

Religious Symbolic Identity: A Major Phenomenon in Space Contestation among Yoruba Religious Groups of Southwestern Nigeria

Oladosu Olusegun Adebolu (Ph.D.)
olusegunoladosu1@gmail.com
adeb12345@yahoo.com
+2347035080096

Makinde Abdul-Fatah Kola (Ph.D.)
makindeabulfatah@yahoo.co.uk
+2348035065159

and

Odewale Victor Taiwo (Ph.D.)
victorodewale@yahoo.com
+2348034705401

Department of Religious Studies
Obafemi Awolowo University,
Ile-Ife, Osun State, Nigeria

Abstract

The southwestern Yoruba religious groups - Christianity, Islam and African Indigenous Religion - have their cultural identities which could be identified through language, names and greetings. Christianity and Islam in Yorubaland were presented as a form of cultural heritages of other races. Their practices reveal to the Yoruba people another dimension of worshipping the God that they already knew. The new belief systems therefore show the process of new etymological dimension of religious practices among the people. The traditionalists viewed this attempt as a challenge because of serious contestation for space and membership. In order for the three religions to maintain and increase their adherents, they created a symbolic ideology which not only give identity but also establish rigorous contextual space recognition within the sphere of religious ideologies. This paper, therefore, investigates the dimension through which these ideologies have been manifested in the area of car inscriptions and stickers as displayed by the car users among the adherents of the religious groups. Oral Interviews, semiotic and phenomenological methods were used in the understanding of the Yoruba religious tradition with a view to appraising the importance of symbols and signs in the expression of ideas and feelings in religion and culture.

Keywords: Symbolic identities, Religious ideologies, Space contestation, Inscriptions, Stickers, Yoruba.

Introduction

Nigerian religious panorama is an identifiable terrain characterized by different phenomenon ranging from sect movements and spiritual exhibitions. However, a lot of ink has been spilled by different scholars on the context of religious movement and identities as they relate to Nigeria. Some of the scholars in this discourse are G.E. Simpson, (1970, 79-92) J.W. Fernandez(1974,531-549) and Rosalind Hackett (1991, 282-299). The most identifiable discussion on this context has to do with the contribution of Rosalind Hackett on New Religious Movements in Nigeria. Hackett characterized Nigeria as a pluralistic religious society dominated by three major religious traditions namely Christianity, Islam and Traditional Religions (Hackett,282). In her opinion, the three major religions in the earlier days of the country's religio-political development canvassed for identities with the vision of creating a forum for social and religious change that will give them recognition or salvage the country finally from the dominance of colonial imperialism. Most recognized are the Christian related movements that have secessionist plan against their western missionaries. The Islamic related were seen as far less common because it was introduced by Africans and had africanese trait because it shared more attributes with the local tradition of beliefs and practices of the people. This development, therefore, allows more proliferation on the side of Christianity than Islam and indigenous religions at the early days of the country.

It is worthy of note that religious setting played a major role in the national development of Nigeria as they served as pacesetters in reactions and counter reactions to the intimidation of western worldview as regard neocolonialism which served as pressure on the cultural dominance of the country (Falola, Dauda,2017:464). Be that as it may, this development was later changed into the context of identification within the sets of different religious groups since the war on colonial dominance had been won through movement ideology. The idea on campaign for nationalism then later seized to reoccur with the emergence of national religious issues which later dominated the activities of the existing religious factions in the country. The factions have the set mind of clamoring for proliferation of members and groups in their different units. A reflection of this could be seen among the southwestern religious groups where several innovations were capitalized upon to attract more recognition for their group building capacity. Major innovation recognized by this study is the phenomenal use of car inscriptions and stickers among the major religious groups of the Yoruba of southwestern Nigeria.

