the end of one-party rule in many West African countries in the 1990s, religion came to play a more prominent role in public life. Islam, Christianity and, to a lesser extent, African “traditional” religions have all “gone public”. This religious revival resulted in the mushrooming of new religious organizations, often with transnational links. Rooted in primarily urban areas, these novel religious organizations rely on the rapidly expanding sector of mass media, which helps them to connect with a wider world and to participate in a public debate about what it means to be religious.

Nigeria, known as the “giant of Africa” since it is Africa’s most populous country, forms an interesting setting to study Christian and Muslim revivalism because its more than 150 million inhabitants are almost evenly divided between Christians and Muslims.² Marshall (2009: 215, 219) notes that the simultaneous rise of the Christian and Muslim revivals in the country should not be seen as coincidental. While initially concerned with the revitalization or restoration of their respective religious traditions, both arose from within similar social classes, were products of post-colonial educational institutions and sought to create moral and political order from the chaos of the oil-boom years by emphasizing religious observance, to the extent that Larkin and Meyer (2006: 287) call them *doppelgängers*: enemies whose actions mirror each other and whose fates are largely intertwined. Despite Marshall’s attempt to point out a common origin of the Christian and Muslim revivals in Nigeria, Christianity and Islam have long been described as discrete and bounded traditions.

Ever since first Lewis (1990) and then Huntington (1996) used the phrase “clash of civilizations” to theorize the various conflicts between Christians and Muslims in different parts of the world, there has been a tendency to study Christians and Muslims as identifiable and distinct groups. As Soares (2006: 2-3) elucidates, this tendency has important analytical limitations since Christians and Muslims have often lived side by side in Africa (one can sometimes find Christians and Muslims within the same family), have shared much in the

Dijk, John Peel, Benjamin Soares, Samuli Schielke and Liese Hoffmann. All errors of fact are, of course, my own.

² It is often claimed that the Muslim population might be slightly larger, but this is a subject of speculation because religious affiliation is excluded from the censuses for fear of political manipulation.

way of culture, have sometimes converted to each others' religions and have appropriated religious elements from each other. Instead of studying Christianity and Islam as conflicting, this paper focuses on their convergence, thereby crossing boundaries and blurring sharp distinctions. I will do so by means of a case study of Chrislam, a religious movement fusing Christian and Muslim beliefs and practices, in Nigeria's former capital Lagos.³ Exploring Chrislam will reveal that "exaggerated expectations regarding the logical consistency and coherence of belief systems often lead to elegant but potentially misleading descriptions" (Fabian's 1985: 139).

Although the movement is officially known as *Oke Tude* (Yoruba for "Mountain of Losing Bondage"), it is commonly known in Lagos as "Chrislam".⁴ Samsindeen Saka, the movement's fifty-year-old Yoruba founder who was born Muslim, preaches, "We're all children of Abraham." According to his approximately one thousand followers, it is "natural" for Christianity and Islam to overlap. *Oke Tude/Chrislam* is an intriguing case for exploring Christian-Muslim multifarious encounters in that its worshippers recognize both the Bible and Qur'an as holy texts, pray to Jesus Christ and the Prophet Muhammad for forgiveness and support, sing Christians hymns about Jesus and Islamic songs eulogizing the Prophet and practise as their main ritual *Tude* or "running deliverance" – spiritual running which Chrislam likens to the Muslim practice of circumambulating the Ka'aba (the cubic building in Mecca) and Joshua's army that took Jericho (known in the Judeo-Christian tradition as the place of the Israelites' return from captivity in Egypt).

Since the Nigerian post-colonial state has cut back and even stopped providing certain services, religious organizations have stepped in to offer services in the areas of education, social welfare, health and security. In Chrislam, these various services are amalgamated in the institution of the "Healing School". Remarkably, although the Healing School does not

³ In 1991 the Office of the Presidency and other federal government ministries were relocated to the new capital city of Abuja. Nevertheless, Lagos remains Nigeria's economic and financial capital.

⁴ Actually, "Chrislam" is not a single movement but is made up of a number of movements of various scopes and different goals. The oldest Chrislam movement in Lagos is *Ifeoluwa*, Yoruba for "The Will/Love of God Mission", which was founded by Tella in the 1970s. Like *Oke Tude*'s founder Samsindeen Saka, Tella uses the concept of "Chrislam" for self-designation. This does not apply to other religious leaders who sometimes mix Christian and Muslim practices in their services, such as "The Most Senior Malaika", a church leader – "female in the flesh, male in the spirit" – who claims to be the "Real God". Since *Oke Tude* is by far the largest and most popular Chrislam movement in Lagos, I restrict myself here to this movement. Given the religious violence plaguing Nigeria, it is a telling fact that Saka and his followers designate themselves not only as *Oke Tude*, but are also using "Chrislam".

provide formal education, it is presented in the form of a school. It will emerge that the training provided by the Healing School is not meant just to enlarge the participants' religious knowledge, but rather to teach them to cope with the ordeal of everyday living. Before going more deeply into the training provided by the Healing School, I will pay attention to the socio-cultural and historical context in which Chrislam could emerge. The ethnography of the Healing School is followed by an analysis of changing attitudes towards knowledge. Saka's establishment of the Healing School runs parallel to a new trend in Pentecostalism toward a higher level of intellectualisation. But whereas Pentecostal churches pay focus on Bible studies and intellectual reflection on the basis of the scriptures, Chrislam's conception of knowledge privileges pragmatics and embodied experience. By participating in the Healing School, Chrislam worshippers hope to acquire the know-how to improve their lifeworlds so that they may eventually reach a state of worldly and spiritual well-being (*alafia*).

Nigeria's Pluralistic Religious Landscape

On Sundays the three churches in the lower-middle-class neighbourhood where I was living in Lagos resounded with Christian hymns accompanied by drums, bells, tambourines and the tumult of the congregation speaking in tongues (glossolalia). This religious "soundscape" (Hirschkind 2006) was amplified by the voice of the *muezzin*, calling Muslims to prayer from a mosque loudspeaker. The presence of the "traditional" Yoruba religion was more mute and invisible, for shrines remained hidden. Since many believers consider "traditionalism" a "backward" form of religious practice, the traditional *babalawo* (diviners) often keep a low profile, making use of signboards instead of modern communication technologies to advertise their services (see also McIntosh 2009: 36). Lagos' pluralistic religious landscape reinforces the competition among Christianity, Islam and to a lesser degree traditional Yoruba religion.⁵ This section gives a brief historical account of the relations between the three religious traditions in Nigeria, with a special focus on Yorubaland and Lagos as its geographical centre.

