Identity mapping strategies-cum-ideologies in selected Yoruba Christian songs among Yoruba Christians in Nigeria

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Abstract

Ideology and identity are two inseparable phenomena that characterise the existence of mankind. As human beings, even when we share a common identity as a people of the same faith, members of the same family, and members of the same society, there are certain ways through which we either consciously or unconsciously create different identities for ourselves; a reflection of our cultural ideologies. This paper examines how Yoruba Christian songs are employed by Yoruba Christian faithful in Nigeria to identify with Yoruba belief system while mapping different individualistic identities among themselves. Employing Staszak's concept of Otherness, which is an ideological phenomenon inherent in the Yoruba cultural system, for data analysis, we discovered that although Yoruba Christiansin Nigeria identify with the generic reference term of 'brethren' in their gatherings, they still create different individualistic identities, Self and Other, for themselves through their songs. Similarly, they identify with some aspects of the Yoruba ideological belief system, as evidenced by the selected songs.

Keywords: Identity, ideologies, otherness, Yoruba Christian songs, Nigeria

1.   Introduction

It is often the case that individuals sharing a common faith and belief system want to maintain the same identity, hence generic tag names such as Christians, Muslims, Bhudists, and so on. However, more often than not, members of these religious sects do carve out separate identities for themselves through their actions and practices in their gatherings and church services; identities that point to the sense of individuality that marks the competitive world in which we live as rational and 'self-centred' and self-oriented beings. In Christendom in particular, Christians would to refer to one another as children of God (brethren), joint heirs with Jesus in God's kingdom, as a mark of solidarity among themselves, as a people of a common faith, race and purpose (Acts, pp. 44-47). Interestingly however, in spite of this sense of collectivism and communialism among them, individual Christians have ways of asserting their sense of individuality and individualism in their practices and activities in their gatherings and church services.

In view of this therefore, this work sets out to give insights into the identity mapping strategies and ideologies inherent in some Yoruba Christian songs commonly sung in Pentecostal and orthodox Yoruba churches in Nigeria.

2.   The Yoruba People and Their Belief System

The Yoruba are largely found in the South-Western part of Nigeria, precisely in states such as Oyo, Ogun, Ondo, Ekiti, Osun and Lagos. Yoruba-speaking communities are equally found in countries such as Benin Republic, Togo, Brazil and Cuba. The Yoruba are a people with one of the richest and diverse ways of life in Africa. The Yoruba-speaking peoples, even when separated geographically, are unified by a similar cultural orientation (although with minor differences), which manifests in their beliefs, values, customs, practices and social behaviours, as reflected in their arts, music, political institution, local economy, family structure, burial, cuisine, numerals, literature and other related activities which characterise their ways of life. People hold their beliefs in high esteem, even in the face of modern day Christianity that pervades every nook and cranny of the

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geographical areas occupied largely by the people. In other words, while they profess a form of Christianity - one identified with Christ and his teachings on living for others as a mark of identity - many also still hold tightly to the socio-cultural belief system of the Yoruba.

Among the many elements of belief system that binds the Yoruba people together is their belief in the existence of supernatural forces that control the affairs of man in the world. Several scholarly works have attested to this. For instance, Borokini and Lawal (2014) commented on the general belief among the Yoruba that certain supernatural forces are often behind all sicknesses experienced by human beings. These forces include familiar spirits, sorcerers, witches and wizards, oriental spirits, spirit gulch and religious spirits. These are habitually referred to as enemies. As argued by these scholars, even when one has a common headache, it is often considered to be an attack from the spirit world. Similarly, Odejobi (2014) submits the Yoruba belief in the existence of creatures known as "*Irúnmalẹ̀, Àjìjà* or *Ààjà* (spirit of whirlwind with knowledge of the use of herbs), *Àrọ̀nì* (a spirit with one leg that teaches the use of herbs), *Egbére* (a smallish elf that carries a small mat and weeps all the time), *ọ̀rọ̀* (spirits of trees), *ẹbọra* and/or *iwin* (a being believed to live in the ground, rock, forest or hill)" (Odejobi, 2014, p. 586). These supernatural forces are sometimes benevolent or malevolent. In the same vein, Opefeyitimi (2009) sheds light on the existence of supernatural forces who control the affairs of man in the world, placing emphasis on the role women play in this regard.