The usage of car inscriptions and stickers forms an experience, and at the same time, it is a medium to express belief identification and sectarian attachment. The investigation of the use of the inscriptions, banners and stickers among the three religious adherents is very important because it showcases the major challenge and competition of the belief systems which are not verbal but done with the aid of signs and symbols. The use of signs and symbols on cars is most dominant and prevalent among the Christian and Muslim adherents than the indigenous religious adherents. This, in a way, suppresses the attention and recognition that ought to be given to the indigenous religious adherents in some ways. With this position, the Indigenous religious adherents, in order to identify and establish their recognition, also came up with such idea to allow them have an equal recognition

within the public. In the light of this, it is very significant to explain the semantic usage of language in the items of sign and symbol of the religious inscriptions and stickers. The logos of the symbols are inscribed with religious languages of Arabic among Muslims and Hebrew or English among Christians. It is then seen as very important on the side of indigenous religious worshipers to also initiate their recognition as well in their own local language which is Yoruba. It behooves us to study these carefully.

Theoretical Framework

Semiotic method is employed for this work. Semiotic according to Harris as quoted by Adeosun, is an approach inspired by Halliday's systemic functional linguistics, which shows the importance of context to situation and culture in reconstructing the meaning of a text (Adeosun, 2013:91). It does view language as the embodiment of the social process in a society through the use of symbols and signs. It shows that context is very important in the understanding of the symbol and sign because religious language is context dependent. Adeosun, therefore, clarifies that when making symbol and sign analysis in this way, it explains meaning-making as a social context. Adeosun further explains semiotic method as the type, which takes cognizance of shared meanings among users of the signs and decodes such signs primarily from their worldview. The perspective of this methodology will be an evidence of symbolic analysis in this work because the usage of stickers and emblem are consistent to the analysis of sign and meaning-making in this work.

Floyd Merrell (1937: vii-ix) with his idea and narration on Charles S. Peirce thought, underlined the fact that semiosis with Peirce philosophy involve the concept of signs and symbols captured in linguistic and nonlinguistic. Peirce's work, according to him, captured vividly the concepts of signs, which in a way indefinitely explain nonlinguistic sphere of semiosis because he showed that meaning cannot live by language alone. Semiotic is then sensed to be evident more on the question of meaning, and meaning to Peirce, is a conduit tube between sign emitter and sign receiver which in the case of this paper, the symbols signified. Floyd then noted in his discussion that the significant of meaning could be seen within interrelations of sign interaction which is being played out on the stage of semiosis. This paper, therefore, looks at how meaning related identities are designed among the three major Yoruba religious groups through symbols and signs for the purpose of space contestation. The essence in their experience and expression through the practice is also explained via phenomenological methods.

Experience and Expression: A Medium for Symbolic Identification

Rollo May quoted by Toyin Falola and Bola Dauda (2017:439) emphasized capacity of human creativity, by saying that "man's consciousness of himself is the source of his highest qualities". He also underlined the fact that "the capacity for consciousness of self also underlies man's ability to use symbols and thus man can think in abstractions like "beauty", "reason", and "goodness." The stake of this fact shows the magnitude of the consciousness of the Yoruba people in the act of emphasizing their religious experience through symbol.

In the same vein, Carl G. Jung (1964:232) identified that the history of symbolism shows that everything or object, both natural or man-made, can assume symbolic significance. He noted that man, with his symbol-making propensity unconsciously, transforms objects: like stone, animals, moon etc. or abstracts forms: like numbers, triangle etc. into symbols and thus endows them with great psychological importance that are used in the religion experience and expression. This experience and expression, according to him, are represented in visual art like symbols.

Religious experience and expression of the Yoruba people are seen to be phenomenological and otherwise anthropologically relevant. Featuring in this area of concept is the admission of A. E. Garvie that was quoted by Dada Adelowo (2001:100) that "in the experience, one may assume that there is something universal and permanent, something rooted in, springing out of human nature while expression will depend on local and temporary conditions, physical, mental, moral and social." The highlights of this understanding show religious expression as something concrete and visible. In doing this, the religious practices of the people or the believer concerned must serve as a primary background to the functional aspects of human society, which among the Yoruba people is highly predominant through the expression of using symbolic messages to communicate their consciousness. While religion belongs to the level of experience, the functional aspects are highlighted through expression.