⁵ The generator, present in even the smallest "churches" set up in people's living rooms, is called "pass my neighbour" in local discourse, underlining the competitive aspect of Lagos' soundscape in which "religious noise" (Larkin 2008) is believed to be necessary not only to attract followers but also to be heard by God. Smith (2007: xii) writes that if he has to describe Nigeria to a person who has never been there, he would say that "in Nigeria the volume is turned up – sometimes too high".

Christians and Muslims have long lived side by side in Nigeria, often in harmony with the traditional practitioners – the boundaries between the three not always sharply demarcated. There were high levels of social interaction between Christians, Muslims and traditionalists and interfaith marriages were common. However, starting in the late 1970s there have been higher levels of contestation and radicalization between, and also within, the different religious traditions, culminating in violent Christian-Muslim clashes in different parts of Nigeria, notably in Kaduna, Jos and Kano.⁶ During the past three decades, religious violence and conflict have become so closely associated with the image that people (not only outsiders, but also Nigerians themselves) have of Nigeria that the pidgin English phrase describing the country is *Nigeria na war-o*, which translates as “Nigeria is a war” (Smith 2007: xii).

As Falola (1998) has pointed out, several factors have been responsible for transforming Nigeria’s religious landscape into a sharp division between Muslims and Christians, along a predominantly north-south axis. The basically Muslim Hausa-Fulani in the north have long had a dominant political and military role. Conversely, the mainly Christian Igbo in the south-east have been economically stronger, largely due to a higher educational standard and oil deposits. In addition to an uneven access to facilities and distribution of resources, other factors contributing to interreligious conflict were the effects of the Biafra War, the 1970s oil boom, the foreclosure of all democratic debate by the military regimes, the manipulation of religion to highlight ethnic differences, the difficulties of managing plural identities in a federal state system and the implementation of the *shari‘a* law in twelve northern states in 2000 (see also Westerlund 2004; Danfulani 2005; Sanusi 2006; Loimeier 2007).

In addition, the rapid rise and spread of Pentecostalism, or born-again Christianity, and its increased presence in the public sphere have fundamentally altered Nigeria’s religious landscape. Pentecostalism first made its appearance in Nigeria in the 1930s, when the leaders of the *Aladura* (“praying”) churches made contact with the Apostolic Church,⁷ a British Pentecostal body. Thus emerged a grouping of churches distinguished by the practices of drawing in the Holy Spirit and speaking in tongues, as well as by a concern for effective

⁶ This is not to say that Nigeria was free from religious tension before the 1970s. In the nineteenth century, Usman dan Fodio led a *jihad* (“holy war”) that resulted in the creation of the Sokoto Caliphate, the largest state in West Africa until it was conquered by the British. In colonial Nigeria, the Sufi orders engaged in violent clashes that continued till the 1960s. But since the late 1970s, incidents of religious violence have increased in number, spread geographically and affected larger portions of the population (Falola 1998: 5).

⁷ Aladura churches were founded in the 1920s with the aim of Africanizing the Protestant mission churches (Peel 1969).

prayer and visionary guidance and for an “African” style of worship. Over the 1950s and 1960s, the influence of American Pentecostalism grew, with leading evangelists conducting revivals in Nigeria and Nigerians visiting their various headquarters in the United States. But the movement did not take off until the 1970s, when vastly increased public revenues from oil permitted a great expansion of higher education and fuelled urban growth. According to Ojo (1988), the charismatic movement had its deepest roots, and found most of its effective leaders, among university staff and students. It later moved with them off campus and continued to grow in the urban centres, still strongest among the educated young but with a broadening social base; and it expanded even faster as economic and political conditions worsened in the 1980s. By the mid-1990s, the *Redeemed Christian Church of God*’s monthly “Holy Ghost Nights” had become perhaps the largest regular gathering of any kind – attracting between 30,000 and 40,000 people – ever held in Nigeria (Peel 2000: 314; Ukah 2009).

Over the past decades, Pentecostalism has drawn many Nigerian Christians from the mainline Protestant churches, the Roman Catholic Church and the African Independent or Aladura churches, promising them spiritual rebirth. As Marshall (1998, 2009) argues, the growing “Pentecostalisation” of Nigerian society has played a central role in the increasing political cleavage and violence along religious lines. Pentecostals are fighting what they see as “a life and death battle with the enemy”, that is, with Muslims (Marshall 1998: 308). Their aggressive proselytising matches that of equally intolerant Muslim groups (Hackett 2003a: 58), leading into what Last (2007) has called an “economy of political panic” between Christians and Muslims.

In the current of religious conflict, religiously plural south-western Nigeria – a region that today is called Yorubaland – is somewhat of an exception. As illustrated by Peel (2000), Christians, Muslims and practitioners of African traditional religion (so-called “Yoruba religion” that is premised on the belief in *orisa* or deities who can be communicated with through oracles operated by the *babalawo* or diviners) have lived together relatively harmoniously in Yorubaland since the nineteenth century, making the region into an icon of ecumenism in Africa. Many extended families in Yorubaland are composed of Christians, Muslims and to a lesser extent traditionalists; and mutual participation in each other’s ritual festivities is a standard feature of Yoruba social life. Given its religiously plural landscape, several of my interlocutors compared the religious situation in Yorubaland to a “shopping mall”. A Christian reverend explained, “If a Yoruba has a problem, his father will go to the mosque to pray for him, his mother will seek support in the church, and his aunty might visit

a shrine to request the *orisa* to help.” The metaphor of the religious market confirms Peel’s (2009a: 8) argument that since the remarkable coexistence between different religious traditions in Yorubaland has come about over the past 150 years, the comparison of Christianity, Islam and Yoruba religion cannot be a static exercise: “... they are less to be seen as systems or structures than as dynamic entities.”

Given Yorubaland’s particular religious constellation, it is not surprising that a movement like Chrislam could prosper in its heartland, Lagos. In a series of city portraits organized by the Heinrich Böll Foundation (a think tank that is part of the German Green political movement) in Berlin in 2009, the portrait of Lagos was entitled *Lagos geht unter* (“Lagos is going down”). This title was well chosen, not only because it reflects the disastrous consequences of climatic change for this metropolis that originated on islands, but also because it underlines the awkward socio-economic situation confronting the estimated 12 million inhabitants. In a setting characterized by chaos, institutional collapse, poverty, high rates of unemployment, unprecedented levels of inequality, corruption and staggering levels of crime, religious organizations seem to provide their followers with the spiritual means to overcome the socio-political anxiety and economic hardship of daily life.