The Yoruba, as part of their belief system, believe in the existence of two worlds - the visible world of the living, which is called *Aye,* and the spiritual world of the *Orisas*, the ancestors and spirits, which is called Ọ̀run (George & Amusan, 2012). *Ayé* is the world in which human beings (mortal beings) live, while Ọ̀run is the home of God and the gods (immortal beings). It is equally worthy to note that the Yoruba habitually refer to the powerful forces of the world as *Ayé*. For instance, anyone experiencing any form of misfortune could be talked about as follows: *Ayé ń bá a jà* 'the forces of the world are fighting him/her', *Ayé ń tẹ́ lé e* 'the powerful forces of the world are pursuing him/her. This ideological belief

often manifests in Yoruba Christian songs in their gatherings and church services. One such song, commonly sung in the Cherubim and Seraphim church, is presented below.

Example 1:

> Ọlọ́run mi mó n bẹ̀bẹ̀
> Ma jẹ káyé ṣe mi oo
> Ayé ló ṣe Samson, álàgbárá
>
> *My God I plead with you*
> *Don't let me be attacked by the forces of the world*
> *The forces of the world were responsible for the fall of the powerful Samson*[1]

In the excerpt presented above, it is believed that the enemies of Samson, the Philistines, were the *Ayé* (enemies) behind his eventual fall. They sought every means of getting rid of him in spite of the supernatural power he possessed (see details in the book of Judges, chapters 13-16).

There are many passages of the scripture that attest to the existence of *Ayé* (enemies, powerful forces of the world) just as the Yoruba conceive of the concept. One such passage is found in Galatians 6, verses 11 and 12 as follows, with particular emphasis on the words in bold.

> Put on the whole armour of God that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against **principalities** and **powers**, against the **rulers of the darkness of this world**, **against spiritual wickedness in high places** (Bible, 1982).

In the excerpt above, the nexus between the Christian ideological belief and that of the Yoruba in the existence of supernatural forces that rule over the earth, and as such control the affairs of human beings on earth is established. This passage of the scripture, among similar others, may be the ideological inspiration behind many (Yoruba) Christian songs on warfare and the belief in the existence

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[1] The Biblical Samson

of supernatural powers as evident in some of the songs selected for analysis in this paper.

The Yoruba believe in *Olódùmarè* (the Supreme God) who rules over the entire world, having many other gods underneath him. This Supreme God of the world is referred to as *Ọlọ́run*. *Ọlọ́run* is believed to live in the sky in company of other gods, (among whom are man's ancestors).

Another phenomenon that characterises the belief system of the Yoruba is the concept of *orí* (destiny). The Yoruba believe every individual has his or her *orí* that makes him or her different from another person. At this juncture, an exploration of the concept of *orí* will be pertinent. According to Hallen and Sodipo (1986, p. 105), every individual is a composite of three different concepts-*ara* (body), *ẹ̀mí* (life-giving element) and *orí* (Spiritual head believed to be responsible for human destiny). We are going to dwell more on the concept of *orí* here, considering its relevance to this work. As argued by Balogun (2007), *orí*, otherwise known as 'inner-head', is responsible for a person's personality and destiny; it is believed to be intractably connected with human destiny (p. 118). It is this phenomenon that is responsible for the realisation of the worth of human beings in the world. He concludes by asserting that *orí* is considered as the personal god of an individual which takes care of an individual and his or her personal interest. This explains why it is believed by the people that whatever *orí* does not approve for one, one cannot get it from God and the gods (Abimbola, 1971, p. 76).

In the opinion of Idowu (1962, p. 170), *orí* is not just the determiner of destiny, but also the essence of human personality that rules, controls and dictates the activities of the person. Since it is what defines a person, every individual is saddled with the responsibilty of protecting his or her *orí*. Individuals are also expected to do everything possible to be in good terms with their *orí* so that their destiny would not be thwarted.

What comes to mind from the positions of the scholars cited above is the idea that as long as human beings have different *orí*, they have different destinies, hence their different identities.

3.   Some Areas of Similarity between the Yoruba Cultural Practices and Christian Doctrines

Although Christianity has come to label many Yoruba cultural practices such as making of sacrificial rituals, and marrying of more than one wife, as being fetish and barbaric and as such should be abolished, keen observation has shown that there are areas of convergence between the two. For instance, it has been observed that both cannot do without songs in their practices and gatherings. Just as songs are rendered in the Yoruba traditional worship and practices, they are also found in Christian gatherings, especially church services. They both make use of songs and drums (although not all churches employ drums) in their gatherings and activities, especially during worship.