In this case, the religious experience which constitutes the consciousness of the major Yoruba religious groups of the southwestern Nigeria is functionally transformed into visible action through the method of symbolic car inscriptions and stickers. This is done to purposely attract interest and promote agenda with strict identification, recognition and connection of the members to the groups. This makes many cars to wear different symbolic logo in an attempt to advertise their faith and belief or in a way to make case for group evangelism. The rhythm of awareness in this aforementioned therefore symbolically creates a medium of relevance and showcases an act of contestation in the limited physical, mental, moral, political and social enclave of the Yoruba society.

Exogenous versus Endogenous: A Model for Symbolic Representation in Southwestern Yoruba Religious Groups

The model in which religious groups in Nigeria appeared in mid-18th century shows that there was more influence from outside on the system. It was noted by Olupona that Christianity in southwestern Nigeria around the time was more of Europeaness in nature(Olupona,1991:34). The Christian religious movement around then was practically exogenous because the major tribute were made to the foreign Protestant, Catholic and Mainline Christian groups. The Christian denominations and sects were recognized with foreign names like Methodist, Baptist, Presbyterian, Roman Catholic, Anglican and a lot more. These names show a symbolic inscription of foreign dominance on certain aspects of Nigeria's setting especially the educational and religious worldviews.

However, the Islamic religious terrain as at 1960's was more compact with her recognition to Sunnite Islamic tradition that holds a general worldview of the Muslim group(Olupona:37-39).This is predominant in the Northern part of Nigeria. Islam as at then

had its development with the inauguration of Muslim brotherhood and other organizations like *Jamatu Nasril Islam*, this development happened shortly after the independence. The major fact in this development shows major local participant impact than external force on the religious groups. The major groups that were formed therefore represent the culture and life style of the indigenous people. The mandate of the brotherhood was later spilled down the Southern part of Nigeria in an attempt to challenge the domination of the spread of Christianity. The attempt yielded results through the creation of several brotherhood organizations like *Ansar-ud-deen Society*, *Tijaniyyah* and *Qadiriyyahorders*. These groups according to Olupona, have their major contributions in the act of providing sound Muslim education that will commensurate with Christian mission schools (Olupona:39). He also noted that the groups were also the symbol for identity formation for Hausa immigrants in southern Nigeria.

Around this time, the indigenous Nigeria religious groups were itemized as 'nativist'. They were represented with the movement names like neo-traditional or neo-primal movement (Hacket:286). These groups ambition was to technically knock out the attempt of deprivation and other frustrations posed by the alien's (western) religion. In all ramifications, they rejected the alien's religious intermediaries such as Christ and Muhammad in their modeling and seized to be recognized with them. In an attempt for recognition and survival, they distinguished themselves by adopting new forms and ideas as part of revitalization process. They engaged themselves with purely indigenous names like *Ijo Orunmila* (the church of *Orunmila*, a Yoruba deity), *arousa* cult or Edo national church, these names captured them as nativist (Hacket:286).

Emerging Trends on Religious Symbolic Template in Southwestern Nigeria

From different readings, it is quite clear that African religious groups in the mid-19th century in a way did anxiously clamour for due identification. According to Fernandez, the drive started as a means of diffusing from religion to politics (Fernandez: 531-532). The wishes and movement of several African religious groups in the wake of nationalism according to Fernandez created about four typologies of movement with different identifications of symbols. He noted that nativist, separatist, messianic and reformative movements were the emblems through which categorization of African religious group were characterized (Fernandez: 534-535). To be mentioned among these groups are the African local indigenous affiliates that clamored for freedom from the dominance of western policies. Hackett also corroborated this while looking into the dynamics of new religious movement in Nigeria. Simpson on his part only reappraised how this typology had brought changes through symbolic manifestation within the rank and files of the southwestern Nigeria religious groups (Simpson:79-82). The aim as at then was to detoxify the political and cultural values of the Africans from the Europeans hegemony.

