

Two Among Us: Theography and the Practice of Interfaith Peace

A Case Study of Pastor James Wuye and Imam Muhammad Ashafa's
Narrative-Workshop Model of Conflict Intervention

by

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Introduction

In richly religious and at times deeply divided Nigeria, Imam Muhammad Ashafa and Pastor James Wuye are spearheading a faith-based movement toward conflict resolution and peaceable coexistence among Muslims and Christians. Together, they founded the Kaduna-based Interfaith Mediation Centre which now has office branches around the country. The Centre¹ employs diverse methodologies in addressing interreligious and community conflicts. This study attempts to assess the Imam and Pastor's use of both personal narrative and experiential workshops models of intervention specifically.

Based on qualitative data collected during late summer 2008, this paper suggests that their impact can be traced in part to two mutually reinforcing factors. First, Wuye and Ashafa have created lives of what I term *theography*, merged spirituality, lived experience, and autobiography. Nowhere is this harmony more apparent or compelling than in the narrative of their friendship and work together as peacemakers. The Pastor and Imam have created a compelling story of redemptive transformation that ultimately springs from a collective narrative of interfaith struggle in northern Nigeria and, importantly, taps into their client's deeply held religious norms and values, inspiring listeners to reconsider long-standing intolerance and to believe, as Wuye and Ashafa do, that scripture commands mutual acceptance. I argue that it is from this congruity of spirituality and autobiography that Ashafa and Wuye derive much of their authenticity and authority as leaders.

¹ Interfaith Mediation Centre goes by several names and monikers, at least colloquially, including Interfaith Mediation Centre – Muslim Christian Dialogue Forum, IMC, IFMC, and MCDF. For ease of reference, this paper typically refers to the agency as simply “the Centre.”

Second, this study contends that where the compelling narrative leaves off, Interfaith Mediation Centre's interactive workshops begin. They offer participants practical experience in peaceable interfaith relations and collective problem-solving. Moreover, Interfaith Mediation Centre's workshops appear to be crucial in reinforcing the attitude changes initiated by the Pastor and Imam's personal narrative, and in promoting changes in behavior that must complement changes of heart in order for peace to be sustainable.

For most of the Interfaith Mediation Centre program participants I interviewed, what results from the narrative-workshop experience is a profound sense of loyalty to the Imam and Pastor and an embrace of interfaith peace as their personal mission. Many of the Centre's trainees have gone on to become informal spokespeople for the Centre, helping to change the culture and discourse around interreligious relations wherever they live and work. Others have launched interfaith enterprises, including dialogue forums and a small non-profit. Together, the narrative and workshop experiences appear to solidify a sense of personal responsibility for peace comprised of allegiance to Wuye and Ashafa, commitment to faith, and a desire to contribute to more positive interfaith relations through direct participation. Results from this study offer an intriguing glimpse at the promising connection that appears to exist between Ashafa and Wuye and their followers.

Literature Review

"We are people who pay attention to our leaders," (Interview 3, Muslim male, 28 July 2008). After repeatedly hearing this refrain doing research in Kaduna, I asked a subsequent

interviewee if he agreed with this generalization about him and his countrymen. Squinting at me in the afternoon sun, he looked surprised that I would even ask the question. “It’s true, yes, it’s true,” he said. “We give our respect to people in positions of authority” (Interview 13, Muslim male, 8 August 2008).

Authority

Though sometimes used interchangeably with the concepts of power or influence, the notion of authority (alternatively, authority-based leadership) has its own literature and attendant history of academic interest. Many scholars begin by harkening back to the ‘classical’ exposition on authority advanced by Max Weber, who considered it “the probability of securing obedience on the part of a given individual or group of persons” (Weber 1947). Ralf Dahrendorf and Emmanuel de Kadt contribute to this definition the explicit proviso that, in de Kadt’s words, “authority is always associated with social positions or roles, positions where the essential characteristic is that of superiority and subordination” (de Kadt 1965; Dahrendorf 1959). These relationship dynamics exist in the workplace, of course, but are also fairly ubiquitous in family, community and political settings. Typically, where there is hierarchy, there is authority, and some scholars propose that the relationship is also usually a voluntary one. Authority is granted, not taken, Talcott Parsons argues, being as it is “that aspect of a status [sic] in a system of social organization...by virtue of which the incumbent is *put in a position legitimately* to make decisions” on behalf of other members of the group (Parsons 1952, my emphasis).

Parson's configuration of legitimate authority resonates well, but is also troubled by, a context as complex as Nigeria, a nation whose cleavages are nevertheless interwoven with the predictable loyalties of a clientalist, neopatrimonial society (Kew and Lewis 2007; Joseph 1999; Bratton and Van de Walle 1997; Pace and Kew 2008; Interview 24, IMC staff, 7 August 2008). Nigerians tend to be deeply status-conscious and respectful of authority, but esteem is not offered blindly or in equal measure. Awareness of a more recent cultural tradition, endemic political corruption, delineates new boundaries in the practice of customary deference. "Nigerians respect their leaders" one interviewee agreed (Interview 7, Christian male, 30 July 2008). With a weary smile he added, "but sometimes our politicians are corrupt." Rallying, he pronounced sternly, "Our religious leaders should not be. We listen to them" (Interview 7).

His qualified explanation mirrors sentiments I heard time and again while conducting research in Nigeria. Bow in the presence of authority, but beware the man who wears the robes of government rather than of God. This distinction between the quality of respect owed to a politician as compared to a faith leader doubtless derives from an awareness of political corruption, but is also likely the result of the remarkable devoutness of Nigerians themselves. A recent study conducted by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) finds Nigeria to be the most religious country in the world. Ninety-one percent of Nigerian respondents said they attend religious services regularly, while ninety-percent reported that they "believed in God, prayed regularly, and would die for their beliefs" (BBC Report 26 February 2004). Whatever the precise ranking, there is little doubt that Nigeria is home to a spirited population of religious practitioners, of which at least ninety-three percent identify as either Muslim or Christian (Kew and Lewis 2007).

In his 2001 *Peace & Change* article titled “The Exercise of Authority to Prevent Communal Conflict,” Joseph Bock articulates several recommendations for aid agencies based on a review of seventeen case studies assessing the role of these agencies in contributing to conflict transformation in settings around the world. As the title of the article suggests, Bock asserts that one “area of significance relating to conflict transformation...[is] the role of obedience to authority” (Bock 2001). Evidence from the case studies he reviews suggests that authority figures, including religious leaders, are powerfully situated to discourage violence and encourage peace.

Nowhere does this potential seem more promising than in Nigeria, but even here, religious expertise alone does not necessarily a leader make. “We work with these religious leaders,” one interviewee agreed (Interview 4, Muslim male, 24 July 2008). “They are from our communities so people feel they know them,” he said. “But,” he qualified, “actually the ones people will follow are the ones who are respected because of who they are” (Interview 4). Significant authority may be legitimately granted (Parsons 1952) to a leader “people will follow” away from violence or toward peace (Bock 2001) because that authority is inspired not just by the leader’s competence or expertise, but because of something closer to what we might call the leader’s spirit.

The Leadership Story: Authenticity and Charisma

Reflecting on life-histories and leadership development, Boas Shamir and Galit Eilam posit that “authentic leaders” possess at least four recognizable characteristics: their leadership is

‘true’ rather than performed, arising as it does from an inherent self-conception of their ‘natural’ role; “they lead from a conviction,” and their work or mission arises organically from this principled belief; they have arrived at their values through the singular tutelage of personal experience; and, their lives are coherent and transparent to the extent that “their talk and actions are consistent with their beliefs and values” (Shamir and Eilam 2005). They further suggest that authentic authority figures “acquire these characteristics by constructing, developing and revising their life-stories,” which are both valuable instruments of contemplative self-development and vital tools for communicating one’s convictions and credentials to others (Shamir and Eilam 2005). These autobiographical stories provide a unified system of meaning that animates the leader’s words and actions, and by which observers may judge the leader’s adherence to his own principles, which is to say, his authenticity. Authentic leaders, finally, are marked by an “authentic followership” distinguishable by their concurrence with the leader’s convictions, their judgment that the leader’s authority is based upon deeply held values rather than pretension or artifice, and their positive appraisal of the harmony among the leader’s beliefs, words, and deeds (2005).

The authentic leader’s life story signals to him and, importantly, to his followers, how the leader makes sense of his life, how he justifies his choices, and why leadership is a ‘natural’ extension of his commitment to principled living (Pearce 2003; Shamir and Eilam 2005). While autobiographical narratives are, of course, “constrained by the events of life” (Shamir and Eilam 2005), they are nonetheless deliberately constructed (Neisser 1994; Yarrow 2008) by authentic leaders in order to “confer meaning on prior events” the significance of which may ultimately be judged by the followers (Shamir and Eilam 2005).

