

## BOOK REVIEW

Abimbola Adelokun. *Performing Power in Nigeria: Identity, Politics and Pentecostalism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022. 268 pp. \$98.41. Hardback. ISBN: 978-1-108-83107-9.

*Performing Power in Nigeria: Identity, Politics, and Pentecostalism* is deeply immersed in its subject, with Pentecostal parlance permeating every part, including its acknowledgment pages. Phrases such as “testimony” and “destiny helpers” immediately engage readers, inviting them into the discourse. The creative use of biblical coinages such as “mixed multitude” and “noisome pestilence,” along with other instances of Pentecostal language, gradually introduce the concept of power as framed in Nigerian Pentecostalism. Readers can trace how “performing power” evolves into a central thesis, making the book a powerful resource for discussions of power politics in Nigerian Pentecostalism. The book itself adopts a performance style, vividly demonstrating in words the performance culture inherent in Nigerian Pentecostalism.

The book excels in scholarly self-reflexivity, allowing responses from research subjects to influence its thoughts and arguments. For instance, the author’s incorporation of a Pentecostal pastor’s analogy of “performing power” effectively sets the tone for the nuanced arguments throughout the book. The first chapter makes consistent connections between film, Pentecostalism, and politics, exemplifying the author’s admirable interdisciplinary reach and depth of knowledge. Chapter One continues the tone set in the introduction by reflecting on the manifestation of power identity as embodied in films with a Pentecostal orientation. In these films, Pentecostal-style prayers become a powerful tool for suppressing evil. The chapter establishes the connections between the ideology in these films and the sociopolitical milieu that produced them, arguing that the oppressive political atmosphere of the 1990s, among other factors, drew citizens to the divine intervention preached both on the church altar, and films like *Agbara Nla* (1993). Through a brilliant comparative analysis of *Agbara Nla* (1993) and *Abejoye* (2020), Adelokun reviews the evolution of Pentecostalism and social changes in Nigeria.

In Chapter Two, readers benefit from the researcher’s positionality as a diaspora African who makes frequent visits to the homeland. The book smoothly transitions across spaces and disciplines, building on the argument of Pentecostal incursion into the political arena by analyzing instances of Muslim–Christian combat for political relevance. *Performing Power* skillfully balances arguments and case studies familiar to Nigerian readers, such as Oyedepo’s famous assertion that pastors wield greater power than politicians, with the illustration of a sitting president kneeling in public before a popular Pentecostal general overseer for


prayers, followed by imminent victory. The book is brilliant in its continuous connection of issues, tying together broad events initially conceived as isolated cases.

Chapter Three, like a typical Nollywood movie, opens sensationally with a viral confession of a sexual escapade between a church worker and a famous Pentecostal pastor. The book seamlessly connects chapters; for instance, Chapter Two ends with the local word “Ayelujara,” meaning the internet’s ability to connect the world. Chapter Three builds on this to explore how the internet and social media, through #MeToo, connect the world on common goals, reconnecting to performance theory by exemplifying how Pentecostal pastors perform identity on social media, employing visual images of themselves as symbols of power. This imagery extends to the technological setup in the church, where lights, sound, and screens empower Pentecostal pastors, inspiring awe in their congregation members. The chapter also demonstrates how pastors utilize church aesthetics and acoustics, incorporating singing, jokes, prayers, and other sensational activities that captivate the audience. For the prosperity gospel of the Pentecostals to find expression, it has had to revise itself to be as glamorous and visually appealing as is social media. Particularly entertaining and intellectually gratifying is the deployment of the Nigerian pidgin slang “see finish” as a concept to interrogate the once larger-than-life images created by Pentecostal pastors, which become demystified on social media platforms. The power of Pentecostal pastors is examined and cross-examined outside the exotic spirituality offered by the church.

Chapter Four (“Everything Christianity/the Bible Represents Is Being Attacked on the Internet!”: The Internet and Technologies of Religious Engagement) benefits from the solid background provided by Chapter Three. Now, the public, via the internet, bypasses church authority and is empowered to speak back to the once highly exalted Pentecostal pastors. The internet, which had been a site of influence, becomes a site of contestation. Chapter Five builds on the lively environment Pentecostal churches nurture, encouraging the rise of third-generation stand-up comedians. The book does not paint Pentecostalism as entirely extortionist but balances the argument by highlighting the supportive environment created by many Pentecostal pastors. However, it complicates the narrative by discussing the controlled atmosphere in which comedians perform, unable to criticize pastors and instead making jokes that promote and magnify their powerful office. In the final chapter, the book explores how naming ceremonies perform power for Pentecostal Christians by creating an identity of power. The book concludes by expressing the powerlessness and frustration that COVID-19 brought upon the Pentecostals, as the pandemic took the world by surprise.

*Performing Power in Nigeria: Identity, Politics, and Pentecostalism* is an indispensable academic resource, offering sound theoretical insights in an accessible manner for scholars at any level, across diverse disciplines and cultural contexts. The author adeptly connects the central thesis of performing power identity in Pentecostalism to governance, politics, economics, and the cinematic world.

The book's relevance extends beyond its primary audience, serving as a model for constructing interdisciplinary arguments.

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doi:10.1017/asr.2024.154