Another aspect of the Yoruba culture that manifests in Christian practices is the concept of divination. According to Jegede (2010), divination as a cultural practice, is an attempt to foretell the future, to have knowledge of the inexplicable and sometimes to know the wishes of divinities, gods, goddesses and spirits which they worship. In the Yoruba traditional system, it is often the case that people consult witch doctors, Ifa priests, and custodians of the gods to gain a glimpse of what the future holds for them, or whenever they are at a crossroads over different issues. These individuals are believed to understand the voice of the gods, hence are able to convey messages from the gods to them. This practice is also found among (the Yoruba) Christians in Nigeria. Looking through the signposts and programmes of many Christian churches in Nigeria, it is commonplace to come across captions such as 'Counselling Session'. These counselling session periods, as our observations have shown, are periods during which pastors and church leaders attend to individuals who have come for one form of consultation or another. Some could go for consultation over an unpalatable situation they are passing through, some consult to seek the mind of

God concerning the future, and so on. Therefore, just as the custodians of the gods in the Yoruba traditional belief are believed to help people offer solutions to their different problems, so are pastors and church leaders believed to help receive solution to the problems of their 'clients' and members from God.

Both equally believe in the power and potency of prayer. In other words, both believe in the use of spoken words to call into being their desires. This becomes obvious in the prayers often made in Yoruba traditional events and occasions, most times backed up with words of incantation on the one hand, and the incessant quoting of the scriptures by Christian worshippers and faithful in their communication with God through their words of prayer. The excerpts below are examples of the use of incantation and Biblical quotations in Yoruba and Christian prayers, respectively.

Yoruba incantation

Gbégbé kì í gbé s'óko
Odíderí kì í kú s'óko ìwájẹ
Àlùkò kì í kú s'óko ìkosùn
Agbe kì í kú s'óko ìdáró
Ẹyẹ kì í fò k'ó f'orí sọ'gi
Omi kì í ṣàn k'ó p'ojú w'ẹ̀hìn

Gbegbe is not lost in the bush
Odidere does not die in search for food
Aluko does not die in the process of dyeing its feather
Agbe does not die in its mission of dyeing its feather
A bird does not miss its flying path
A fish does not miss its bearing in the sea
A river does not miss its running course   (Fabunmi, 1987)

Christian prayer

It has been written
I shall be the head, and not the tail
It has been written
No weapon formed against me shall prosper
It has been written
The Lord shall perfect that which concerns me..........

This position is affirmed by Ogungbile (1997), who paints a vivid description of the aspect of similarity in the Yoruba traditional system and Christianity, especially as it relates to prayers in the Aladura churches. In fact, just as the Yoruba traditionalists pray (incantate) on concoction to achieve certain purposes, so do pastors and church leaders in Christendom quote scriptures when they pray on oil, water and handkerchief to effect healing or a major breakthrough of one form or another.

4.   The Concepts of Identity and Ideology

Different schools of thoughts differ in their opinions on the conception of the concept of ideology, hence, the description of the term as 'a system of beliefs; false consciousness or misguided beliefs; as a general notion; and as the basis of social practices. These are highlighted below.

4.1   Ideology as a System of Beliefs

In this regard, ideology is seen as something that has to do with systems of ideas, especially with the social, political or religious ideas shared by a social group or movement. Therefore, we speak of communism, anti-communism, socialism and liberialism, feminism and sexism, racism and anti-racism, pacifism and militarism as examples of ideologies. Members of a group who share the same ideologies stand for the same number of ideas that form the basis of their beliefs about the world. From the above, it is established that ideologies are the fundamental or basic beliefs of a group and its members.

4.2   Ideology as False Consciousness or Misguided Beliefs

Within the Marxist school of thought, ideologies are seen as forms of false consciousness, that is, popular but misguided beliefs formed by the ruling class so as to concretize their class authority and conceal the real socioeconomic situations of workers. This view of ideology is a central element in the commonsense and political uses of the term, viz as a system of false, misguided,

or misleading beliefs (van Dijk, 2006). For example, in the ideology of anti-communism which dominated the politics and scholarship of the Western world, ideology was associated with communism.

4.3 Ideology as a general notion

Looking at ideology from this perspective allows for the recognition of 'positive' ideologies like those of feminism and the oppositional ideology such as racism as being functionally the same. This is because these anti-ideologies (as anti-racism, anti-sexism) do not just oppose racism or sexism, but have their own ideology. In other words, they are ideologies that sustain and legitimatise opposition and resistance against domination and social inequality. Therefore, they equally have their own idelogies.