Of additional import for the Imam and Pastor given their work with faith communities, but also with alienated youths and angry militants, is the question of relatability. Life stories, As Eva Illouz observes, are an inherently accessible means of self-reflection because “autobiographical discourse expresses more directly than other discourse one’s sense of self, identity, and motivation for acting in the world” (Illouz 2003). Referencing recent scholarship on leadership and social identity theory, Shamir and Eilam write that:

“...followers identify with the leader to the extent that the leader is prototypical of the group, that is to the extent he or she embodies and represents central group values and characteristics. Followers’ judgments about the prototypicality of the leader are likely to be based on his or her life-story: the more the story presents the leader as similar to the followers in terms of background, values and other central characteristics, the more likely are followers to perceive the leader as authentic and as a ‘representative character’ worthy of identification and trust” (2005; Shamir, House, and Arthur 1993).

Though the leader’s rise to a position of authority may be unique, the authentic leader’s life story must be “embedded in a collective story of which the followers are a part” in order for followers to both identify with the leader and grant him authority (Shamir and Eilam 2005).

Followers whose sympathies and aspirations resonate with those they recognize from the story of the leader’s own life may feel powerfully connected to that leader. Respect, loyalty and obedience are likely to follow. Not surprisingly, perhaps, Shamir and Eilam note that “there are reasons to expect authentic leadership to be contagious” (2005). Authentic leaders “may give license or even encourage others to behave authentically as well,” encouraging followers to themselves become positive “role models” for authentic living and leadership (2005).

Shamir and Eilam suggest four thematic classifications into which autobiographical leadership development narratives tend to be divided, most notably for the purposes of this study, the “leadership development out of struggle” theme (2005). Stories thus categorized point to the

maturation of the leader through “ordeals that transformed the person,” frequently “contain a moral element stemming from the fact that the reported life experiences offered easier, but less moral, ways of coping” that the leader ultimately rejects, and usually entail “victory over enemies or debilitating circumstances” (2005). The leader’s principled choices allow him to triumph over hardship, setting a positive and appealing example of how his group’s core values can lead to victory, prosperity, and the joy of self-actualization. At the same time, forged-by-adversity narratives are well-suited to showcase the requisite qualities of leadership, namely “strong will, self-confidence, proactivity, ability to take on big challenges and cope with difficulties, independence, and toughness” (2005). When accompanied by the high level of mission-life coherence that authentic leaders display, these traits make for a compelling account and a magnetic figure capable of commanding respect from followers and calling others to mission that animates his life.

The ability to lead, then, arises when a group member is put in position of authority by followers (Parsons 1952) who deem the person an authentic representative of the best characteristics of the group (Shamir and Eilam 2005), from which authenticity the leader will likely evince self-confidence and charisma. This charisma, in turn, is critical to a leader’s capacity to enliven his compatriots and enlist their support for his cause. In his mid-century promulgation on authority, Max Weber proposes a tripartite typology including the notion of charismatic authority. According to Weber, charismatic authority is “power legitimized on the basis of a leader’s exceptional personal qualities or the demonstration of extraordinary insight and accomplishment, which inspire loyalty and obedience from followers” (Weber 1947).

The assumed expertise that accompanies religious ordination lends significant import to a leader in the Nigerian context, as noted above, and the leader's authority may again be augmented when it is developed through a gripping personal story of triumph or redemption. Philip Smith would seem to agree, contending, in fact, that Weber's original conception of charisma actually "relates to the sacred qualities of an individual" leader (Smith 2000) who typifies the ideals and values of the group to the point of achieving the status of an exemplar. Following Weber, Smith describes the merging of admiration and obligation that results as "the sense of mission and duty that defines the relationship between the [charismatic] leader and his or her followers," a relationship of he terms a "moral bond" (Smith 2000).

The Power of Narrative

Smith also illustrates what he considers the essential relationship between charismatic authority on the one hand, and both rhetorical skill and narrative communication on the other. Shamir and Eilam conclude that authenticity springs from an ability to communicate coherence between life-story and mission, and Smith makes a similar assertion, citing Weber's insight that charisma stems in large part from oratorical agility: it is rhetorical skill that serves "to convince [observers] of the leader's charismatic qualification" (Weber quoted in: Bell 1986). These contentions complement scholars of western Africa (Yarrow 2008; Ebron 2002; Hasty 2005; Piot 1999; Yankah 1998) whose research confirms that "rhetorical skill is an important aspect in the consolidation of status and identity in a variety of West African contexts" (Yarrow 2008). Working among civil society activists in Ghana, Thomas Yarrow finds that for the "'Big Men' (or Women) of the NGO sector," command of industry specific scholarship and fluency in a

range of relevant “discourses” is “demonstrated as much as asserted through linguistic competence” (Yarrow 2008).

For Smith, charismatic authority’s most valuable currency is narrative. It is by constructing narratives that are collectively meaningful that the charismatic leader earns the admiration and dedication of his followers (Smith 2000). Sounding remarkably similar to Shamir and Eilam in their discussion of “leadership development out of struggle” stories, Smith argues that the use of “salvation narratives” particularly distinguishes the charismatic leader (Shamir and Eilam 2005; Smith 2000). Whereas Shamir and Eilam focus on the theme of triumph over adversity, Smith suggests that salvation narratives promise deliverance from some familiar conception of evil, be it embodied by an actual nemesis, or by some larger societal ill, such as poverty (Smith 2000). Salvation narrative strategies include ideologically “aligning actors and events,” juxtaposing the narrator’s own life journey with nationally or culturally resonant “plots, trajectories, destinies” and, significantly, with “moral codes” that distinguish right from wrong in broadly recognizable patterns, ultimately tendering a coherent “salvation framework” wherein the leader’s life and example offer hope, comfort, and inspiration to followers (2000). In a similar fashion, Yarrow observes that in the case of leading Ghanaian activist life-histories, “the progress of their lives and of the nation were not seen as simple synonyms” (Yarrow 2008). Rather, activist’s construct their autobiographical narratives such that they partially attribute the growth and development of Ghana and its civil society sector – arguably, the salvation of Ghana from poverty, mismanagement and underdevelopment – to “their own ‘ideology,’ ‘commitment’ and ‘sacrifice’” (Yarrow 2008).

Anticipating Shamir and Eilam's conception of the authentic leader's story as "embedded in a collective story of which the followers are a part," Smith implies that within the discursive space of the salvation narrative, both the charismatic luminary and the everyday citizen recognize the topography of their own lives within a familiar range of opportunities for exercising personal choice (Shamir and Eilam 2005; Smith 2000). This ability to relate to the leader's life and context engenders affinity, trust, loyalty and even obedience. For Yarrow, meanwhile, the charismatic leader serves as a role model because his choices are honorable and exemplary, but also because they are aligned with the aspirations and best interests of the group. This 'commitment' to an 'ideology' of group advancement, even when it entails personal 'sacrifice' on the part of the leader, inspires respect from followers that is appreciated through the leader's life-story and granted by followers through deference to the leader.

The Processing Dilemma

Smith, Yarrow, Shamir and Eilam all implicitly point to a successful leader's ability to trigger what persuasion theorists would term heuristic level information processing. Heuristic level information processing "involves focusing on salient and easily comprehensible cues, such as a source's credentials [or] the group membership of those endorsing an opinion" (Ledgerwood, Chaiken, Gruenfeld and Judd 2006). These signals, in turn, "activate well-learned decision rules known as heuristics," including "'experts know best,' 'in-group but not out-group sources can be trusted,'" and so forth (Ledgerwood, Chaiken, Gruenfeld and Judd 2006). In northern Nigeria, we might add, "religious leaders are trustworthy," and "elders must be respected." What makes heuristic processing models so powerful is that they "allow judgments,

attitudes, and intentions to be formed quickly” because they are based on ingrained “rules” that are presumed to be truisms (2006).

One significant limitation of heuristic processing is the nature of decisions arising from it. Arrived at instinctively rather than thoughtfully, such decisions are more likely to be unstable or ephemeral rather than enduring (Ledgerwood, Chaiken, Gruenfeld and Judd 2006). Changes of heart and mind that begin at the heuristic level may yet conclude at what social psychologists consider a deeper, more systematic level if opportunities for “careful attention, deep thinking, and intensive reasoning” are available (2006). Opportunities for deep processing, however, must also be made sufficiently appealing. Significantly more motivation is required to process at the systematic level rather than the heuristic level, especially in conflict settings, because systematic level processing requires significantly more effort (2006). Systematic processing, of course, is essential for resolving intergroup tensions and interrupting repetitive conflict cycles, because “cognitive changes that occur as a consequence of systematic processing are likely to persist and thus affect future judgments and behavior” (2006). To complement the punch of heuristic level processing, the effective leader is well served to offer his adherents the means and inspiration to engage in the deeper experience of ‘intensive reasoning’ and reflection.

Intersections: Complementary Conflict Resolution Techniques

Theories of both authority-based leadership and leadership development through personal narrative are relevant to this inquiry due to the Pastor and Imam’s explicit use of both their inspirational personal narratives and their roles as religious leaders. They use numerous other

intervention techniques, however. Most prominently, perhaps, is the one that has been developed alongside the formalization of the field of conflict resolution itself: the interactive workshop model.