In a country torn apart by religious violence, Chrislam may be seen as an alternative model for Christian-Muslim unity. In an interview discussing the historical origins of the movement, Saka told me that during his second pilgrimage to Mecca he received a “divine call” from God that inspired him to bring about peace between Christians and Muslims:

The vision to bring mutual understanding between Muslims and Christians was revealed to me by Almighty God, when I rested near the *Ka’aba*. In a dream, God showed me photographs of religious intolerance in Nigeria, and He assigned me to bridge the misunderstanding between the two religions.

But although Saka frames Chrislam as an interfaith movement,⁸ I argue in this paper that the movement is not so much a direct response to the religious violence plaguing Nigeria, but rather that it has to be seen within a broader context of what Gore and Pratten (2003: 237) call a “culture of violence”. NIREC, the *Nigeria Inter-Religious Council*, founded in 1999 with

⁸ Saka’s earlier attempts to register his movement as “Chrislamherb” with the federal government failed, because the state representatives thought he wanted to blend Christianity, Islam and Yoruba religion in a heretical trinity. When in 1999 Saka changed the name into Chrislam/*Oke Tude* – implying interfaith dialogue – he was finally recognized as a religious leader. Ironically, whereas Saka saw a conflict between his business as an herbalist and his divine calling, he did not see any contradiction in his bringing together Christianity and Islam.

the aim of promoting greater understanding among Christians and Muslims, does not recognize Chrislam as a movement propagating interfaith dialogue but rather sees it as “cult” or “sect”. The opinion of the NIREC representatives that Chrislam is “unidentifiable” and therefore “heretic”,⁹ was shared by many of my “mainstream” Christian and Muslim interlocutors.¹⁰ The “culture of violence” shaping everyday living in Lagos may explain why an increasing number of Lagosians have turned to Chrislam. It seems that this movement provides its followers with a faith-based community offering support and a road to advancement. This function becomes clear particularly in the Healing School that is organized every Tuesday morning in Chrislam’s headquarters to instruct the participants on how they can deliver themselves from both physical and spiritual afflictions.

Chrislam’s Healing School

A recurring event in Chrislam’s calendar is the Healing School.¹¹ The following case study gives an account of a Healing School that I attended in Chrislam’s worship centre in Ojota, a crowded and lower-middle-class neighbourhood in the north-east of Lagos.¹² The worship centre has features of both a church and a mosque and is referred to as the “Mission” by the worshippers. Whereas most Chrislam services are led by Samsindeen Saka, this Healing School was led by two middle-aged female ministers,¹³ who were trained by the “general overseer” Saka. Since several participants came to the Healing School with pen and paper

⁹ According to one of the NIREC representatives, the proliferation of Chrislam proves “the drama of the end time unfolding”.

¹⁰ For want of a better word, I use the term “mainstream” to distinguish between Christians belonging to the mainline churches and Muslims adhering to Sufi orders or reformist movements on the one hand and Chrislam worshippers on the other.

¹¹ In addition to the Healing School held on Tuesdays, other weekly programmes organized by Chrislam are the Women’s Affairs Programme (organized on Thursdays for newlywed and barren women and offering midwifery services to pregnant women) and the Sunday service. Twice a month, night vigils (prayer sessions held between midnight and dawn) are held on Thursdays and Fridays. Recently, Saka’s wife started a Children’s Programme at the weekends, with the aim of using games to introduce Chrislam’s ideology to the children of the Chrislam worshippers. Every day Saka holds office hours for “counselling” and every Thursday the ministers hold a meeting discussing the state of affairs in Chrislam’s headquarters and the various branches.

¹² In addition to the headquarters in Ojota, Chrislam has three smaller branches in different areas of Lagos, one in the city of Ibadan, three in the capital city of Abuja and one in London.

¹³ Chrislam opposes the hierarchical structure of the Catholic Church and the mosque, in which leadership roles are reserved for men, and has opened up possibilities for female ministers. While the term “minister” has a strong Christian connotation, many ministers have a Muslim background.

ready to “learn”, nobody objected to me taking notes. I was even invited to take photographs, because this was seen as publicity for Chrislam’s “global significance”.

When, after being held up for hours in a “go slow” (pidgin for traffic jam), my colleague Mustapha and I finally arrived at Chrislam’s worship centre at around 9 a.m., we were invited to shelter from the rain in the bookstore, where, in addition to the Bible and Qur’an, religious books written by Saka with revealing titles such as *Today’s Success is Mine* and *Key to Happiness* were sold. Because it was raining, the woman heading the bookstore was not expecting many worshippers to participate in the Healing School. Moreover, it was Ramadan, a busy time for the largely Muslim congregation.¹⁴ I was told that although Chrislam worshippers engage in rituals fusing Christian and Muslim elements, to a certain extent they remain loyal to the religious tradition in which they were born. The bookseller explained that because many Chrislam worshippers were fasting, they were “too tired” to attend the Healing School. While we were chatting in the bookstore, Saka’s black Hummer passed by.¹⁵ He got out, waved at us and, accompanied by his driver holding an umbrella and his wife, entered his office.

When we entered Chrislam’s auditorium – a large room with mirror glass windows and a tiled stage in the middle embellished with plastic flowers – a small group of women and men had assembled around a fenced praying ground that, as we were told, resembled the Ka‘aba in Mecca. While the worshippers ran barefoot around the praying ground containing a well with “holy” water (*Tude* water), they shouted “Amen”, “God bless” and “*Allah Akbar*” (God is Great). After having run seven rounds,¹⁶ they stopped in front of the praying ground to sing:

¹⁴ Saka estimated that about eighty per cent of his followers are Muslims.

¹⁵ While one often sees double-parked cars in front of the many Pentecostal churches in Lagos on Sundays, I noticed that most of the Chrislam worshippers travel by public transportation to the worship centre. In a country where cars are seen as a status symbol, the fact that most Chrislam worshippers do not have a car suggests that they are from a lower-class background. Saka himself drives a Hummer that was given to him by one of his more affluent followers.

¹⁶ This resembles the *sa‘i* ritual during the pilgrimage to Mecca, which consists of running or rapidly walking seven times back and forth between the hills of Safa and Marwah in Mecca. This is a re-enactment of Hagar’s search for water before Allah revealed the water of the Zamzam well to her. During the Chrislam services, I heard Saka and his ministers mentioning the case of Hagar: “Look forward, never backward, so that you will notice the well water that Hagar noticed.”

Oke Tude (Mountain of Losing Bondage), deliver us
Deliver us from the illness in our bodies
Oke Tude, deliver us

This hymn was followed by a prayer for health and wealth for the worshippers, their partners and children and the entire congregation. Showing their humility before God, some worshippers lay down on the floor, while others gesticulated wildly with their hands in what seemed like an attempt to persuade God to shower them with blessings.