4.4 Ideology as the Basis of Social Practices

Here, ideology is seen as what social groups or movements have come to believe and uphold, which form the basis of the social practices of the members of the group. Therefore, feminism as an idelogy may be at the basis of gender descrimination, and pacifist ideologies may be at the basis of protest against nuclear weapons. From the foregoing therefore, it suffices to conclude that ideologies constitute the bedrock upon which the social beliefs and characteristics of a group in terms of their identity, position in the society, interests and relations to other groups are built.

All these are in line with the position of Coward and Ellis (1977, p. 6) as cited in Hutcheon (1991), who opine that ideology both constructs and is constructed by the way in which we live our role in the social totality, and by the way we represent that process in art. In other words, all social activities and practices are informed by ideology, such that it determines the ways in which what we say and believe connects with the power-structure and power relations of the society we live as human beings (Eagleton, 1983, p. 14 cf. Hutcheon, 1991). From the positions of these scholars, it may be deduced that ideology is the rationale behind what we do, what we say, how we say it, and the purpose we intend to

achieve by what we say, etc (Ajayi & Ajayi, 2014), and a phenomenon that determines the worldview of a people as opposed to others.

In the opinion of North (1981, p. 49), ideologies have three characteristic features, viz ideology is an economizing device by which individuals come to terms with their environment and are provided with a "worldview" so that the decision-making process is simplified; ideology is inextricably interwoven with moral and ethical judgements about the fairness of the world the individual perceives; and individuals alter their ideological perspectives when their experiences are inconsistent with their ideology. In effect, they attempt to develop a new set of rationalizations that are a better "fit" with their experiences.

Ideology has been described as a crucial social phenomenon in the construction of identities (Nwagbo, 2014). Ideologies are established belief systems, values, attitudes, and assumptions shared by members of a particular social group (Fairclough, 1995, Bloor & Bloor, 2007), as opposed to members of another group. In other words, a people of a given social group will do things in a particular way and manner, as a mark of beliefs that differentiate them from other group(s) in the society. As individuals grow in a larger society, they consciously become aware of the social group to which they belong and the group they do not belong to. Sometimes, this social group identity reflects in language, dressing, food, faith, etc. Generally, people become conscious of *Self* and *Other*, and then begin to associate more with their in-group members than their out-group members (Nwagbo, 2014).

Bloor and Bloor (2007), commenting on the relationship between ideology and identity, submit that one of the outcomes of belief system is prejudices which are powerful assumptions with respect to the identity of the Self in contrast with the Other, thus, the Self is cheered and the Other is jeered. Bloor and Bloor (2007) accentuate their argument with the excerpt below.

> Fundamental to prejudice is the simple dichotomy of *Us* and *Them*, the Self and the Other. Prejudice of this kind can exist at all sorts of levels, using an enormous range of criteria in order to distinguish the Other from Self: social class, skin colour, language, nationality, dialect, indigene,

gender, sexual preference, place of birth, ancestral origins,
social customs. People generally think that the ways in
which their social group does things are natural and that
alien practices are aberrant (p. 128).

From the foregoing, it suffices to assert that ideology is a tie that binds individuals sharing a common perception on a phenomenon, what marks their identity as members of a people sharing similar worldview.

5.   Theoretical Issues: Other(ness) as an Ideological Concept in the Yoruba Worldview

Discussions on the concept of Other(ness) have originated from the social scientists, among whom other(ness) is conceptually and consensually taken as a phenomenon that defines and differentiates one from another. In the opinion of Simmel (1971), the Other, "is the Stranger who is beyond being far and near. The *Stranger* is said to be an element of the group itself, not unlike the poor and sundry 'inner enemy'—an element whose membership within the group involves both being outside it and confronting it" (Simmel, 1971, p. 144). Lamont and Fournier (1992) argue that defining the Other requires drawing a demarcation between real or symbolic boundaries. These boundaries, according to these scholars, lead to internal differentiation creating social, cultural, and moral categories. They also generate hierarchies among cultures. Also echoing the position above, Baudrillard and Guillaume (1994, p. 50) claim other(ness) is crossing a boundary, and a boundary can be imaginary and invisible. To them, with the use of otherness, territorial, cultural, and political boundaries can be marked among human beings. As far as territorial boundaries are concerned, they define the political unity of nations, the boundaries of an "US" which is nourished and promoted by a national rhetoric and historical experiences. The passage from cultural boundaries to political boundaries is realized through the institutionalization of sameness and difference, a process through which identities, whether religious, linguistic, racial, are elaborated (Kastoryano, 2000, p. 78).