The Work of Workshops

Drawn from the influential work of John Burton and pioneered in the 1960s and 1970s by Leonard Doob and Herbert Kelman, the interactive problem solving model of conflict resolution – also termed the workshop method – was first conceived as a means to “bring together politically influential members of conflicting parties in a private, confidential setting for direct, noncommittal conversation” that encourages “sharing perspectives, exploring options, and joint thinking” (Kelman 1998). Contemporary derivations of this model frequently entail participation by non-policy level parties, and while the “ultimate goal” of Kelman’s workshops is “to transfer the insights and ideas gained from these interactions into the political debate and decision making processes,” many current incarnations of this model are intended to foster positive intergroup relations and further mutual understanding with an eye to affecting culture and societal discourse more than policymaking (Kelman 1998; Pace and Kew 2008). What all of these workshops have in common, however, is the fact that they encourage participants “to deal with the conflict analytically rather than polemically” and that “they are designed to produce changes in the workshop participants themselves, in the form of more differentiated images of the enemy, greater insight into the dynamics of the conflict, and new ideas for resolving the conflict” (Kelman 1998).

Opportunities for the systematic cognitive processing required to affect significant social change may happen best in these small-scale interactive settings, and, along these lines, recent scholarship indicates that workshops may serve three important functions. Marie Pace and Darren Kew's research on the work of Nigerian civil society organizations finds that conflict resolution workshops promote *principles* that encourage conflict resolution; offer practical *experience* applying those principles; and, may ultimately prove to be "constructive catalyst[s] in the ongoing *social transformation* of values, norms and political cultures" in society as a whole (Pace and Kew 2008, my emphasis). For program participants with minimal exposure to the culture and practice of nonviolent conflict resolution or of a healthy democracy – which Pace and Kew argue have much in common – these workshops appear to supply a crucial link between imagination and reality, between possibility and practice (Pace and Kew 2008).

The principles and skills that conflict resolution workshop participants learn and practice can include self-determination, non-violent competition, participatory decision-making, interest-based negotiation, and so forth (Pace and Kew 2008). In creating a discursive space defined by those values, meanwhile, workshop participants are creating a microcosm of conflict resolution-oriented culture amongst themselves. This culture is created within but, significantly, not bounded by, the space of the workshop. As Pace and Kew observe, "no individual belongs to a single group – be it ethnic, religious, organizational, professional, or social" such that "values and ideas learned or experienced within one group [or workshop] to which an individual belongs may be carried into the context of another group to which she or he is a member" (Pace and Kew 2008). Where Shamir and Eilam argue that authentic leadership may just be 'contagious,' Pace and Kew contend that "values learned at the micro-level within small groups can also impact the values of the largest group to which individual belongs, including the state" because these value-

laden workshop experiences give rise to broader “social discourses” (2008). These discourses “are powerful because of their capacity to shape and reshape a sense of what is real and true” in the larger social setting by “provid[ing] the foundation of a society’s ethical and moral logic about what is good and bad, right and wrong” including “the everyday logic through which actions are taken” (2008).

At the group and at the individual level, interfaith workshop experiences would seem especially critical in northern Nigeria. Aside from impersonal social mingling in public spaces, Muslims and Christians in Kaduna remain quite isolated from each other, living in what one might term post-conflict faith ghettos (Interview 8, Interfaith Mediation Centre staff, 29 July 2008). Most are inexperienced with respect to cordial interfaith relations in northern Nigeria, a part of the country wracked by interreligious violence as recently as November 2008 and again in February 2009 (Interview 8; BBC Timeline: Nigeria, accessed April 2009). Whatever the context, however, this type of intergroup work is essential for the acceptance of social change because it affords the opportunity to participate in that change by providing a framework that “provide[s] valuable discursive space where social change can be *collectively* conceptualized and negotiated” (Pace and Kew 2008, my emphasis). Indeed, in an overview of recent scholarship on change in conflict resolution settings – be that change in attitude, behavior, or perception – Eric Marcus observes, that “it is widely accepted that meaningful participation and involvement enable those affected to commit to the change” (Marcus 2006). In other words, one’s participation in creating change is directly and positively related to one’s commitment to it (Marcus 2006).

Pace and Kew point out that workshop participation tends to produce buy-in and know-how on a personal level, while also tending to promote shifts in ‘moral logic’ and sociopolitical culture in the larger groups to which those individuals belong (Pace and Kew 2008). Both are required, of course, for societal-level shifts from a culture of conflict to one of peaceful coexistence. Peace may be inspired by the life-story of a leader, it may be enforced through an authority figure’s obedience networks, but to be stable and sustainable, it must ultimately be consolidated into a society’s ‘moral logic.’ For peace to prevail beyond a leader’s lifespan, it must be internalized by a critical mass of individuals who will collectively sustain it through dedication, skill, even bravery. Toward this goal, experiential workshops may help leaders transfer responsibility for, not to mention authorship of, social change to a broader population. In short, by offering discursive space for “careful attention, deep thinking, and intensive reasoning” (Ledgerwood, Chaiken, Gruenfeld and Judd 2006) and for the interplay of collective imagination and practical experience (Pace and Kew 2008), workshop models of conflict resolution may make lasting conflict transformation more likely.

Finally, Joseph Bock contributes two case-study based recommendations relevant to the workshop context. “First,” he writes, “aid agencies need to try to cultivate the human desire to belong to a group promoting peace rather than violence” (Bock 2001). Harnessing this natural tendency toward grouping may provide the social support for, and affective bonds among, group members, potentially encouraging peaceful conduct and reducing the risk of recidivism toward negative attitudes or destructive behavior. “Second, it appears that community members, especially their leaders, need to be trained in how to help people discipline their information processing so that they are able to counteract, or at least are relatively immune to, hate-filled and often bigoted rumors” (Bock 2001). Such skills are particularly vital during so-called flashpoint

periods of high inter-group tension when pernicious or spurious rumors may lead directly to violence (Bock 2001). Bock does not specifically recommend any particular means of accomplishing these two goals, but does point out that “communal conflict preemption techniques” are vital, including those “aimed at preparing people to stand up for peace when violence is imminent” (Bock 2001). Interactive workshops that create interfaith relationships even as they promote new values and teach concrete skills would seem a good place to start.

Research Questions

A qualitative analysis of the Imam and Pastor’s work can investigate the nature and extent of the impact that Ashafa and Wuye’s interventions have on parties in conflict. Insufficient quantitative data exists around the precise number of people that Ashafa, Wuye, and Interfaith Mediation Centre have successfully turned away from interfaith hatred. Nevertheless, even a small qualitative study such as this one reveals compelling and consistent response-patterns among a sampling of Interfaith Mediation Centre trainees. In particular, this research focuses first on the impact of the narrative – the story of Wuye and Ashafa’s transformation from militants to men of peace – on Interfaith Mediation Centre program participants. Second, this study examines the impact of the Centre’s interactive workshops on participants who have already heard that narrative. To that end, this study asks two questions. First, what role does the Pastor and Imam’s personal narrative play in changing the attitudes and behaviors of their program participants, and why? This paper analyzes the nature of the narrators and the narrative, in addition to examining data provided by Interfaith Mediation Centre program participants, staff, and community members familiar with their work. Second, how does this ‘narrative

intervention' interact with other conflict resolution tactics that the Centre employs, specifically the experiential interfaith workshops? By analyzing data provided by some of the Centre's program participants, this study begins an exploration of the connection between inspiration and experience with regards to promoting durable changes of mind and behavior.

Thesis

This study points to an intriguing process between Wuye, Ashafa and Interfaith Mediation Centre on the one hand, and their program participants on the other. Based on the data from this study, this paper advances three interrelated arguments. First, Ashafa and Wuye's followers perceive them to live their values in word, deed, and story. This story, what I term *theography*, is a moving account of their profound struggle with hatred and anger that eventually results in a redemptive embrace of their respective faiths and, importantly, of each other. The narrative chronicles the merging of their lives and religious ideology through spiritual development, personal friendship and their professional venture as peacemakers. While this *theography* is the narrative itself, it is also the actual life they lead every day – their work, teachings, associations, and exemplary roles as leaders in the movement toward interfaith acceptance in Nigeria and beyond. Both by definition and by dint of credibility among their followers, the Imam and Pastor's life and story must perpetually reinforce one another, must be essentially inseparable.

Second, the effect of this *theography* on the Interfaith Mediation Centre program participants I interviewed appears to be twofold. The compelling story and daily fact of the Imam

and Pastor's lives encourages a process of identification whereby program participants recognize their own struggles with interfaith intolerance, anger and fear in the early challenges that the Imam and Pastor faced. Ashafa and Wuye's story, after all, appears situated within the larger narrative of interfaith tensions in northern Nigeria, and the harrowing tale is deeply familiar to the community members with whom they work. Having thus established a kind of narrative bond with followers, I argue that the resolution of Wuye and Ashafa's story toward peace rather than militancy appears to inaugurate a moral shift among their followers, a critical process that begins to alter clients' perceptions of what is possible and desirable with regards to interfaith relations. As typically as Wuye and Ashafa's story begins, in other words, it leads followers to a less common conclusion: that a sincere understanding of God's will commands peaceable interfaith coexistence.