The argument of Fernandez was that, through which symbols were the groups made their movement known? His analysis identified two major basic poles in which the symbols were formed which are traditional pole and the acculturated pole. The traditional pole is the symbolic identification through the culture and core value of the people and this is peculiar to indigenous religious groups like *ijo orunmila* and *ogboni* cult, while acculturation is the symbol designed from the contact the people had with other foreign

culture. This is seen in the features of many African Christian churches like Presbyterians, African Methodist, African Baptist, Anglican Church and a host of others. The two formations are either used expressively or instrumentally. In instrumental usage, the religious group is goal minded while the expressive usage is an attempt to make a case for displacement from the situation which is causing frustration.

The acculturated design shows that the adherents did not totally dislodge themselves from the functional and aspects of European religious practices and tactics. They use the tactics for the purpose of evangelism and awareness to further strengthen the popularities of their mission. Such attachment is seen in the foreign names that most missions were called. The effects of the foreign input could also be seen in the mode of worship. This indicates that the practices were not totally indigenous in a way. The traditional identification showed how the people resolve to the neo-traditional or neo-primal as against the contempt of neocolonialism. The traditional people made use of their cultural values as the scepter or symbols of identification.

This theoretical placing, according to Fernandez, explains different symbolic orientation which the groups identify themselves with in customizing their social control, religious behaviour and improving their status from European dominated parent organizations. The symbolic orientations noted in his discussion are acculturated and traditional. Groups like separatist and the messianic were thus identified with acculturated symbols while nativist and reformative groups were identified with traditional symbols. The changes in the religious practices of the people, especially indigenous Christianity and indigenous religion could be seen from the influence of migration on the religious development of the African. The acculturation engaged as at then showed the magnitude of foreign influence on the content of African culture. It shows the influence of foreign language, dressing and most importantly education on the practices of the belief system of the Christian and the dominance of Arab traditions on Muslims. This cultural migration affects majorly the ways of life of the people and thus syncretized them either through language or name recognition. The ultimate of this shows how Christians and Muslims pair their traditional names alongside with the Judeo-Christian or Arabic names. In the case of neo traditional movement, this habit is totally forbidden.

Coming to 20th and 21st century developments, it shows that landmark of symbolic recognition has been made apolitical. The fight for control and dominance within limited space available for religious and spiritual development then turns to be option of the religious groups. This then creates different methods and theory to be used for proliferation of members or group dominance and recognition. Part of the method is the highway religious centres that are created for the sake of popularity and claims of dominance and recognition. This is a very magnanimous and symbolic representation of many religious groups within the southwestern zone of Nigeria. Along Ibadan- Lagos express way, one can view locations of churches and Islamic institutions like Redeemed Christian church (*ijo irapada*), NASFAT Muslim centre, Mountain of fire (*oke agbara ina*) ministry, Four square ministry, winners ministry (*ijo asegun*) and a host of other religious organizations very conspicuous and adjacent to the highway. One important thing about these establishments is that the names acquired by some of the Christian mission groups

are more of traditional and self-acclaimed than that of Eurocentric identification. The translation of the names of the Christian religious centres from English language shows that they adopted traditional names.

Apart from this, the establishment of these religious centres on the road side was practically argued to be more oriented on business motives or financial gain. It is otherwise noted that the road side religious mannerism could be seen without indigenous native traditions participating with any representation in the act of the trade because their popularity could not garner an explode representation in the business. It borders to ask the reason for their non-representation in this scheme of religious proliferation and identity since the highway mission has become a serious religious trademark among the southwestern religious faiths. This question could partly be given answer from the pattern and recognition of the sensitivity and significance given to religious inscriptions and stickers on cars which are run by the adherents. The car stickers as a means of religious propaganda were not given much relevance by indigenous practitioners.