What becomes clear from the discussion above is the fact that each society has its Otherness. Society in this context implies any group of individuals bound by a certain identity- village, city, nation, religious sect, etc. This explains why France and the United States, for instance, − two different countries having two different historical contexts − are today experiencing the same tensions between *universalism* and *particularism* but practice very different modes of inclusion and exclusion (Kastoryano, 2000). Similarly, the concept of other(ness) explains the multiplicity of doctrines in Christendom, leading to the many sects and denominations found in Christendom. It therefore suffices to say that other(ness) is a phenomenon that fundamentally defines rational human beings. In other words, other(ness) is the ideological brain behind our cultural, national, ethnic, political, racial, and religious differences (to mention a few).

The concept of other(ness) is a phenomenon that has also been extensively examined by philosophers and language specialists. In their discussions, they appear to agree with sociologists that other(ness) is a phenomenon that reinforces how an individual is different from another person (Sarukkai, 1997). It explains how majority and minority identities are constructed in societies across the world. Otherness is defined as possession of unfamiliar and/or inexplicable features (Murdick *et al*., 2004). It may include features that are familiar but which are rejected as a result of the responsibilities placed on the society in which the 'other' appears (Smart, 2001). In Staszak's (2008) opinion, otherness is a product of a process by which a dominant in-group (US, the Self) constructs one or many dominated out-groups. In other words, Otherness is a phenomenon that advances the cause of a group over and above the cause of others. The creation of otherness connotes applying a principle that allows individuals to be categorised into two classes: *them* and *us*. In the words of Staszak (2008), otherness and identity are two conceptual elements which go hand in hand. The Other only exists relative to the self and vice versa (Staszak, 2008, p. 2). Central to Staszak's conception of otherness is power asymmetry. Only the dominant group occupies a position where they can impose the value of their

particularity, that is, their identity and to devalue the particularity of others. This work adopts, with slight modification, Staszak's (2008) view of Otherness.

Our conception of otherness in this work, although agrees with that of Staszak (2008) in terms of it being a reflection of identity and ideology, differs in the sense that it is not centred on the concept of power or dominance as stated in the explanation of Staszak. We see otherness here as a marker of identity and ideology employed by the Yoruba to assert their sense of individualism in spite of their sense of collectivism, a phenomenon with which social and personal identities are constructed in Christendom, as depicted in the songs selected for analysis in this paper. In other words, we see the concept of otherness as an ideological phenomenon inherent in the cultural belief of the Yoruba, which manifests itself in many of the songs sung by Yoruba Christian faithful in their gatherings and church services.

The Yoruba, as a people, believe in both principles and ideologies of collectivism and individualism, as depicted in the proverbs below.

Example 2:

Àgbájọ ọwọ́ láfi ń sọ̀yá, àjèjì ọwọ́ kan ò gbẹ́rù dórí
In unity we make great exploits, not much can be achieved individually
(United we stand, divided we fall)

Example 3:

Èyí wù mí ò wù ọ́, ní kò jẹ́ kọ́mọ ìyá kan fẹ́ obìnrin kan náà
What pleases you might not please me, hence our different choices and desires
(One man's food is another man's poison)

Example 2 above demonstrates the sense of collectivism inherent in the Yoruba socio-cultural-cum-ideological system. However, this same set of people still go head to assert their sense of individualism in the proverb captured in Example 3. What this suggests is the fact that the Yoruba are a people who believe in collectivism, but also express their sense of individualism whenever the situation demands.

6.   Methodology

This work employs the ethnographic methods of data collection, that is, participant and non-participant observation methods. In the case of the use of the participant observation method, the researcher was personally involved as a worshipper in the church services where some of the selected songs featured. Songs gathered using the non-participant method are those observed to be commonly sung in church services and Christian gatherings. Interestingly, these songs are such that are featured in Pentecostal and orthodox churches, including the popular ones such as Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG), Christ Apostolic Church (CAC), Mountain of Fire and Miracle Ministries (MFM), Cherubim and Seraphim (C&S), Celestial Church of Christ (CCC), among others. Ten songs, which are highly representative of the many songs in this category, have been purposively selected for analysis in this paper. The selection of songs was based on their reflection of the issues which constitute the thematic focus of the paper.

The data gathered are subjected to content and critical analysis, with particular emphasis on the manifestation of the Yoruba ideological-cum-socio-cultural concept of *otherness*, which strongly manifests in the selected Yoruba Christian songs.