For some of their program participants, the alignment of Wuye and Ashafa's ideology and scripture is the critically convincing factor. For others, the demonstrable agreement between Wuye and Ashafa's words, values, and deeds – that they 'walk the talk' – is what engenders respect and trust. Despite the apparent distinction, however, the close correspondence among their values, deeds, words *and* scripture – that which makes *theography* possible in the first place – requires that these seemingly distinct attributions equal one truth. The Pastor and Imam represent the attainability of union between one's earthly and spiritual lives, a union more appealing to some of their program participants than the temptation to militancy. Having framed that union in terms of their friendship, and that friendship in terms of divine inspiration, they make clear that to join their interfaith peace movement *is* to obey God and scripture.

Third, where the story primes program participants to believe that positive relations are possible, the Centre's interfaith conflict resolution workshops offer practical experience in making those interactions actually happen. These workshops offer personal experiences that solidify the changes of mind and heart that the story of the Pastor and Imam begins. What is more, within and ultimately beyond the space of the workshop, program participants contribute to important shifts in the very discourse around Muslim and Christian relations in Nigeria. Spreading word of their experiences, sharing stories of their own personal transformation, they participate in altering the "foundation of society's ethical and moral logic about what is good and bad, right and wrong" including "the everyday logic through which actions are taken" (Pace and Kew 2008).

In short, the Imam and Pastor's transformational narrative helps to inspire critical changes in attitude, buttressed by loyalty to them and devotion to faith, all of which is augmented by conflict resolution workshops that offer space to learn and practice parallel changes in behavior. What appears to follow among program participants is a powerful personal commitment to the responsibility for peacemaking. This is demonstrated by marked changes in vocation or occupation enacted via new interfaith partnerships. Interviewees report changes of heart and mind that include feelings of acceptance toward both faiths, rejection of violence, and desire for peace and collaboration. Such feelings have led to tangible outcomes including new professional interfaith partnerships, abiding interfaith friendships, and interfaith initiatives including a neighborhood watch group, a women leaders forum, a conflict widows support group, a child protection association.

Methodology

This study is based on qualitative data I gathered during a five week stay in Nigeria in the late summer of 2008. I spent most of that time in and around the city of Kaduna, which is the capital of Kaduna state, and home to Interfaith Mediation Centre headquarters. The organization now has several branch offices around the country, including in Lagos and Jos, but the majority of Interfaith Mediation Centre staff, including Imam Ashafa and Pastor James, live and work primarily in Kaduna. In addition to observing and interviewing the Centre's staff and program participants, I visited post-conflict zones throughout Kaduna, particularly areas in which Interfaith Mediation Centre had worked closely with community members, and, in some cases, still was. I also interviewed a small number of scholars, religious leaders, local political figures, traditional leaders, and civil society professionals in Abuja, Kaduna and Kano.

The bulk of my analysis is based on information I gathered during interviews. Additionally, I benefited from access to research materials provided by Interfaith Mediation Centre, and by think tanks including Mambayya House / Centre for Democratic Research and Training at Bayero University, the Ken Nnamani Centre for Leadership and Development, and Arewa House Centre for Historical Documentation and Research at Ahmadu Bello University.

Sample

While every conversation informs my analysis, the primary evidence on which I base my conclusions comes from data provided by the Centre's program participants. Of the forty-seven interviews I conducted, twenty-four were with program participants, including eleven men

(seven of them Muslim and four of them Christian) and thirteen women (six of them Christian and seven of them Muslim). These interviewees ranged in age from roughly twenty-four to sixty-five. Six of these respondents are traditional or faith leaders: the traditional leader and one faith leader are Muslim, while the remaining five religious leaders are Christian. The program participants I interviewed have a variety of experiences through the Centre: some had received multiple trainings in specific topic areas, including early warning systems or good governance, while others had participated in workshop conferences only once.

All twenty-four participants expressed familiarity with the Pastor and Imam's story of transformation. Several had heard it through multiple sources, including through the documentary film *The Imam and the Pastor* and by hearing the story directly from Centre staff, including Ashafa and Wuye, at one of the Centre's trainings. Some expressed awareness of the story by dint of being longtime residents of Kaduna, through membership in Jamatu Nasril Islam (JNI) or the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), or by having known Ashafa and Wuye through some other social or religious association.

Many of the program participants I interviewed had been personally affected by interfaith conflict, including three women who had lost husbands during what their characterized as faith-based conflicts. This relative number may actually be much higher among the general population that the Centre serves. Of the many people I met but was not able to interview, a majority volunteered that they had lost friends, neighbors, or relatives due to interfaith violence.

All participants expressed strong identification with the Centre, remaining engaged with it, however, to varying degrees. Fourteen reported being regularly in touch with Interfaith staff. Of this group, thirteen attend regular meetings held at the Centre. Ten, meanwhile, expressed

alumni-style affiliation with the Centre but reported less frequent contact with Interfaith Mediation Centre.

To gain additional perspective on the Centre's work and reputation, I secured interviews with five community members who were familiar with the Centre's efforts but had not participated in Interfaith Mediation Centre programming, and had never been in direct contact with anyone from the Centre.

I interviewed eleven Interfaith Mediation Centre staff during my four week stint in Kaduna. These included most members of the Kaduna-based team. I held multiple interviews with several staff members, including Wuye and Ashafa. I also spent considerable time observing staff, attending community meetings held both off-site and at the Centre, and visiting Local Government Areas (LGAs) throughout Kaduna in which the Centre has worked.

I was able to obtain interviews with high-level representatives from the premier faith-based umbrella organizations in Nigeria, namely CAN and JNI. These are two of the most important partners among Interfaith Mediation Centre's inter-organizational network. Together, CAN and JNI represent the vast majority of Nigeria's faith populations.

Finally, I supplemented all of these conversations with interviews I conducted in Abuja, Kano, and Kaduna. I was able to speak with scholars and civil society professionals in these three cities – seven interviews in total – all of whom are unaffiliated with Interfaith Mediation Centre. These conversations, along with information I obtained through Mambayya House, Arewa House and the Ken Nnamani Centre, inform my broader understanding of the social,

political and religious climate in northern Nigeria, along with my analysis of Interfaith Mediation Centre's work specifically.

Data Collection and Preparation

Due to my interest in the transformational narrative of the Pastor and Imam specifically, I do not obscure their identities, for which transparency I have their permission. I do not reveal the specific identities of any other interviewees, having decoupled their identity from the interview materials either in the transcription or note-taking processes. I did, of course, maintain a record of (and declare where relevant) interviewees' demographic information, including gender or religious orientation, for example. Interviews are randomly numbered (one through forty-seven) and cited according to the number assigned to each.

Interviews generally lasted between an hour and an hour and a half. Interviews with program participants centered around their familiarity with Interfaith Mediation Centre and specifically with Pastor James and Imam Ashafa; their assessment of Ashafa and Wuye's impact; their awareness of the Pastor and Imam's transformational story and their assessment of its meaning and impact; their own experiences with interfaith conflict; their participation in the Centre's interfaith workshops and their assessment of resulting impact on them; and, their perception of the nature and causes of interfaith conflict in Nigeria and specifically in Kaduna. Interviews with Interfaith Mediation Centre staff focused on the development and delivery of the Pastor and Imam's story; organizational history; interreligious conflict analysis; the Centre's broad strategies and specific tactics, including the role of the Pastor and Imam's personal

narrative in formal and informal interventions; interfaith workshops; and successes, challenges and lessons learned.

The interviews I conducted were semi-structured. I prepared many of my questions in advance, but was as interested in having my questions answered as in having an open and responsive conversation with my companions. I taped many of these interviews, but in cases where taping was not possible or permission to record the conversation was not granted, I took detailed notes. In addition, some data was gleaned from the Imam and Pastor documentary and from programming videotaped by IMC staff for their own records of which I have copies.

Findings

In this section, I present the data I gathered from the Interfaith Mediation Centre program participants I interviewed. I arrange the data here in the general order in which interviewees and I discussed it, beginning with their general reflections on the Pastor and Imam's work, followed by their thoughts regarding the salience of Wuye and Ashafa's transformational narrative and the impact of the Centre's interfaith workshops.