Around 10 a.m. a middle-aged woman rang a bell to announce that the Healing School was starting. The worshippers stopped running and sat down on the plastic chairs on the stage (women and men sat separately). Most of the women were dressed African-style, while the men wore trousers and T-shirt. Most women wore a headscarf and some also wore a *hijab* (veil) on top of it. Noticing these veiled women, Mustapha, who is a pious Muslim, shook his head in disbelief: “What are these women doing here? Let them go to the mosque.”

The female minister leading the Healing School, dressed in a colourful African gown and wearing an embroidered shawl around her head, entered the stage, welcomed the participants and the guests (Mustapha and me) and started singing Christian hymns in Yoruba and English,¹⁷ accompanying herself on a bell. The participants sang after her:

Who owns the power?
Jesus owns the power
Jesus owns the power
The everlasting God

The power that never fails
The power of God
The power that never fails
Come down and side with me

While most of the hymns sung by the minister invoked God and Jesus, a few praised the Prophet Muhammad. The hymns were followed by songs of thanksgiving:

Thank you God
For not allowing the world to take away your praises from my mouth
Thank you God
For not allowing the world to turn me into a miserable creature
Thank you God

¹⁷ The programmes organized by Chrislam take place in both Yoruba, one of the *linguae francae* in Nigeria, and the national language of English.

For not allowing the world to take away my good health

While the minister increased the pace, an elderly woman dressed in white, with a headscarf on her head and holding Muslim prayer beads in her hand, started dancing, followed by the other participants.

With her eyes closed and her hands folded before her chest, the minister then struck up Chrislam's anthem in Yoruba:

Our God, the Creator, listen to us
Oh God, bless Prophet Isa [Jesus Christ]
And the Noble Prophet [Muhammad]
Oh God bless Samsindeen [Saka]
And the Noble Prophet

In the meantime, more people, delayed by the rain and “go slows”, had assembled in the worship centre. Altogether around fifty worshippers, the majority of them women, participated in the Healing School.¹⁸

After having sung for about thirty minutes, the minister addressed the participants: “Praise the Lord. Hallelujah. Praise Jesus. *Allah Akbar*. *Amin*.” She told them that after attending today's “lesson”, the participants would witness “miracles” in their lives. This prospect was answered by the participants' enthusiastic shouts of both the Christian “Amen” and the Muslim *Amin*. Then it was time for the main part of the Healing School: the “prayer points”. Prayer points refer to the issues, largely related to health, wealth and success, that Chrislam worshippers pay attention to in their prayers. The worshippers first prayed collectively, led by the minister, and then individually. The minister encouraged them to mention the specific reasons for attending the Healing School, so that they could “open the way for the Lord to enter into their lives.” Because the worshippers were encouraged to pray aloud, I could hear them praying for the success of their businesses, exams or visa applications, and the success in finding a possible partner, getting pregnant or gaining sexual potency. While praying, the worshippers waved and gesticulated with their arms. Some had

¹⁸ Based on participant observation during the Sunday services and night vigils, I estimated that Chrislam's congregation numbers between 500 and 1000 followers. The congregation used to be much bigger but Saka lost many followers after the incident of the stolen baby, an incident that was expatiated on in the Nigerian media. Saka claimed that a 65-year-old follower had gotten pregnant after attending his “miracle baby” night vigil. Actually, it turned out that this woman had stolen another woman's baby from the hospital, pretending it was her own.

their eyes wide open, others closed. Some hit their body or head with their fists in an attempt to empower their prayers, while others swivelled around. A few participants prayed as if they were singing a rap song, accompanying themselves by rhythmically snapping their fingers. Each prayer point was followed by singing, clapping and dancing. By ringing the bell, the minister indicated that it was time for the next prayer point.

The prayer session started with a prayer to thank God for providing for the participants' health, prosperity and protection against "evil powers". The minister shouted through her microphone: "Thank you God that I'm not in the hospital or mortuary, but that I'm here today." After having thanked God exuberantly for His generosity, the session proceeded with a prayer for the forgiveness of sins. The minister told the worshippers that some of their problems were not caused by "witches and wizards" but because of their sins and so they had to pray for forgiveness: "Open your mouth and confess your sins to God. Say 'I'm a sinner.' All sins will be put in the dustbin today." While they were praying for forgiveness of their sins, the worshippers kneeled down and some lay prostrate on the stage.

When everybody stood again, the minister announced the third prayer point, a prayer for purification from "evil powers":

We are here for spiritual sanctification, for cleansing ourselves spiritually. Therefore we should pray vehemently. Angel Uriel, Gabriel, Michael: come down and sanctify us! Whatever you [the worshippers] have swallowed through your mouth, be it a fetish or something else, will come out today. We are here to neutralize all evil powers.

The participants shouted unanimously, "Oh yes". When a newcomer, a young woman, did not pray loud enough in the minister's opinion, she was incited to pray more vehemently: "You should shout for Jesus. I want to hear your voice. Because prayers are vitamins for your soul and the key to your success, you must pray loudly. Are you hearing me?" To give this woman the right example, the worshippers roared.

The atmosphere became more delirious and during the next prayer point – a prayer for "spiritual power" – the participants jumped wildly on the stage, shouting, "Oh Lord, give us the power to conquer our enemies." The minister incited the worshippers: "Hold your neighbour's hands and tell her or him that all evil powers shall be destroyed today." The bell rang as a sign that the worshippers should calm down again, and during the fifth prayer point, seeking for the acceptance of their prayers, they prayed in a more subdued manner. The

minister explained that since it was Ramadan, it was even more important to ask God for the acceptance of one's prayers.

During the next prayer point, a prayer for the protection against "spiritual attacks by witches and wizards", the mood became more elated again, with the participants shouting after the minister: "Today we will set all demonic forces on fire. Today the Holy Ghost Fire will burn down all evil in our lives. Oh yes! We pray to God, Moses and Muhammad. We pray to *Oke Tude*, so that our bodies will be uplifted today and all our problems will be solved." The seventh prayer point was related to the preceding one: a prayer to destroy the "ancestral curses" that are believed to prevent one from prospering: "The curses of our ancestors, both on the paternal and maternal side, will come to an end today." The minister explained this prayer point as follows: "Don't depend on your relatives too much, because they maintain links with the ancestors. Be on your own!"¹⁹ The prospect that one has the possibility of redeeming the past (both the immediate past and the ancestral past) and beginning anew was embraced wholeheartedly by the worshippers, who shouted enthusiastically, "It's true." Although this prayer point incited the worshippers to turn away from their extended families, Chrislam highly values the nuclear family. The last prayer point was therefore a prayer for the worshippers' partners and children. The many childless women in the congregation prayed to God to bless them with the "fruit of the womb".