7.   Data Presentation and Analysis

7.1   Identity Mapping Strategies and Ideologies in the Selected Songs

7.1.1   *Self* first, *Others* follow

It has often been argued in different quarters that human beings are naturally 'selfish' or better put 'self-oriented'. This phenomenon manifests itself in the rat race that characterises the existence of man, as man often tries to outsmart or outshine the other, hence the competitive world man lives in. Yoruba Christians, even when they are a 'people' of common faith, belief system, and kingdom-family (children of one God), more often than not manifest the ideology of *Self*

first, Others follow in their gatherings, especially church services. This is considered to be a mark of their identification with the Yoruba belief system. This is evident in the songs presented below.

Excerpt A: Intercessory prayer session (usually sung in a call and response manner)

> Evangelist: ***Èmi*** ni màà ḳọ́ḳọ́ jẹri ságbára *Ólúwa* (pointing to himself)
> *I will be the first to testity to the power/mighty act of God/Lord/God*

> Congregation: ***Èmi*** ni màá ḳọ́ḳọ́ jẹri ságbára Ólúwa (each person pointing to
> him/herself)
> *I will be the first to testity to the power/mighty act of God*
> Evangelist: ***Èmi*** ni màá ḳọ́ḳọ́ ra mọ́tò ayọ̀ lọ́dún yìí
> *I will be the first to buy a car this year*

> Congregation: ***Èmi*** ni màá ḳọ́ḳọ́ ra mọ́tò ayọ̀ lọ́dún yìí
> *I will be the first to buy a car this year*
> Evangelist: ***Èmi*** ni màá ḳọ́ḳọ́ lọ sAmerica nílé ***mi***
> **I** will be the first to travel to America in ***my*** household

> Congregation: ***Èmi*** ni màá ḳọ́ḳọ́ lọ sAmerica nílé ***mi***
> ***I*** *will be the first to travel to America in **my** household*
> Lead: Praise the Lord
> Congregation: Halleluyah

Excerpt B: Intercessory prayer session

> Call: ***Èmi*** lókù níléé wa tó ma làlùyọ
> *I am the next to succeed/ experience breakthrough in my household*
> Response: ***Èmi*** lókù níléé wa tó ma làlùyọ
> *I am the next to succeed/ experience breakthrough in my household*
> Call: ***Èmi*** lókù lẹ́bíí wa tó ma làlùyọ
> *I am the next to succeed/ experience breakthrough in **my** family*
> Response: ***Èmi*** lókù lẹ́bíí wa tó ma làlùyọ
> *I am the next to succeed/ breakthrough in **my** family*

Excerpt C: Praise session

> **PL**[2]***:*** ***Émí*** ní Jesù fẹ́; Ó fẹmi yéye
> *I am the one Jesus loves; He loves me so much*
> ***Émí*** ní Jesù fẹ́ràn jẹni kẹ́ni lọ
> ***I*** *am the one Jesus loves more than anyone else*
> Ó rá ***mí*** padà lọ́wọ́ ikú òjiji
> *He rescued **me** from sudden death*
> Áyọ́ ígbalà ***mi*** wá di pupọ̀ rẹpẹtẹ

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[2] Praise Leader

*The joy of **my** salvation is bountifully multiplied*

Congregation: **Émí** ní Jesù fẹ́; Ó fẹ́mi yéye

I am the one Jesus loves; He loves me so much

Émí ní Jesù fẹ́ràn j'ẹni kéni lọ

I am the one Jesus loves more than anyone else

Ó rá **mí** padà lọ́wọ́ ikú òjiji

*He rescued **me** from sudden death*

Áyọ́ ígbalà **mi** wá di pupọ̀ rẹpẹtẹ

*The joy of **my** salvation is bountifully multiplied*

Excerpt D: Intercessory prayer session

Pastor: Ayọ̀ **mi** dé

***My** joy has arrived*

Ayọ **mi** bọ̀ọ̀

***My** joy is here*

Ayọ **mi** káàbọ̀

*Welcome **my** joy*

Ayọ **mi** wọlé de

***My** joy has come in to me*

Congregation: Ayọ̀ **mi** dé

***My** joy has arrived*

Ayọ **mi** bọ̀ọ̀

***My** joy is here*

Ayọ **mi** káàbọ̀

*Welcome **my** joy*

Ayọ **mi** wọlé de

***My** joy has come in to me*

Excerpt E: Song of supplication

Omijè ojú **mi** n bèrè anú rẹ bàbá (2ce)

***My** tears seek for your mercy*

Fi aṣọ ojú rere wọ̀ **mí** Ọlọ́run mi

*Clothe **me** with a garment of mercy*

Aráyé ń retí ohun tí **mo** mú bọ̀ lọ́dọ̀ rẹ bàbá mímọ́

*The whole world is asking for what **I** have brought/got from you*

ọdún yìí ń lọ, oṣú yii ń lọ

this year is going; this month is going

Ómijé ojú mi ń bèrè anú rẹ....