Establishing Impact

Before I could delve into *why* program participants felt the Pastor and Imam's work was impactful, I first needed to establish that participants felt that their work *is* impactful. "What has their work done for your community?," I wanted to know. "How has their work affected you?," I

asked. All twenty-four (100%) of the program participant I interviewed responded positively, indicating that they felt their lives were better thanks to the Centre's work. "Before [Interfaith Mediation Centre intervened], it was vengeance and violence," a middle-aged pastor from a small community on the outskirts of Kaduna City told me (Interview 16, Christian male, 30 July 2008). Throughout our conversation, he referred to the center both as IMC and as MCDF, a reference to its earlier name, Muslim Christian Dialogue Forum. "Then IMC called community members together. All the IMC tried to do is teach peace, preach peace. That is what brought us all together...We eat together, we come together. This is the work of MCDF. It has really changed our orientation and our thinking" (Interview 16). A Muslim man in his twenties who lives in the city echoed these sentiments. "After the [Centre's] training, we work together," he said of his Christian and Muslim neighbors (Interview 19, Muslim male, 8 August 2008). "We've all benefited a lot. What I learn from MCDF, I pass on to my brothers and sisters. Yes, it's possible, that is what they are doing. They showed me...Instead of violence we must work together" (Interview 19).

One young man credited the Centre with changing the very trajectory of his life. "Pastor and Imam Ashafa helped me so much," he said (Interview 21, Muslim male, 8 August 2008). "They saved my life, when others were getting themselves killed" (Interview 21). Speaking to the broader trends he has witnessed in Kaduna State over recent years he added, "Now there is peace everywhere because everyone wants to talk peace. We are a community that has benefited from MCDF" (Interview 21). Another interviewee, a reverend in his forties, felt blessed that Imam Ashafa and Pastor James had come into his life and his community:

"We've been working with Interfaith Mediation Center. I think God used them to prepare me for this work, because I attended several trainings from Interfaith Mediation Center

before I was elected to this office so I came to this office with that understanding on how I can approach my Muslim brother differently from the fire-for-fire approach in the past...Today we are living at peace, today people are not afraid to go out and do their business. Look, today, even if there's a crisis situation, it typically does not escalate beyond where it sparks" (Interview 6, Christian male, 4 August 2008).

A Muslim woman who works at a Kaduna-based women's advocacy center also attributed broad religious and cultural shifts away from violence to Wuye and Ashafa's work:

"You see as a Muslim, you know, I know there was a time not too far away from now that it is even a sin, some people regard it as a taboo, for you to even mention relationships between Muslims and Christians in a mosque. People will just look at you as trying to convert to Christianity, especially if they see you mingling with some group of Christians, Christians paying visit to your house, and they will target you. But today here we are that in most mosques they preach, almost on weekly basis, they have time that they dedicate for preaching of peaceful coexistence in Nigeria. They have a slogan that if the almighty God wished to make Nigeria to be all for Muslims, he has the powers to do that. But for him to make us Muslims and Christians, he has a meaning for that, that it is only honorable of us to accept each other, accept each other despite our religious inclinations, to move the country forward. This is the preachings always in the mosques now. So I think that this is one tremendous impact that MCDF have in Northern Nigeria. They were some of the first to preach this way and now, you see, others heard them and do it too" (Interview 5, Muslim female, 4 August 2008).

Indeed, most of the program participants I interviewed made comparable connections between the Centre's work and changes in their own lives and communities. "I lost my husband," a Christian woman in her fifties told me (Interview 25, Christian female, 15 August 2008). She was passing through the Centre and agreed to stop for a moment to speak with me. "I am here to save my children from those clashes between the faiths" (Interview 25). She looked tired and determined. "I see more peace in my community with Pastor James' help," she said, and kept walking (Interview 25).

Understanding Impact: Authority, Spirituality and Authenticity

As participants reflected on the source of Ashafa and Wuye's authority, three response patterns emerged:

Authority. First, all twenty-four (100%) of the participants I interviewed stressed that Ashafa and Wuye's roles as religious leaders are crucial to the reception of their message. Many implied that this was the most 'obvious' answer to "why do you think they are effective" type questions. "Of course, yes, because they have this authority as religious leaders. That's very important here," one Muslim in his fifties asserted (Interview 13, Muslim male, 8 August 2008). A Christian man in his twenties agreed, noting that the Imam and Pastor "are our leaders, our religious leaders, and we look to them for guidance and what to do" (Interview 9, Christian male, 7 August 2008). A woman in her forties, who lost a family member when an interfaith altercation turned violent also agreed. "They are spiritual teachers and Nigerians must listen to this authority" (Interview 14, Christian female, 12 August 2008). She underscored this statement by offering a distinction that several of the other interviewees also emphasized. "We don't always trust our politicians, you know, because of this corruption. But we hold our religion, we love our religion, and with our religious leaders there is this trust" (Interview 14). A Christian woman in her forties, for example, did not mince words in echoing these sentiments. "The politicians here cause more trouble than they fix. The Imam and the Pastor don't do like that, and we must listen to them as our religious fathers," she concluded (Interview 26, Christian female, 15 August 2008).

One Interfaith Mediation Centre trainee, a Muslim woman in her thirties, deemed the Imam and Pastor's position as religious leaders critical even though she concludes that religion is not the main source of conflict:

“You know, people take religion in this place as something of a do or die affair. But the actual cause of this problem is not religious. Because those who perpetuated the problem, you see them meeting together in another place, Muslims and Christians, eating and dining together, yes, whereas other [civilians] are killing themselves in the name of religion. So, for us, we see it as more of a political problem...we see politicians using religion, because they know that Nigerians are religious people. We so much cherish our religion and the rest of it. So, they have no alternative than to use religion to divide us so that they can get to where they want to get to ... But now religion has become a problem, whatever the start of it, so we must also face this religious problem. Imam Ashafa and Pastor James are our religious leaders, and we must look to them to address this problem. You see, only religious leaders can do this” (Interview 5, Muslim female, 4 August 2008).

For this interviewee, faith leaders have the advantage of a salient entry point, particularly in and around Kaduna. “Here we are mixed, that is why we have more interfaith problems,” she said of the state she calls home (Interview 5).

Scripture. Second, twenty-one interviewees elaborated on the theme of Ashafa and Wuye's authority and effectiveness, and of that twenty-one, ten (48%) attributed the Pastor and Imam's impact to the fact that both their working lives and their personal lives are demonstrably based on the teachings of scripture. “These two are brothers,” one man in his twenties said to me (Interview 23, Christian male, 8 August 2008). “They tell us to love all our brothers, and that God has made us differently to live together. The Bible and the Qur'an say the same: do not pursue vengeance but peace. And that is what they do, they work together every day for peace” (Interview 23). Why, I wanted to know, does he find this argument for interfaith acceptance persuasive? “I am a *Christian*,” he pronounced, “if this is what God say, then it is so. Pastor James says peace is our duty. They show us that the Bible say it also so I believe it. When my

friends say ‘no,’ I say ‘Where is your Bible? See that it is true’” (Interview 23). The Imam and Pastor’s ready and regular use of scripture to animate their message of peace impressed another young man as well. He had attended an interfaith conference hosted by the Centre, and had additionally gone through one of their good governance workshops. “We must hear what the Qur’an say. You know, I know it, but many have not read the Qur’an. Sometimes they can’t read. So Imam Ashafa, he tells us. He is doing what the Qur’an say, and so we must, we Muslims. Yes, that is why people listen” (Interview 20, Muslim male, 8 August 2008). A woman in her fifties offered parallel sentiments. “The Pastor, he takes us to what the Bible says. He is without a hand because of a Muslim, but the Bible tells him to love and forgive. Here he is a man of God. I am a Christian. We have equally been hurt in these religious crises. So, we must listen. I want to forgive also when the Bible say it because I am a Christian” (Interview 25, Christian female, 15 August 2008).

Harmony and Authenticity. Eleven of these twenty-one respondents (52%) comprised the third response pattern, citing the evident harmony between Wuye and Ashafa’s values and deeds as a key reason why program participants trust them, respect them, and grant them such authority. “I see them together and I know that they ask me to do the same with my Muslim sisters,” one Christian woman in her twenties said to me (Interview 31, Christian female, 18 August 2008). An infant watched us from her lap as she spoke. “I respect them because I see what they do. Some of our politicians, they say this and they say that and then they go and do whatever they want. The Pastor and Imam preach peace and then they do the same” (Interview 31). The positive correlation between Wuye and Ashafa’s words and deeds similarly struck a Muslim man in his forties as extremely important. “You see, we can trust them,” he said thoughtfully (Interview 2, Muslim male, 4 August 2008). “They are not like the politicians who

live hypocritically. These two are friends because they believe, and we can see it when we can see them together” (Interview 2). I asked him what he thought that Ashafa and Wuye believe. “Yes, okay, let me say they believe what they do is right, believe that they must work together, believe that God say it, and believe that we are all brothers. So people respect them and will listen to them” (Interview 2).