Analytical Expression of Car Stickers and Inscription as a Religious Symbolic Identity among Religious Faiths

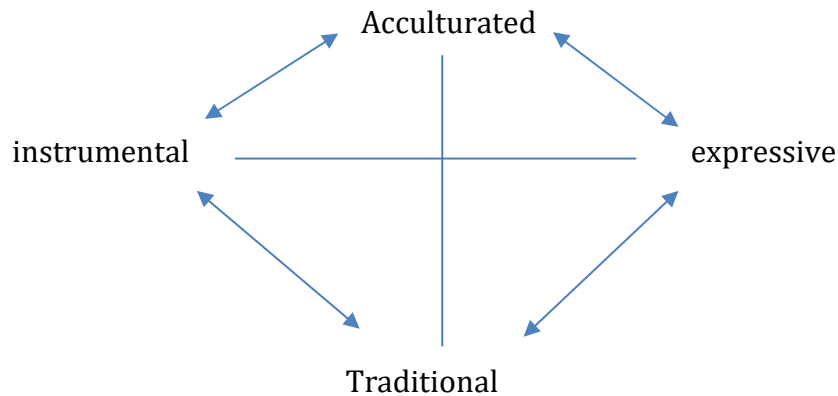
Symbolic expression has become a major traditional phenomenon among the Yoruba of southwestern religious settings. It is observed that “religious tradition in a way expresses religious needs at the cultural level and at the same time participates in the religious polarity of need and satisfaction” (Nielsen, Hein, Reynolds, Miller, Karff, Cochran, Mclean: 1983: 20-21). This implies that symbolic expression among the Yoruba religious faiths through the aid of car stickers and inscriptions has become a special communication device of tradition through analogy of word and diagrams couched to express the feelings of different adherents in respective space available for transmission of ideas. These are done through systematic statements of beliefs that could explain the inward feelings of the people and as well attract and garner interest for membership.

This analogy of expression could be seen in the light of Pierce’s(Floyd, 1937:11) mainstream of semiosis where the addresser and the addressee jointly enter the centre equation of sign meaning. Here, the sign addresses itself to something or someone and thus establishes the objectives of the mind which creates a mediating relationship done democratically between the components of the signs (human and object) and therefore engenders meaning. This, in Pierce’s philosophy, is tagged as semiotic tripod sign of Representamen- Object- Interpretant. The line of traditional and acculturated polarities of identities as signified by Fernandez could also be seen in the light of this tripod connections that allows symbolic object as a means of mediating umpire between the representamen (i.e. the religion) and the interpretant (i.e. the adherent).

Car stickers and inscriptions objects which are used by the worshippers and adherents of different religious groups are based on religious identification of their worldview which naturally brings to fore the explanation and expression of cultural lines of religions which they are adhered to. The symbols seem to show the hallmark that underlines the religious psychological feelings expressed by the adherents in their respective line of religious uniqueness and which thus by persuasion expected to be shared by others within the

society. To validate the level of this uniqueness, it is important to see the expression of the symbols amidst the contestation of different religious ideas which set their goals to monopolize the existing space and people for the recognition of their religious interest.

This navigation of ideas could be analyzed using Fernandez theoretical framework already mentioned in this paper. It is important to know if the symbols are traditional or acculturated and which directions are they meant to pursue. In this way, one would be able to ascertain the level of polarity discourses inherent in the symbols and of what needs and satisfaction are the symbols driven towards. The theoretical axes of Fernandez (1974:537) could be indicated as follows:



The analyses of this axes indicated that when a symbol is acculturated or traditional, the two formations are either used expressively or instrumentally. The survey and oral interviews carried out on this study identify these positions. Here, Christianity and Islam are acculturated while indigenous religion is traditional. The analyses of the findings will be done based on the different religious axes.