After the prayer sessions, the minister summoned the participants to give "offerings of thanksgiving": "It's better to give money than to receive it. God will replenish the money you donate today. By donating you make sure that your success will never dry up. God will bring us wealth today. Amen." Before putting the money in a plastic wastebasket that was standing on the stage, the worshippers prayed over the money.

Then it was time for the second part of the Healing School service: religious study. This part was much shorter than the praying sessions. A younger female minister, dressed in a grey woman's suit with a woolly hat, read aloud from the Yoruba version of the Bible. The first minister translated the passages into broken English. They narrated the Bible story about a woman who was possessed by an evil spirit:

¹⁹ On one of the flyers announcing an upcoming night vigil was written "Don't be a woman." When I asked a worshipper, somewhat surprised because the majority of the Chrislam worshippers are female, what was meant by this statement, he explained: "In our society a woman is seen as dependent on her relatives and husband. During the Chrislam services we are taught to be self-reliant."

Praise the Lord. A woman had been ill for eighteen years before she was healed by Jesus. Let us stand up to pray together so that we will be healed in the same way as the woman was. Hold your neighbour's hands and pray so that you will be delivered today. Ask the Holy Spirit to release you from bondage,²⁰ just like Jesus redeemed the possessed woman. The bondage of illness, bareness, deprivation, sorrow and frustration shall be broken today. Amen. In Jesus' mighty name we pray.²¹ Like the people of Israel caused the fall of Jericho, today you will uproot everything that is blocking your way. From today onwards, the devil will not have power over you anymore. One, two, three, let's pray!"

While the participants marched on the stage, in an attempt to trample all evil in their lives underfoot, they sang: "Jericho fall down, fall down today," while making a kind of stroke symbolizing a "breakthrough" in their life. One elderly woman seemed to fall into a trancelike possession. She swivelled around, waving her arms in the air while shouting "Jesus", but suddenly resumed herself and continued praying with the other worshippers.

When the religious study part had come to an end after about fifteen minutes, it was time for the most crucial part of the Healing School: the distribution of *Tude* water. The minister who had earlier led the prayer sessions warned the worshippers that instead of crying over their problems, they should empower themselves by drinking and washing with *Tude* water:

There's power in the water [*Tude* water]. By drinking the water and washing with it, your business will flourish again. You are not supposed to be poor. You should move forward, but the witches and wizards tie you down so that you encounter misfortune. You are working so hard and earning so little, because of the wicked people. Today the bondage will be broken. You will be free from today onwards! You are not justified to be stagnant; in the name of Jesus, you are justified to command progress! In the name of *Oke Tude*, from today onwards stagnation is cursed in your life!

Underlining the importance of thinking positively about themselves, the minister incited the worshippers to laugh and so they alternated their prayers with bursts of laughter. She also ordered them to tell the person sitting next to them that "Today is my day; I will receive my blessing before you. Today is my success."

²⁰ "Bondage" is a widespread concept in Pentecostalism, referring to the idea that in order to be "reborn" believers have to break off the bonds that keep them entangled with their past (Meyer 1998).

²¹ Like Pentecostals, Chrislam worshippers place strong emphasis on the empowering and protective qualities of the name of Jesus (Maxwell 2005: 12-13; Lindhardt 2010: 257).

After having listened to the minister's religious "pep talk" for about twenty minutes,²² the participants were asked: "Put your hands in your pockets in order to donate something [i.e. money]." First those who would donate 200 *Naira* were summoned to walk in the direction of the plastic wastebasket serving as a donation box, followed by those donating 100 *Naira*.²³ Those donating 50 *Naira* or less, i.e. the majority of the worshippers, closed ranks.²⁴ During the donation of the money, the worshippers sang:

We will harvest it, if we wait²⁵
We will harvest it, if we don't backslide
Whatever we give, we will harvest it

After a last prayer for "the Mission" (that is, Chrislam), the minister requested some worshippers to tell what their problem was. Remarkably, they all complained about "itching hands", a condition that the minister explained as metaphoric for the situation they found themselves in: being poor, unemployed and without perspectives. She guaranteed that as soon as they gave their tithes to Chrislam on a monthly basis, their hands would stop itching; a prediction that the worshippers responded to with eager shouts of "Hallelujah" and "*Allah Akbar*". Then an elderly woman came forward to give testimony to the power of prayer. She told the congregation that although she was old, she had the energy to fast during Ramadan because she broke her fast every night by drinking *Tude* water. Upon hearing this testimony, the minister clapped and told the congregation: "Shout Hallelujah. Tell your neighbour: 'My testimony shall be bigger than yours.'"

Around 12 a.m. the two ministers withdrew to the fenced praying ground to bless the *Tude* water, while the participants waited impatiently on the plastic chairs on the stage, eager to being "delivered". After about ten minutes, the worshippers who had earlier donated 200 *Naira* were summoned to come to the well to be purified. Their heads and faces were washed with *Tude* water and afterwards they drank a cup of the water.²⁶ The same procedure was

²² Encouraging the participants to pray loudly, sing, dance and clap, the ministers resembled religious "cheerleaders".

²³ At the time of my research, 100 *Naira* was about US\$ 0.60.

²⁴ This money was later divided among the ministers and part of it was given to Saka to run Chrislam.

²⁵ This line suggests that by donating money, referred to as the "seed of thanksgiving" in Chrislam discourse, the worshippers will harvest its earnings.

²⁶ Healing by means of water is a practice that Chrislam has in common with the Aladura churches. The books and pamphlets published by Saka write that by drinking and/or bathing with *Tude* water the lame have started walking, the blind seeing, the deaf hearing and the

followed with those who had donated notes of 100 or 50 *Naira* or less, but less water was used. Since it was Ramadan, those Muslims who were fasting did not drink the water but were only washed with it. The purification ritual was followed by another three rounds of *Tude* running. With the blessing that “Goodness and mercy shall follow us our entire life, forever and ever,” the ministers concluded the Healing School. While some worshippers continued running *Tude*, others left for the waiting room in front of Saka’s office, willing to wait for hours for a private consultation with “The Man of God”.