Given the high correlation between the Pastor and Imam’s personal, vocational, and religious lives, it is perhaps not surprising that there was overlap between respondents who respected the Pastor and Imam’s vocational-scriptural consistency and those who admired the coherency of their actions, values, and deeds more generally. Seven of these twenty-one program participants (33%) indicated appreciation of both. Recall the young man noted above who identified so strongly as a Christian and appreciated learning that both the Qur’an and the Bible call for peace rather than vengeance. Later in our conversation he added, “You know, what they preach and how they do are equally the same. That is something I must respect” (Interview 23, Christian male, 8 August 2008). A young woman seamlessly combined the sentiments. “Everything they do gives glory and praise to God,” she said (Interview 31, Christian female, 18 August 2008). “They work very closely with the Holy Scripture and they live by this word. It is important for the rest of us to see that” (Interview 31). A middle-aged Muslim man put it this way: “Islam is a religion of mercy and Imam Ashafa is a man of faith and mercy. I see this in his work with Pastor James. They give credit to God and follow His teachings. That is enough” (Interview 13, Muslim male, 8 August 2008).

Narrative Upon Narrative: The Personal Connection

Program participants also told me about their own experiences with interfaith conflict, and it was from the basis of these stories that they tended to make clear how important Imam Ashafa and Pastor James' story is to them. Referring to Interfaith Mediation Centre as simply 'Interfaith,' one Muslim youth in his twenties said, "Before I came into contact with Interfaith, I think that violence is the answer to all my problems" (Interview 21, Muslim male, 8 August 2008). He swept his hand across the sky as he said it, as if to indicate not just the neighborhood where we sat speaking, but the arc of his life. "Then my Imam says I must work with Interfaith and I heard about Imam Ashafa and Pastor James. They say they give up violence and so we must" (Interview 21). I asked how he had heard their story. "Yes, I know it, they say it. And I thought 'wah, that is really something.' Also, [my] Imam told me about them. He told me they fought for their faiths and still today they are fighters for the faiths by preaching peace" (Interview 21). He pointed back at his own chest as he said this. "So, that begins to open my mind to peace. I told others about this, and, you know, some laughed but I know they are listening" (Interview 21).

In an effort not to intrude on private or sensitive matters when I asked program participants to share their reflections on the ways in which interfaith conflict has touched their lives, I kept my questions general. I did not press for further information when clear answers were not forthcoming. Many respondents, however, and especially female interviewees, spoke very directly about their experiences with regards to faith-based conflict. Several have faced significant loss or hardship. Some of the interviewees already quoted here have lost loved ones. Of the thirteen female program participants I interviewed, for example, three had lost spouses to

interfaith fighting. The men I interviewed were usually more circumspect about issues of anguish and loss. The young man just mention above, who was so impressed by the Pastor and Imam's transformational story, reported that he had never experienced or inflicted physical harm, but that he had nevertheless suffered. "Thoughts of violence tore up my mind," he said, shaking his head (Interview 21).

For several of the program participants I interviewed, Ashafa and Wuye's first-hand experience of conflict and loss resonated with related they face in their own lives. A soft-spoken Christian woman in her thirties told me: "There have been many problems due to this fighting here in the north. A friend of mine was hurt during the Shari'a crisis" (Interview 32, Christian female, 19 August 2008). I asked her what she thinks about the Pastor and Imam having once been fighters. "Well, they show that peace is necessary and it is possible," she replied (Interview 32). "They tell us that you can keep your faith and still accept the other [faith group]. The Pastor and Imam did this in their own lives. The young men need to hear that to know that they can hold onto the face but they must also embrace peace" (Interview 32). I asked her if she hears something of her or her friends' experiences in the story of the Pastor and Imam. "Yes," she answered. After a moment, she added, "Well, their past is the same as ours. It is the same. The story is the same. Pastor and Imam are a part of it and they are making this change. We can go with them because we need to stop these religious crises" (Interview 32). Her companion, a Muslim woman who looked to be about the same age, listened, nodding, and then said, "It is very important for us to hear that this peace is possible and to know that Imam Ashafa and Pastor James overcame this violence problem. When the people hear that, it gives them hope," she added (Interview 15, Muslim female, 19 August 2008).

In his evaluation of Ashafa and Wuye's work, the reverend mentioned earlier explained that he believes "two things make their message authentic" from the perspective of their followers:

"One: people who know them when they were growing or hear their story today and know what James and Ashafa stood for and finally see that they now change and start dialoging and discussing issues of common interest, people now say look let's follow their new path. People who did not know them before still can hear the story and come to understand that change because maybe they can relate it to their own lives or they can relate that need [for change] to their own lives" (Interview 6, Christian male, 4 August 2008).

Many of the Centre's trainees, he notes, share a sense of common history with the Imam and the Pastor, providing for shared sensibilities and a foundation of trust. Warming to the second reason that he considers their message of peace authentic, he explained that when the 'relatability' factor is combined with positive religious authority, something very special happens:

"And number two, in the past the religious leaders were actually the ones using their authority to push and incite people. Also when they were young, Ashafa and James maybe did some of the same. Now, Imam Ashafa who preached and tell his followers "don't have anything to do with the Christians" we have seen him with the Christian Pastor sitting on television and talking and shaking hands. Now people are willing to change their positional view. And Pastor James who have said to people "don't have anything to do with this Muslim" or every time he is abusing every Muslim is now seen working and going for meetings, conferences and workshops with the Muslim leaders. People think 'Come on, what is happening to our guy?' It makes people think. Ashafa and James are like one of them and their faith is very important. So that also has them saying, 'Okay, what James and Ashafa are doing is right'" (Interview 6).

After falling silent for a moment, he echoed a sentiment with which many before him had agreed. "Leadership," he concluded, "is very important" (Interview 6).

The resident pastor of a church located outside of Kaduna City took Pastor James and Imam Ashafa's story to a more symbolic level still. "They are two, you know," he said of Wuye and Ashafa, "and so we are in Kaduna, Muslim and Christian equally" (Interview 16, Christian male, 30 July 2008). He looked to be in his fifties, with a dignified air and the quiet voice of

someone who has experienced tragedy first hand. He is one of the Centre's trainees, and considers himself a friend of the organization. "They fought in the past," he said. "Yes, we know their story. They speak of it. They speak of it and we know that they have changed" (Interview 16). For this pastor, "change" is not just an abstraction. Years before, interfaith rioting tore through his village after a religious controversy was sparked at a nearby university. No one he knew had been a part of the original controversy. Still, when fighting broke out in his village, dozens of people were killed. "God has put us here together as Christians and Muslims," he said, sounding like the Interfaith Mediation staffers I interviewed (Interview 16). "Equally we must be brothers as those two are. People see them and they see that change in them so they know that they must do the same. They know that it is possible for us" (Interview 16).

His conviction grows in part from the training he received from Interfaith Mediation Centre. "Now I know what to do if trouble starts. I know the imams to call and we patrol together. We are on duty twenty-four hours a day" (Interview 16). How had he first connected with these imams, I asked him, and why did he trust them? "I meet them through Interfaith," he said matter of factly. "They give us this early warning training in the workshops" (Interview 16).

The Work of Workshops

For many of the participants with whom I spoke, the workshops are the space in which concepts that Interfaith Mediation Centre advances – cooperation and cordiality, nonviolence and acceptance – coalesce into the realm of real life. One Muslim woman I interviewed works with a nonprofit to promote women's rights, including access to education, adequate nutrition, political

participation, health and maternity care. Shortly before we spoke, she had attended a women's conference held by the Centre, which included interactive workshops and other interfaith activities. She told me that the conference helped her fully appreciate that Nigerian women share similar needs and concerns, whatever their religion.

“You see, the program was targeted at conflict situations. You know, we have these religious conflicts here and there in Nigeria, particularly in northern Nigeria. So it was centered on that. We reviewed the cycle of conflict in Nigeria, and in Northern Nigeria in particular. And, we come to realize that women and children, whether Muslim or Christian, are always at the receiving end. We are always the victims. And no priority whatever it is, the programs that are designed to us they are always designed by men, implemented by men, so the women have no stake at all...and then we looked at: What are the ways women could come in? What are the possible contributions women could make in that aspect?” (Interview 5, Muslim female, 4 August 2008).

She began to feel a sense of kinship with Christian women, additionally fostered by the structure of the conference workshops. “They have us sit together, Muslim and Christian next to one another, and work through problems together, and we see that we can do this, and we find that we have many things in common” (Interview 5).

One Muslim man in his thirties, who lives in a small community outside Kaduna City, felt profoundly affected by his workshop experience:

“The Pastor and Imam, in the past, this one is thinking I will revenge because they have killed my brothers. And this one is thinking, I will revenge because they have taken my hand. But then they sat back and they realized that nothing good comes of this. Then they came together. People know their past. People see them and they know their past. I see them and see a future. Now I am a part of it and Interfaith has trained me. I used to think that peace was impossible. Then I attend a workshop with my Christian brothers. We dialogue about the problems and at the end of the day I see that we can do this together and now I know that the religions call for this” (Interview 12, Muslim male, 8 August 2008).