Indigenous Religion

The content of indigenous religions from the finding of the research shows that the worshipping of the ancestral gods is paramount in the religion and this depends on the motive of each individual in connection with their experience of the deity in their religious tradition. The inscriptions and stickers attached to their cars thus specified their religious identifications to a certain god in line with the traditional or African culture which they avowed. The symbols of the inscription express either religious identification or personal experience with the god itself. It is also identified that in some cases symbols may be held as a universal identification of cultural typology which creates no friction but brings unity in diversity. In this case, there are different representations of intermediaries from the acknowledged sects which stand for harmony and unity. This indicates a pluralistic form of belief system. The uniqueness is thus a form of personal or communal religious experience. This could be seen from the following inscriptions and stickers.



fig 1

fig 2

fig 3

In figure 1, there is the sticker with the inscription that reads “OBATALA LIVES” while in figure 2, the inscription reads “ISESE LAGBA” meaning “culture stems above all. “The analysis of the above inscriptions and stickers shows that both are traditional and expressive. The language of the second inscription is written in indigenous Yoruba language and the intent of the inscription is tending towards expression of the traditional belief system. The inscription in a way claims supremacy but not to institute dominance on the existing religious space (Ayomide Aworeni, Oral Interview). It also attempts to call for communal recognition and not for the Yoruba belief to be displaced by any other existing religious groups. In the sticker where it is written “OBATALA LIVES”, the intent is to show that most deity in African worldview can also stand at par with equal representation of other religious intermediaries. In Christianity, for example, there is JESUS LIVES; this equal uniformity is an indication of identity, recognition and pronouncement of resemblance which the adherents may want to show to the public. In some cases, the adherents from different religions may want to show superiorities of their practices based on the advert that are done through the stickers. Though the symbols in Traditional Religion sometimes tend towards persuasion for new members but the mechanism for doing this is not readily available since it is purely localized and not much exposure is given to it. It is observed that most of the adherents of Yoruba religion are not well educated which indicates the reasons why most symbols are not dynamically utilized like in other religious practices. Also sponsorship is not there for promoting the agenda of the group goals. This may adduce to the reason for the non-acquisition of ground for recognition and identification in the scheme of highway missions already discussed earlier.

Christian Perspective

Considering the importance of space contestation among the religious group in Nigeria, Christians use emblems, logo and stickers of various sizes and shapes as instrument of faith and at the same time to express the mind-set of their religious worldview. Most of these symbols are either acculturated or indigenous in nature (Fernandez: 537). The usage is with a view to seeing that their involvement in space contest is registered. The rationale behind the use of these acculturated items as discovered by this study is limited to the following uses: religious identity, religious propagation, and confession of faith. One technique commonly employed by the adherents of the religion according to Adebayo Tiamiyu is pasting the instrument conspicuously at the back of their automobile, as this will enable the target audience to catch a glimpse of the message inscribed(Adebayo Tiamiyu, Oral Interview).

The emblems, logos and stickers mostly inscribed are letter-words like JESUS IS LORD as seen in figure 4, a Hebrew word SHALOM as seen in figure 5 which means peace and DOVE picture in figure 6 which represents Holy Spirit. These emblems indicate that Christian trends of contestation are more acculturated in nature (Fernandez:537). The emblems and logos have a Judaeo-Christian origin and this underlines the fact that the adherents did not totally dislodge themselves from the functional (and) aspects of European religious practices and tactics. The inscription 'JESUS IS LORD' projects the supremacy of Jesus as well as the Christian religion. According to the sticker, Jesus is to be worshipped above all other recognised religious founders. According to Olukunle Amoo in an interview, "it clearly expresses the religious belief of the owner of the vehicle. So, it puts to rest the question of religious identity of the person." The dove symbol is a registered instrument of a particular church. According to him, "the symbol also expresses concern for recognition amidst other religious groups." (Olukunle Amoo, Oral Interview) Sighting such emblem on any automobile, gives no room for questioning about the owner's religious identity, it indicates an identity awareness creation.(Ismail,1998,pp.199-225)