Knowledge and Healing

Although the Healing School lacks features of a formal school in that teaching methods and instruction aids, including programmed schedules, curricula, textbooks, blackboards, desks and benches are missing, it is still presented as a school with the aim, according to one of the ministers leading this service, “to teach its participants how to become delivered from all that keeps them in bondage.” Although most of the ministers (female as well as male) leading the Healing School services are not well-versed in either Christianity or Islam, they believed that by attending the services the participants’ religious knowledge would increase. The Healing School is set up as a religious study group in which the participants are instructed in Bible stories and Qur’anic verses and, more importantly, learn how to heal themselves from bodily as well as spiritual afflictions. The participants told me that by attending Healing School they hoped to experience a “breakthrough” in their lives and find a solution for the challenges they were facing, including illness, infertility, impotence, problems in finding a partner, unemployment, failing business, visa rejections, witchcraft attacks and possession by demonic powers.

Why is the Healing School called a “school” although its primary function is not to transmit (religious) knowledge and its format resembles that of many other services taking place in Chrislam that are not designated as “schools”? A first explanation could be the growing intellectualization of Nigeria’s religious landscape under the influence of the Pentecostal movement. Whereas the first two phases in the Pentecostal revival in Nigeria were marked by an accent on spiritualism and a rise of the “prosperity” doctrine, the current phase underscores the need for intellectual reflection (Marshall 2009: 11, 132, 178). According to Marshall (op. cit.: 179-181), in an attempt to underline their charismatic authority, many Pentecostal pastors nowadays qualify themselves as “doctors” and open their

deceased arisen from death. In a corner of the auditorium, close to the well, the crutches of the formerly crippled are the “proof” of the water’s healing power.

own schools, universities and colleges. To avoid losing more followers after the incident of the stolen baby (see note 18), Chrislam could not lag behind in the development toward a higher level of intellectualism. In early 2000, Saka therefore founded the Healing School and opened a bookstore selling a variety of religious books and pamphlets, most of them written by himself.²⁷ Although Saka did not finish secondary school, he calls himself “doctor” since earning a “doctorate in divinity”: “God has planted His wisdom in me. That’s what people noticed and that’s why I have been granted a doctorate from the University of California.”²⁸ In line with his self-designation as a “doctor”, he converted his Sunday sermons into “lectures”:

I used to heal people during my services because my people wanted to witness miracles. Miracles have no long-lasting effect; people soon forget about them. Therefore I now concentrate on lectures instead of miracle services. People learn from my lectures and knowledge is durable. Are you getting me?

Although Saka presented himself to me as a Muslim who has made the pilgrimage to Mecca four times, the case study illustrates that Chrislam actually borrowed many elements from Pentecostalism. Its focus on prayer healing, engagement in lively worship and spirit possession, belief in the power of the Holy Spirit and use of the media in propagating its message, which stimulates the adherents’ aspirations for prosperity and moving forward, all resemble Pentecostal beliefs and practices.²⁹ Remarkably, the style of preaching adopted by Saka and his ministers verbally resembles that of the Pentecostal pastors whose services I attended during my field research. Expressions like “Today is my day” and “I’m a winner/somebody”, inciting the worshippers to a “breakthrough” in their lives, were frequently uttered during both Pentecostal services and Chrislam’s Healing School. Moreover, Chrislam’s interpretation of “deliverance” – referring to the ritual of *Tude* or

²⁷ Saka confided to me that because of his limited education, his English writing skills are poorly developed. He therefore dictates his ideas to his wife and children, who then write them down for him. After he has checked their writings, Saka publishes them on his own.

²⁸ In addition to “doctor”, Saka calls himself a “prophet” (*woli*), because he sees himself as an intermediary between God and his followers and because he can “see” (the term used for prophesy). In Pentecostal authority, however, the mediated access to revelation and vision typical of prophetism has largely disappeared (Van Dijk 2003; Marshall 2009: 191).

²⁹ Nevertheless, some features of Pentecostalism, like speaking in tongues, are missing in Chrislam. A female minister explained, “*Baba* [daddy, i.e. Saka] does not allow us to speak in tongues. When people are in trance, they can say all kinds of things, like ‘your mother is a witch’, ‘you are going to die tomorrow’ and other things that scare off people. Therefore *Baba* does not like it.” Furthermore, Saka uses herbal medicines in healing patients, a practice that the Pentecostal movement dismisses.

“running deliverance”, which is likened to the Muslim practice of circumambulating the Ka‘aba and to Joshua’s army that took Jericho, performed with the aim of freeing oneself from demonic forces – is derived from Pentecostal discourse.

The basic idea of deliverance is that a worshipper’s progress is blocked by evil powers that hold him trapped in bonds with Satan. These powers are personified in Chrislam as “witches and wizards” and function as what Hackett (2003b: 62) terms the “local understandings of human misfortune and spiritual agency” in Nigeria.³⁰ Witches and wizards are proclaimed to reside within society at large, but more particularly within the immediate circle of relatives and neighbours. As Geschiere (1997: 11) points out, witchcraft is the “dark side of kinship”. As in many parts of sub-Saharan Africa, in Chrislam social hierarchy tends to be associated with jealousy and accusations of witchcraft. A broad ethnographic literature has observed that witches often serve as a popular idiom for contemplation of the perils of social inequality and greedy individualism (e.g. Taussig 1980; Comaroff and Comaroff 1993; Geschiere 1997; Meyer 1998, 1999; Newell 2007). Chrislam worshippers participate in the Healing School services to be delivered from these demonic forces. Their deliverance, which is mostly accompanied by possession by the Holy Spirit, is expressed in good health, prosperity and fortune. As in Pentecostalism, deliverance is coupled with a narrative form, that is, testimony, which bears witness to the effectiveness of prayer and demonstrates the worshippers’ redeemed identity (Meyer 1998; Van Dijk 2003: 173-174; Hackett 2003b: 65-66).

Chrislam’s deliverance ideology explains its overall success in Lagos, especially among socially marginalized groups like (barren) women and youth. The common view in Lagos is that Chrislam is a “feminine” religion. In Nigeria, bearing children is necessary for attaining complete social and moral personhood, and childless women are often abandoned by their husbands. Women’s concern to bear and successfully rear children may lead them to the Healing School, which offers them the means to “destroy the yoke of barrenness” and to “restore broken wombs”. Besides women, there are also quite a number of young men active in the Healing School. Some of them participate in the services in the hope of finding a wife

³⁰ Chrislam’s discourse refers to witches and wizards as “wicked people” and associates them with birds, because they are believed to move through the air at night. Whereas a witch could be either female or male, a wizard is always male; and whereas a witch is considered bad, “wizard” has a more positive connotation. During the time he was still an herbalist, Saka’s stage name used to be *Young Wizard*, referring to his power to trace and enfeeble witches. Chrislam worshippers believe that witches and wizards conspire with *jinnns*, Muslim spirits, to block their progress in life.

or moving upward economically. Due to Nigeria's socio-economic crisis, it has become more difficult for young people to reach social maturity through marriage and setting up their own households, and Chrislam seems to offer them the spiritual means, and sometimes also material ones in the form of cheap plots of land to construct a house and capital to set up a business,³¹ to bridge the gap between their aspirations and actual possibilities.