***My** tears seek your mercy.............*

The songs in excerpts A, B, C, D and E above are usually sung during prayer session(s). As evident in the said songs, pronouns and pronominals are employed by Yoruba Christian worshippers to mark different identities for

themselves. This strategy is imperative in view of the different personalities present at the various church services where such songs as presented above are sung. Pronouns and pronominals (see Ajayi & Filani, 2014) such as **Èmi** 'I', **Mi** 'me' and 'my' are employed by these individuals to mark their different identities as different individuals, although they bear the generic name 'Christian brethren' which marks their general identity as followers of Christ. In what appears to be a competition where one tries to outsmart or outshine the other, the worshippers emphasise their ideology of *self first*, then *others*. Hence, in terms of the fortunes, blessings and goodness they desire from God, theirs must come before others. In fact, in pursuing this ideology, they often portray God as a partial being, one who loves one (*Self*) than *Others*. As a people of common faith, brethren, it would be expected to see more '**We'** and '**Us'** inclusive in those instances where first person personal pronouns and pronominal *I*, *me*, and *my* are preponderant, as shown in the excerpts above.

Viewing this practice within the context of the conceptual principle that forms the basis of Christianity, sacrificial love (for God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son so that anyone who believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16, NLT), these individuals may be described as being *self-centred* or self-oriented rather than being other-centred.

7.2 Different Individuals Face Different *Ogun* (Warfare)

The ideologies portrayed here are two-fold. One, there are supernatural forces in the world that are responsible for the challenges faced by individuals (see Opefeyitimi, 2009, p. 46); and two, different individuals have different challenges facing them. This is another identity mapping strategy inherent in many Yoruba Christian songs, as shown in the selected songs for this paper. The Yoruba believe in the existence of supernatural forces that control the affairs of man in the world. These supernatural forces are believed to be responsible for the many and different *ogun*, challenges/warfare, that different individuals face in the world. This *ogun* can manifest in different ways, such as misfortune, joblessness, lack of

major breakthrough, lack and poverty, sickness, barreness, etc. Just as individuals are different in their looks, so are their problems as determined by the said supernatural forces, such that whatever problems one is facing are characteristics of oneself, hence one's personal identity that makes one different from another individual. This personalised idenity is reinforced in the excerpts below, in which the ideology of different individuals with different problems is further captured.

Excerpt F: Prayer and deliverance session

> Gbogbo ogun tó ń jàmí ní kòrò
> *All the **household forces** fighting against me*
> Gbogbo ogun tó ń jàmí lábénú
> *All the **internal forces** fighting against me*
> Èdùmàrè gbé mi léké gbogbo wón
> *Lord, let me triumph over them*
> Kótó di pe wón ó bà mì láyé jé
> *Before they end up destroying my life*

Excerpt G: Prayer and deliverance session

> Ogun Fáráo
> *The Pharaoh-led warfare*
> Tó wonú omi lo pèlú omo Isrẹli
> *That entered the sea with the Israelites*
> Kò mà bá won jáde
> *Never came out with them*
> Ogun ayé mi
> *All the **forces** against **my** life*
> Tó wonú ádurà pèlú mi
> *That entered into prayer with **me***
> Lórúkọ Jésù kó má a bádurà lọ
> *Let them not come out in Jesus' name*

Excerpt H1: Victory song/Thanksgiving

> Ìdè ***mi*** já, paaah!
> ***My*** *bondage is loosed*
> Ìdè ***mi*** já o
> ***My*** *bondage is loose (emphasis)*
> Halleluyah ***mo*** délé ayò
> *Halleluyah **I** have gained victory at last*