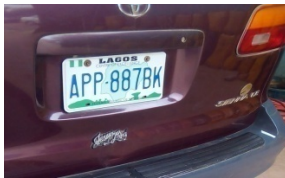


Fig 4

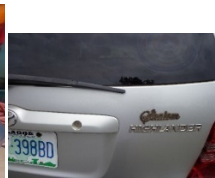


fig 5



fig 6

Islamic Perspective

Islam as a religion has its principles and practices which are kept in any part of the world where it is found; for Islam is considered to be a universal religion rather than a religion of a particular place. Its universality according to Mawdudi, lies in the fact that, its objective is to create and cultivate in man the quality and attitude of submission to the will of God.(Mawdudi,1960:21). Moreso, Ali observes that Islam laid the basis of a unification of humanity with a brotherhood of man which knows no bounds of colour, race, country, language or even rank. Hence, it recognizes the equality of not only the civil and political rights but also of their spiritual rights. (Ali,1973:9)The fundamental doctrine of Islam is that humanity is of single community as it stated in the Qur'ān: "All men are a single nation."(Quran 2:213) Therefore, the principles and practices of Islam cut across all nations and communities and the adherents of Islam are expected to carry them out in accordance with scriptural stipulations. Nevertheless, due to individual and communal differences, Islam takes into consideration customs of communities and nations which are not at variant to Islamic law and allows such under what is called '*Urf*'.

Urf is an Arabic word which means that which is known. It is inferred from this meaning to imply what is known and therefore acceptable to a community, i.e. usage or custom. (Othoman, 1981: 343). It is defined as 'recurring practices that are acceptable to people and of sound nature.' (Kamali, 2006: 369)Hakim quotes Al-Ghazali as defining '*Urf*' as "what is accepted by people and is compatible to their way of thinking and is normally adopted by those considered to be of a good character."(Hakim, 1994: 109)Hakim mentions further

that *'Urf* can be inherited from previous generations or it can evolve locally in response to certain conditions or changes in the milieu of the environment. (Hakim: 110). Therefore, as much as Islam does not have a particular symbol, it does not disapprove the use of symbols in as much as it does not contradict the Islamic injunctions; hence, the use of symbols can be classified under *'Urf* in view of the fact that this custom is found in all human societies. As Hodgson observes, the use of symbols springs from human condition – from the perception vital and cosmic correspondences, which was perhaps at its most seminal in archaic mankind. (1964:220). The Muslim societies are not left out in the use of symbols. It is noted that the medieval Islamic was an agrarian – urban society of the medieval period and always depended on symbols for self-expression, like any other such society. (Hogson: 221).

Since a symbol is considered to be a basic material unit for making meaning by attaching meaning to it in socially contextualized interactive, intersubjective and interpretive practices, (Fornäs, 2012:44) this probably gives room for intensive space contestation and recognition amongst various religious groups in Yorubaland, southwestern Nigeria. Islam is therefore not left out in this direction. The use of car inscriptions and stickers can be said to have some factors. The first one centres on sustaining the faith of Muslims in view of various Christian evangelical strategies for winning souls into Christianity. While Islam predates Christianity in Yorubaland, the latter posed serious challenge to the former at its arrival, particularly in the aspect of proselytization and competition for adherents. Gbadamosi notes that “among the Yoruba, the relationship between Islam and Christianity was marked by the eternal competition for the souls of men.”(1978:124) The challenge subsists and extends to the use on inscriptions and stickers which promotes space contestation amongst adherents of Islam and Christianity.