The case study endorses Soares' (2009) argument that there is an increasing tendency among Nigerian Muslims to appropriate elements of Pentecostalism. As he points out in his study of NASFAT (*Nasr Allah al-Fatih Society of Nigeria*, which translates as "There is no help except from Allah") – the largest Islamic organization in contemporary Nigeria – many Muslims in south-western Nigeria, particularly the young ones, are in constant contact with Pentecostalism, which now saturates public life. They are attracted to Pentecostal services and activities with their spirited worship, leadership roles and the health and wealth gospel, to the extent that we may speak of a contemporary move toward "Islamic Pentecostalism" (see also Larkin and Meyer 2006; Peel 2009b). Chrislam's Healing School, a service founded by a Muslim and attended by many Muslims, is a case in point of this tendency. In an interview discussing the organization of Chrislam, Saka confirmed that it is influenced by Pentecostalism but emphasised that Chrislam was his own invention.

Besides the growing "Pentecostalisation" of Nigerian society, Chrislam's Healing School also has to be seen against the background of the crisis of the post-colonial state. A recurrent theme in my conversations with Chrislam worshippers, and to a large extent with other Lagosians as well, was their aspirations for success and prosperity. "Life in Lagos is tough," I was told time and again, and a school diploma was no longer considered sufficient to move upward socially and economically and lead a successful life. Indeed, with the crisis of the Nigerian state, secondary education does not guarantee well-paying employment or access to higher education anymore (see also Lindhardt 2010: 247-248). Due to Nigeria's fraudulent political economy, the opportunity to lead a successful life depends to a large extent on personal connections. As Smith (2007) illustrates, one needs to know the right people in the right positions.

With the influx of oil money, the Nigerian state invested in schools and nationalized Christian missionary schools in the 1970s. In the mid-1970s, primary education for all

³¹ In addition to selling books and other religious products (like *Tude* water and anointment oil) and collecting tithes, "seeds of thanksgiving" and other donations, Chrislam's major source of income is the sale of plots of land at a reduced price to its adherents, whom Saka encourages to "move forward by becoming landlords instead of tenants."

Nigerians was introduced, which led into an enormous increase of the level of literacy. For a long time education has been associated with development, progress and “modernity”, but with the neo-liberal reforms of the 1990s the link between schooling and development declined. Now that formal education no longer automatically leads to a future occupation, many Lagosian youths have become, in Hansen’s terms (2005), “stuck in the compound”. They cannot acquire the resources to marry and move out of their natal homes to create their own households. As a result, they are unable to achieve social maturity. In such a situation, the religious study groups offered by religious organizations, of which Chrislam’s Healing School is but one example, seem a viable alternative to formal education. A Muslim university graduate put it clearly:

In the past, a high school leaver could chose between three or four different well-paying jobs. But nowadays higher education is no longer a guarantee of finding a good job; one also needs to know people and have a lot of luck. With an ever-increasing population and higher levels of inequality, luck has become a factor to take into account. As you probably have noticed, Nigerians explain everything in terms of “good” and “bad luck”. They experience their constrained situation as a form of bondage and turn to religion, which for them is a symbol of hope.

Now that many secondary school graduates often end up in the same informal economy occupations as people who have finished only primary school or are illiterate, Nigerians’ attitude towards education has changed. Instead of the cognitive dimension of knowledge, which focuses on content, Chrislam worshippers attach more value to knowledge’s performative power, claiming that learning is inseparable from doing.³² For them, cognition is not so much a mental process; instead, they link it with practical mastery. In this context Kresse and Marchand (2009) speak of “knowledge in practice”, which they oppose to theoretical knowledge (see also Jackson 1996: 34-36). The meaning of this practical knowledge lies in what is accomplished through it, not in what conceptual order underlies it (op. cit.: 34). Such practical knowledge or “know-how” is acquired not through formal instruction, but by learning certain techniques, acts and gestures that enable the Chrislam worshippers to arm themselves against attacks from the spiritual world, inhabited by witches, wizards and other demonic powers. This know-how helps them to feel healthy and regain control over their lives. Thus, as a particular kind of discursive practice, the Healing School teaches a doctrine that emphasises the efficacy of knowledge. A minister told me: “God is not interested in our faith; to Him it doesn’t matter whether we are Christians or Muslims.

³² Because of Chrislam’s emphasis on doing, I prefer the term “worshipper” to “believer”.

All He is interested in is what we do with our faith.” This putting one’s faith into action is what Saka refers to in his services as making religion “work”.³³ Chrislam’s focus on pragmatism explains why many mainstream Christians and Muslims, who prioritize faith over practice, consider Chrislam worshippers “insincere” and “hypocritical”.

Chrislam’s pragmatic conception of knowledge entails that knowledge is not controlled by a few chosen one (that is, religious specialists) but is, in principle, accessible to everyone. After all, one does not need literate or intellectual expertise to tap into the powers of Christianity and Islam (see also McIntosh 2009: 25). I heard Saka preaching, “We’re all born imams or pastors.” The ministers whom I interviewed all noted that they were not well-versed in religion. Saka appointed them ministers not because of their knowledge of the Bible and/or Qur’an, but because he “saw” in them signs that they were “fit to deal with the spiritual world”. A young woman told me how she became a minister:

After having had several miscarriages, I decided to worship in Chrislam instead of the mosque. I became very active in Chrislam, attending all its services and participating actively in the night vigils. That’s how The Man of God [i.e. Saka] noticed me. He picked me out of his congregation and asked me whether I wanted to become a minister. He told me he had seen special signs in me, but I don’t know what he meant by that. I felt happy that day. When I went home, I discussed it with my husband. After he made the *hajj* [the pilgrimage to Mecca], my husband stopped worshipping in Chrislam. Like many of our husbands, he doesn’t like it there. However, he still uses the *Tude* water and anointment oil I bring home. My husband told me that it was okay if I wanted to become a minister. I went back to The Man of God who anointed me.³⁴ That’s how I became a minister, a worker for God.

A few ministers told me that after receiving a “call from the Holy Spirit”, they went to Saka themselves to inform him that they wanted to do the “work of God”.