The young Muslim man mentioned earlier who described his mind as being “torn” by thoughts of frustration and violence largely agreed with this assessment. He noted that the workshop was

as much a chance for positive interaction with Christians as it was for discovering a positive role for himself in the realm of interfaith relations:

“Then I went to their workshop on peace and acceptance. They guide my mind away from violence. I learned a lot of things. I worked with my Christian brothers for the first time and I see them in a new way. We came to agree on many things. Even though the faiths are different, the values are really the same. I learned that need, that we must all live together. When I realized there is that need, I came back to my community and am doing home work on peace and coexistence, particularly with the youth” (Interview 21, Muslim male, 8 August 2008).

He added, with evident satisfaction, “Now, I am a youth leader” (Interview 21).

Role and Ownership. Among the most outspoken of the program participants was an older woman who helps to coordinate one of Interfaith Mediation Centre’s programs for women whose lives have been disrupted by conflict. She was one of the first people I interviewed, and among the first to articulate a theme I would hear repeatedly in subsequent conversations. “Ambassadors,” she proclaimed. “We,” she indicated her female companions, who were both Muslim and Christian, “are ambassadors of self-sufficiency and peace” (Interview 33, Christian female, 20 August 2008). She settled into a chair so that we could speak more comfortably. “Interfaith [Mediation Centre] trained us, and now we should try to bring sanity and unity between the women, both Muslim and Christian” (Interview 33). She told me that women in her group travel beyond the bustle of the city, so that they can meet with “women in the rural areas” to offer support and guidance. “We carry our values with us and watch for sparks of conflict. Here, you see it” (Interview 33). She gestured toward the window where the city of Kaduna lay below, a city once busy with textile mills and other factories. Today most of them stand silent and empty, boarded-up shells of industry. “Many of the men having nothing doing [are

unemployed]. We have degree holders with no work. They will fight for food and they will fight over their faith. But the women can help. They can keep things calm when the men are sparked by rumors between the faiths, and the women can support each other” (Interview 33). Though she had mentioned rampant unemployment with regards to male bread-winners, she was eager to emphasize that women must also be productive. Women, she observed, are the primary caregivers for children, and thanks to her Interfaith Mediation Centre training, “now these are our roles too: we do campaigns about awareness, teaching women to care for one another. We involve more women by God’s grace. By God’s grace, we are going to make sure peace reigns” (Interview 33). She is the leader of her group, and indicated that this work has become hugely important to her. She is not a paid employee of the Centre. Nevertheless, she says, “This is my work, my mission” (Interview 33).

Within the jointly created space of cooperative interfaith relations during a workshop for women, one interviewee reported, participants begin to think about their roles and their lives beyond the conference:

“So we came up with this resolution: that we are going to serve as ambassadors of peace because the nurturing of our families is the jurisdiction of our women. She gives birth to a child and she brings up the child...So we believe that the only way is to empower the woman to accept this fact that we are all human beings and the most important thing is to preach peace and to work towards uplifting the living standards of human beings. Then, behold, we will be able to dispense 75% of the work, because every woman will work towards changing the thinking of her own children at home. And if I work toward changing the thinking of my children, I have four, you have five, you have seven, then behold, the society will be free and will be a peaceful one. So, we chartered our course together and it was one of the goals we achieved at that conference” (Interview 5, Muslim female, 4 August 2008).

Working in concert with one another, she reported, the women felt a sense of collective empowerment and new possibilities.

Good Christians, Good Muslims. Several other Interfaith Mediation Centre trainees expressed similarly missionary zeal for interfaith peacemaking, and fourteen of the twenty-four program participants referred to themselves as “ambassadors” for peace and interfaith acceptance. “We encourage them and tell them that they can help,” an Interfaith Mediation Centre staff person told me (Interview 34, IMC staff, 4 August 2008). “In everything they do, every day, they can spread the word of peace” (Interview 34). For many of the program participants I interviewed the newfound role as a representative of cordial interfaith relations signaled personal commitment to religious practice along with adherence to the Centre’s values. Recall the ten program participants mentioned earlier who explicitly attribute Ashafa and Wuye’s impact to the scriptural basis of their message. Many of these participants find scripturally based teachings compelling because such mandates guide them in on toward the best path of righteousness and faith. As one of the women quoted earlier remarked, “The Pastor, he takes us to what the Bible says...the Bible tells him to love and forgive. Here he is a man of God. I am a Christian. I want to forgive also when I want to be a Christian” (Interview 25, Christian female, 15 August 2008). Speaking with calm confidence, a Muslim woman in her twenties observed that “Imam Ashafa reminds us that Islam is a religion of peace and mercy. If I say I am devoted to the teachings of Islam, then I must be merciful and I must have care for my Christian sisters” (Interview 15, Muslim female, 19 August 2008). The reverend I interviewed told me that he and his colleagues “reduce the violence, because violence, the confrontational approach, is not just bad, it’s un-Christian” (Interview 6, Christian male, 4 August 2008). A Muslim man in his thirties put it this way: “They show us that we must be at peace with our brothers. That is what the Qur’an says. If I am a Muslim,” he asked rhetorically, “then what will I do? Yes, I am a Muslim. I will do it,” he concluded (Interview 18, Muslim male, 20 August 2008).

Making Change Happen. Several program participants reported taking on new leadership roles after participating in the Centre's workshops, including some who entrepreneurially blend messages of interfaith acceptance with other social concerns. The Muslim woman I interviewed who is devoted to promoting women's rights realized that, working together across religions, Nigerian women can advocate for themselves with a unified voice, simultaneously promoting interfaith cooperation and the mission of the Centre:

“It was really, really a very good experience because prior to that conference all of us were working at our own levels. We used to see each other as people from different background and people trying to move their cause, that is their religious cause, their faith-based cause. But the conference opened our eyes to a singular fact that we are all human beings, and whatever religion we worship, the utmost goal is to serve humanity. A Christian or a Muslim, we are all human beings, therefore the needs are the same. And the religious teachings they are equally the same. It's just the interpretation and the understanding that varies. So that conference really made us realize that. And there and then we all took it upon ourselves to serve as ambassadors for MCDF in our various states” (Interview 5, Muslim female, 4 August 2008).

Some of the women from the conference went on to form an interreligious women's forum. “It was out of the conference that we decided to set up the women's group,” she told me, and they had already held two conferences of their own by the time she spoke with me (Interview 5).

A Christian man in his forties, meanwhile, had long been interested in starting a small community organization to advocate for the welfare of so-called street children. He would like to see children in schools rather forced to hawk wares or beg for money, but he appreciates that child labor stems in large part from quality of life issues, including poverty and lack of education on the part of the parents. He did not know where to begin, or how to tackle such a complex problem that would undoubtedly require his mixed faith community to address these systemic issues cooperatively. “The training at Interfaith opened my mind and showed me that I can work with my Muslim brothers too,” he told me (Interview 36, Christian male, 7 August 2008). “I

started this organization to work with parents on these many issues, and you see,” he gestured toward his youthful companions, one Muslim and one Christian (Interview 36). “It is an interfaith project. We work with everyone for the sake of the children.” When that is not possible, he said, “we send a Muslim to speak with Muslims or a Christian to speak to the Christians. But always this organization is for both the faiths, and people who work with us know that. We are ambassadors for the Interfaith Mediation Centre in the community” (Interview 36).

Discussion

Interesting patterns emerged from this data, warranting further explication and additional research.

Authentic Authority: a Scriptural Basis

This study clearly shows that the program participants in the interview sample (100%) credit Wuye and Ashafa’s impact to their authority as spiritual leaders. “Respect religious leaders” is a heuristic with which everyone seems to comply, which works both powerfully and favorably for conflict interveners who are a Pastor and an Imam. Attempting to uncover a more nuanced explanation of the nature and source of this particular Pastor and Imam’s authority, however, revealed an interrelated pair of response patterns among twenty-one of the original twenty-four interviewees. The first, representing 48% of these respondents, centers around the scriptural basis of the Centre’s values and mission. It implies that religious figures may not be effective conflict interveners simply because they are authority figures. Rather, it suggests that

they are effective because their specific expertise as religious leaders is a persuasive source of authority. Such figures are at their most convincing, therefore, when they can explicitly align their otherwise social directives (live peaceably together) with religious mandates (love your neighbor, keep your brother, God has made us to live together). This use of faith-based directives is especially compelling, of course, in contexts like Nigeria where citizens are highly sensitive to the invocation of religious doctrine.

The second response pattern, representing 52% of these respondents, emphasizes the demonstrated agreement between Ashafa and Wuye's life choices on the one hand and scriptural teachings on the other. Among these program participants, respect and deference springs from the fact that the Imam and Pastor 'live as they preach': they befriend each other as they ask other Muslims and Christians to do; they live by the teachings of scripture; and, their personal lives and public personas cohere, a sentiment often underscored by a comparison to Nigerian politicians, who "divide the faiths so they can keep the power, and then they go and do whatever they want with whoever they want [of either religion]" (See interviews 2, 13, 23, 31). These respondents appreciate the harmony between Wuye and Ashafa's personal and professional lives, suggesting that transparency must extend even into the 'private' realm in order for that harmony to be meaningful. More importantly, this concern for life-work-scripture coherence arose during conversations about the Imam and Pastor's authority and effectiveness as peacemakers, suggesting that these respondents' assessment that a leader's authority is closely tied to the perception that he or she is consistent and genuine.