Ideologically, both Yoruba culture and Christianity believe in spiritual warfare and bondage as explained earlier. One of such several scriptural passages that echo this phenomenon is Psalm 35, which is commonly believed in Christendom to be a weapon of warfare against enemies and spiritual forces. Just as it is with the songs presented much earlier, in the songs (F, G, H) above, the singers or worshippers would not use collective pronouns in those instances where personal pronouns and pronominals are employed. This is a deliberate way of carving different identities for themselves, since different individuals gathering at the church service(s) have different issues they are contending with. To them, using collective pronouns here will not drive home the point of calling on God to intervene in their personal issues as different individuals, even when they are 'brethren'. The song presented in **Excerpt H1** is particularly sung when an individual feels he or she has just overcome a particular challenge. Here too, the sense of individualism reinforced in this paper is further asserted. This is predicated on the belief that, just as individuals have different challenges in life, so are their victories. One might have just gained victory over barreness; another over joblessness; another over misfortune, and so on, hence the need to personalise the song to mark their different identities as different individuals with different victories.

For instance, in a particular church service where an individual came out to thank the Lord for the 'victory' he has just got or the new thing the Lord has done for him, while singing the song, personalising it, the church congregation was not seen or heard singing the song as captured in the excerpt below.

Excerpt H2:

> Ìdé rẹ já, paaah
> ***Your*** bondage is loosed
> Ìdé rẹ mà já o
> ***Your*** bondage is loosed (emphasis)
> Halleluyah ò délé ayọ̀......
> *Halleluyah **you** have gained victory at last*

7.3 Different Individuals Face Different *Ogun* (Warfare)

In many Yoruba Christian songs, such as the one presented below, references are often made to the concept of *orí* as a marker of identity-cum-ideology. As explained earlier, *orí* in the Yoruba worldview defines who an individual is; what makes him or her different from another person. It is a phenomenon which must be taken care of and protected. This ideology is reinforced in the excerpts below.

Excerpt I: Prayer and deliverance session (commonly found in C&S, CCC, and CAC)

> ***Orí*** mi kọ̀ ọ́
> ***My head*** *rejects it*
> ***Orí*** mi kọ̀yà (2ce)
> ***My head*** *rejects suffering/misfortune*
> Ẹlẹ́dá mi kọun tí ò dáa
> *My creator rejects that which is not good/palatable*
> ***Orí*** mi kọ̀yà
> ***My head*** *rejects suffering/misfortune*

Excerpt J: (As above)

> ***Orí*** inú mi má mà ba tòdé mi jẹ́
> *My inner head, do not destroy the outer one*
> Ẹlẹ́dá mi má mà ta kò mi oo
> *My creator, do not go against me*
> Ọ̀lọrún mi má ma jẹ n fìwà mí o ṣẹrà mi
> *My God, don't let me hurt myself with my character*

Excerpt K: (As above)

> ***O***rí mi o, wá bẹ́sẹ̀ mi sọ̀rọ̀
> ***My head***, *communicate with my legs*
> Ẹ́sẹ́ mi o wá ***bórí*** mi ṣèpadé
> *My legs, liase with my head*
> Ibikíbi táyọ̀ mi wà ẹ gbe wá fún mi
> *Wherever my joy/fortune is, get it across to me*

The concept of orí mentioned in these songs is as got from the Yoruba ideological belief as no known scriptural passage refers to orí as a phenomenon to be prayed to or worshipped as projected in the songs presented above. In the songs, individuals' different identities are presented and mapped with the personalised mention of *orí*. Note that whenever these songs are sung, more often

than not, it is personalised with the use of pronominal *mi* 'my' as opposed to the generic pronominal *wa* 'our'. What this suggests to us is the fact that even though they are Christians who share a common faith, they do not share a common fate and destiny. They are different personalities and individuals who have chosen different *orí*, hence the need to personalise the songs. This ideological belief manifests in the popular saying among the Yoruba that even twins that are given birth to on the same day carry different *orí* (destinies), and hence would want their sense of individuality and individualism to be acknowledged and respected by others. With these songs, the worshippers have achieved two things. One, they have identified themselves with the ideological belief of the Yoruba in the existence of the concept of *orí*; and two, with the use of personal pronominals, they have mapped a personal identity which is different from that of another person. That is, the *self* identity and the *other* identity.

8.   Conclusion

The concept of *otherness* largely dominates Yoruba Christian songs, as shown in the selected songs analysed in this paper. There is usually the advancement and the promotion of the cause of the *Self* over and above the cause of *Others*. Ideologies such as *Self* first, *Others* follow, and different individuals are faced with different '*warfares*' and issues of life are identity mapping strategies inherent in the selected Yoruba Christian songs. This further reinforces the arguable universal conception of human beings as self-oriented and self-centred beings, irrespective of their race, belief system, and national orientation.

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