After their anointment, Saka instructs the ministers during a three-month internship. A male minister from a Muslim background explained what this internship involves:

The Man of God taught us what he called “spiritual connection”. We were instructed in how to sit on a prayer mat, like Muslims do, for a long time. When we were able to do so, we were trained in meditation. If you meditate, you feel something happening in your body; your body connects with the spiritual world. Through spiritual connection we learned how we could arm ourselves and others against spiritual attacks.

³³ Ministers are often referred to as “workers” in Chrislam discourse.

³⁴ This ritual refers to the act of pouring perfumed oil on the minister’s head.

The ministers whom I interviewed emphasized that the skills they were instructed in during their internship are accessible to all Chrislam worshippers as long as they observe the Chrislam regulations, including *Tude* running, praying vehemently and “vegetarian fasting”.³⁵ Observing these regulations shows, say the ministers, that one “is for God”, implying that one is willing to submit oneself fully to God – be it the Christian god or the Muslim one.

A final conclusion that can be drawn from the case study is that Chrislam is not so much a religion of the head, but more of the body, as reflected in the movement’s emphasis on healing and deliverance. Chrislam worshippers throw their whole body into their religious practice. Many worshippers walk around while praying, moving their bodies. Some lie prostrate on the floor, while others jump. A number seem to borrow movements from professional sports, like swimming, weaving them into their prayers (see also Maxwell 2005: 21). Arms are waved and fists clenched. The whole time there is a great cacophony of sounds as worshippers pray aloud, shouting in a mixture of Yoruba and English. The belief that “a healthy soul lives in a healthy body” and that the body is the site where struggle with the demonic takes place explains why worship in Chrislam has a profound bodily dimension. Successful deliverance from bondage by demonic forces is expressed in trancelike possession, during which the possessed gesticulates dramatically, swivels around, shouts and finally falls on the floor. Being delivered, the body has been transformed. Several interlocutors told me that Saka himself is a good example of this bodily transformation: he started his mission when he was slim but nowadays he is fat, which they interpreted as a sign that he has been “blessed by God”. According to many, his bald head with a fringe of beard “shines with piety”. One Chrislam worshipper told me that his skin colour lightened when he was “delivered from evil”. It may thus be concluded that the knowledge transmitted in the Healing School is not so much “knowledge of the mind” but rather “knowledge of the body” (see also Jackson 1996: 34).

³⁵ Chrislam worshippers are expected to engage in “vegetarian fasting” on Thursdays. The idea behind this fasting is that worshippers have to “torment the flesh” in order to be “delivered from evil”. In addition to the vegetarian fasting, many worshippers from a Muslim background fast during Ramadan and those from a Christian background during Lent. This demonstrates that although Saka fuses Christian and Muslim elements, becoming a “*Tude* member” does not involve giving up one’s previous religious affiliation entirely.

Conclusion

In a setting marked by disillusion and blocked aspirations, it seems that Chrislam worshippers have found in the institution of the Healing School a “spiritual economy” (Rudnycky 2009) that offers a refuge from the disruption caused by neo-liberal reforms and promises socio-economic progress by providing guidelines on coping with difficult life circumstances. For example, a former “area boy” told me that his participation in Chrislam prevented him from “going astray”:³⁶

I used to be a boxer, always engaged in street fights, you know. When my mother, a pious Muslim, introduced me to Chrislam and I started attending their programmes frequently, my life changed. I stopped fighting. Nowadays I fight only for God’s sake. All over the world, and in Nigeria in particular, Christians and Muslims are fighting and Christians and Muslims are also fighting among themselves. Why are we fighting when we all descend from Abraham? In Chrislam, Christians and Muslims pray together; we love each other and we find comfort in religion. By singing, clapping and dancing together, we forget about our problems. That is why I love Chrislam. I call The Man of God a father, who takes care of his congregation and disciplines us, and I call the congregation my brothers and sisters. We form one large family.

What this narrative tells us is that Chrislam, a quintessential popular religion, functions as a social safety net that provides support, security and a network to those struggling for survival in the specific conditions of neo-liberal Lagos. In the face of state retrenchment and growing levels of violence and crime, Chrislam thus offers an alternative mode of life (see also Maxwell 2005: 6).

This alternative mode of life is attracting especially women and youths, who have no or only limited access to formal education, or who have lost trust in it. It emerged that socio-economic and religious change has initiated an epistemic shift in Nigerian society. Whereas religious forms of schooling are generally informed by what Brenner (2000) calls an “esoteric episteme” – in which religious knowledge is perceived as hierarchical, thereby restricting its access and control to a limited number of specialists who are believed to occupy a higher level of spirituality – in Chrislam’s Healing School pragmatics conditions knowledge. The aim of the Healing School is to teach the participants how they can “break their bondage”, so that they will become successful in life. This know-how is not restricted by gender, age, ethnicity, class, education or religious background. As preached by Saka, everybody can learn

³⁶ “Area boys”, or youth gangs, are associated with crime and violence in Lagos (Momoh 2000).

how to become his or her own pastor or imam, which explains the popularity of the Healing School.

Rather than tearing Nigeria apart, religion provides Chrislam worshippers with an instrument to cope with the ordeal of everyday living. With its ideology of deliverance from bondage and the promise of healing, the Healing School offers them a powerful discourse of hope.³⁷ In an era in which schooling no longer ensures young Nigerians' future, they place their hope in other avenues of upward social and economic mobility. During the Healing School services, the participants learn how they can become somebody, a "winner" in Chrislam discourse, by taking control of their own lives. It remains to be seen whether Chrislam's pragmatic approach to religion will draw in more Nigerians trying to survive in a complex world in which they are no longer sure what to believe, or whether it will, in the long term, have a secularising effect, deterring believers who see in it a corrupted faith that will ruin Nigeria further.³⁸

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³⁷ Unlike psychology and philosophy, anthropology has largely ignored "hope" as a descriptive and analytical category. An exception is Crapanzo's (2003) reflection on hope as a category of social analysis. But while Crapanzo (op. cit.: 6, 19) argues that hope is the "passive counterpart" of desire, in that "one acts on desire" whereas "hope bucks the activism (call it 'agency') that founds our understanding of social action", the participants in the Healing School see hope as an active and agentive modality that encourages them to change their lives fundamentally and to "move forward" (see also Cole and Durham 2008: 15-18).

³⁸ In the 1990s, a time of neo-liberal reform and the criminalization of the political economy in Nigeria, a public debate arose revolving around the question whether religious leaders who were involved in mixing religious traditions had spiritual powers (expressed in their ability to heal, exorcise and prophesize) or were just "419" (419 is what Nigerians call fraud, apparently after a section in the Nigerian criminal code, see Smith 2007).

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