The second factor has to do with Islamization. The religion of Islam is about *da'wah* – invitation to the cause of Allah and there are various methods for embarking on *da'wah*. *Da'wah* may not necessarily be made through speeches, it may come in writings or symbols. Hence, it can be through various inscriptions, logos and stickers. In this situation it will be meant to maintain and sustain the adherents in the religion. This is based on a Qur'anic directive that says: “Invite to the way of your Lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching...” (Quran 16:125) In some instances, the inscriptions and stickers are written in Arabic depicting Islamic art with Qur'anic verses. Ethinghausen implicitly states that:

...so the most important religious motif was the divine message embodied in the language of the Qur'ān. This caused the extensive use of pertinent Qur'anic sentences as decorative elements, as well as other religious and secular phrases. Since the Arabic alphabet was the universally used form of writing, and since its letters easily allowed artful variations, inscriptions were nearly always calligraphically composed. They therefore came to constitute a special Islamic art form that is applied not only to buildings but to every available medium. (Ethinghausen, 1975, p. 3)

Another factor that needs to be mentioned is identification. There is no iota of doubt that this factor is to be reckoned with in space contestation among various religious groups in

Yorubaland. Religious identity is a serious concern to the adherents of various religious groups bringing about contested spaces of identity. As the adherents of other religions identify themselves through inscriptions and stickers on their cars, adherents of Islam too see the need to be identified as Muslims through inscriptions and stickers on their cars; hence, they design different car stickers with inscriptions showing Islamic symbols, logos and labels. Moreso, a religious commitment is often at the core of an individual's sense of identity. Coşgel and Minkler quote Seul to have stated that religions often serve various psychological needs "more comprehensively and potently than other repositories of cultural meaning that contribute to the construction and maintenance of individual and group identities." (2004:342-343).

It needs to be mentioned at this juncture, however, that the religious symbols used by the adherents of Islam can be classified under acculturation in view of the fact that the religion was spread to this part of the world from Saudi Arabia. This brings about the contact of the Muslims in Yorubaland with Arab traditions and enhances the use of inscriptions in Arabic scripts on the car stickers. It becomes necessary to give examples of these inscriptions and car stickers as displayed by Muslim car owners on their cars.



Fig 7



Fig 8



Fig 9

The three figures above have their inscriptions in Arabic portraying different meanings. The inscription in figure 7 expresses statement of testimony in Islam. It states that "there is no deity worthy of worship except Allah," while the inscription in figure 8 expresses the second part of the word of testimony stating that "Muhammad is a messenger of Allah." This implies that a Muslim must hold tenaciously to this statement of testimony and display it wherever he may be. The inscription in figure 9 states that "Allah is the greatest" which implies that to a Muslim, nothing is great than Allah.



Fig 10



Fig 11

The two figures above have their inscriptions on identification. They are meant to show the religious identity of two different Islamic organizations. Figure 10, for instance, has a sticker with an inscription of "ACADIP" which is an acronym of Academy of Islamic Propagation, (<https://acadip.net>) an organization based in southwestern Nigeria and whose focus is comparative religious studies. Figure 11 also has an inscription of "NASFAT" which stands as an acronym for Nasrul-Lahi-l-Fatih Society, a Nigerian Muslim prayer group. (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/NASFAT>). The inscriptions are meant to identify those who belong to these Islamic groups; hence, the members of these groups put such stickers on their cars in order to identify with their religious groups.

Conclusion

This study so far has shown that contestation through symbols and signs within religious pluralism is a major trademark for belief practices. Since no religion can do without it, then it tends to clarify that symbolic usage within any terrain of religious setting can be tagged as science of human relationship in which religious ethical beliefs and meaning, practices and manifestation can be adduced. In the case of Yoruba religious groups of southwestern Nigeria, the study shows how the usage underscores the dynamic experiences in which religious identities were created and it also ascertains the mindset of the groups in their field missions. The study thus underlines the fact that the evidence of neo-traditional or neo-primal and neocolonialism are the features of this context and this in a way shows an advanced development in the discussion of religious movements and identities in Nigeria.

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Oral Interviews

Oral Interview granted by Ayomide Aworeni, Ifa priestess, Ile-Ife, 11/05/2018

Interview with Pastor Adebayo Tiamiyu, Deeper Life Bible Church Olodo District Ibadan. 3/2/2019.

Interview with Bishop Olukunle Amoo, Laughter Bible Church, Ibadan. 10/2/2019