Both responses point directly to Shamir and Eilam's configuration of the authentic leader: that their leadership is 'true' rather than performed, arising as it does from an inherent self-

conception of their 'natural' role; that "they lead from a conviction," and their work or mission arises organically from this principled belief; that they have arrived at their values through the singular tutelage of personal experience; and their lives are coherent and transparent to the extent that "their talk and actions are consistent with their beliefs and values" (Shamir and Eilam 2005). Twenty-one of the twenty-four program participants I interviewed – that is, 100% of those who spoke to the source of Ashafa and Wuye's authority – all appear to have essentially applied heuristic 'tests' by way of judging the internal coherence of the system that comprises the Pastor and Imam's lives, values, and preaching. From where do their beliefs originate and are they supported by scripture? Does their leadership derive from hard-earned life lessons and accumulated accomplishment? Do their vocational choices correspond to their personal choices? Are they truly invested in the community? Having passed muster in all cases, the Pastor and Imam are deemed legitimate, trustworthy, and deserving of allegiance.

What is so striking is that these response patterns arguably represent distinctions without a difference. The Imam and Pastor's values and life-choices are tightly bound, and both are explicitly tied to their readings of the holy texts. To say that one is impressed by the concert between their actions and principles is, in effect, to appreciate the sympathy between their actions and scripture. All respondents in both groups (100% of twenty-one) appear to rely on two primary 'texts' to take the measure of the men: biography and scripture. Nowhere are these texts in greater sympathy than in the story of Ashafa and Wuye's unlikely friendship, both lived and told. It is in this story that Wuye and Ashafa clearly pass the authenticity test, reminding me of something Pastor James said to me: "Our story is partly our credentials" (Interview with Pastor James Wuye, 30 July 2008).

Theography: Living Scripture

The testimony I gathered points to a relatively straightforward process of identification, inspiration, and, ultimately, loyalty. While participants do not see themselves as equals to the Pastor or Imam, they do recognize Wuye and Ashafa as one of their own: "...their past is the same as ours. It is the same. The story is the same" (Interview 32, Christian female, 19 August 2008). Not only does the story of the two men's friendship begin and resolve in Kaduna, but it is imbued with emotionally charged experiences recognizable to their program participants, including anger, distrust, and suffering. As Shamir and Eilam predict, when the authentic leader's life story is "embedded in a collective story of which the followers are a part," followers are likely to identify with the leader and to grant him authority (Shamir and Eilam 2005). In the Pastor and Imam's case, the story seems to create a kind of narrative bond of sympathy and understanding with program participants. The Imam and the Pastor have struggled alongside other members of their community, and that fact alone seems hugely significant for their clients.

Beyond struggle, their story is also imbued with something else deeply recognizable to Interfaith Mediation Centre clients. Redemptive love of God and faith is what 'saves' the Imam and Pastor from lives of anger and violence. Framed as their personal transformations are in terms of a devotion to understanding and embodying God's word, what begins as a narrative bond transforms into a scriptural and moral imperative (Smith 2000), encouraging the young woman who claims that "The[ir] story is the same" as that of many northern Nigerians to conclude that "We can go with them because we need to stop these religious crises" (Interview 32).

Here, the power of *theography* over simple biography comes into stark relief. Time and again, the Centre's program participants return to their faith, encouraged by the knowledge that, through piety and perseverance, a story of collective struggle can end in triumph. It is very important for us to hear that this peace is possible," as one woman put it, "and to know that Imam Ashafa and Pastor James overcame this violence problem. When the people hear that, it gives them hope" (Interview 15, Muslim female, 19 August 2008). It remains unclear whether the Imam and Pastor's story rises to the level of what Philip Smith terms a "salvation narrative," but it does seem clear that Ashafa and Wuye's story resonates with a deeply felt desire to rise above the miseries of interfaith conflict.

Theography appears additionally meaningful in this particular context thanks to a surprising source: the country's dubious politicians. Based on complaints of hypocrisy and phony investment – "Some of our politicians, they say this and they say that, they divide the faiths so they can keep the power, and then they go and do whatever they want with whoever they want [of either religion]" (Interview 31, Christian female, 18 August 2008) – community members are relieved to find leaders whose values, motives, and piety they can trust. The individuals with whom I spoke seemed hungry for authentic role models, or even for leaders who reliably care about the citizenry. Here, Wuye and Ashafa's story amounts to a kind of narrative proof, not only of their comparatively "exceptional personal qualities" and their "extraordinary insight and accomplishment" (Weber 1947), but of their public testament to a public *and* private commitment to living what they preach, to the highest commandments, and to the well-being of all Nigerians.

When lead conflict interveners are also primary storytellers of a collective narrative from which their personal stories derive meaning and legitimacy, and when their personal decision to embrace rather than hate one another is based on the mutual goal to live out the word of God, then this personal decision is infused with communal significance. Thomas Yarrow writes that “stories and anecdotes illuminate the steps through which a distinctive ‘self’ develops” while “relationships with particular people are construed as the more tangible though more transient counterpart to the less tangible, more enduring ‘ideology’ that arises” (Yarrow 2008). For the Pastor and Imam, their story reveals the steps through which a unique *friendship* develops. Their hard-won relationship *is* the ideology, and a partnership from which, as both men have said, “there is no divorce” (Interview 1, Pastor James Wuye, 30 July 2008). Because their friendship is based on their interpretation of God’s word, their enduring partnership demonstrates their permanent commitment to scripture, the highest, “more enduring” doctrine of all (Yarrow 2008).

One of the most brilliant aspects of their particular *theography* is that the close agreement that it demonstrates between life and message, and between message and scripture, makes *obedience to their message tantamount to scriptural compliance*. Recall the interviewee who stressed, “I am a Christian,” continuing, “Pastor James says peace is our duty. They show us that the Bible says it also so I believe it” (Interview 23, Christian male, 8 August 2008). Scriptural obedience is a potent incentive in northern Nigeria, even perhaps in the face of temptation toward militancy. For, what the Pastor and Imam profess to have gained in militancy’s place appears to represent a collective desire that may be powerful enough to trump inclinations toward anger and violence: fundamental compatibility between one’s everyday actions and one’s duty to God. To be inspired by Ashafa and Wuye’s lives is to be inspired by a higher mandate; to

do as they do by befriending an ‘enemy’ is to live out one of the hardest scriptural tenets; to follow their lead is to represent, as they appear to, the best that each faith has to offer.

Good Muslims, Good Christians: A Calling

One theme implied across many of the interviews I conducted was that of being the “good” Muslim or Christian, which one seems to attain not merely through righteousness but in the proper understanding and practice of one’s faith. One reverend said that “violence, the confrontational approach, is not just bad, it’s un-Christian” (Interview 6, Christian male, 4 August 2008), while a Muslim man told me that “They show us that we must be at peace with our brothers. That is what the Qur’an says. If I am a Muslim, then what will I do? Yes, I am a Muslim. I will do it” (Interview 18, Muslim male, 20 August 2008). But program participants engaged this theme throughout our conversations. Interviewees frequently stressed their identities as Christians or Muslims, and some offered this identity as an explanation for their compliance with scriptural mandates for interfaith peace. These declarations seemed to express both an understanding of what it means to be a ‘good’ faith practitioner and a desire to be considered as such not only by God, but by fellow practitioners, by the Pastor and Imam, even by this researcher.

It seems additionally possible that this theme indicates a desire on the part of Interfaith Mediation Centre trainees to be recognized for their own “Pastor and Imam” style accomplishments. Having set the standard by way of their living *theography*, the program participants’ frequent emphasis on the strength of their own religious identities seems to

underscore their desire to compare themselves favorably against the model set by Ashafa and Wuye. As such, this theme may even represent attempts to confirm trainees' allegiance to the Centre's mission and message. Whatever its precise implications, the (implied) call to become a good practitioner by joining the Pastor and Imam's faith is clearly one to which program participants are responding positively.

Practicing Peaceable Relations: the Narrative-Workshop Continuum

Program participants' minds and hearts do appear to be significantly impacted by Ashafa and Wuye's life and story, but *theography* alone, however compelling, seems unlikely to guarantee changes in program participants' behavior. Instead, the story appears to prime participants for participating in the Centre's workshops, where the practice of change takes place. As Ledgerwood, et al. note, the hard work of "systemic processing" – exactly the type that workshops entail – "is unlikely to occur unless a person is both *able* and *motivated* to do it" (Ledgerwood, Chaiken, Gruenfeld and Judd 2006). Here, Wuye and Ashafa's transformational narrative may serve as both the inspiration and motivation that program participants will need for the workshops to come.

The fact that several workshop participants could readily speak to significant, even rapid, workshop outcomes, does seem to indicate an expedited or enhanced workshop process. In any case, participants seemed almost impatient to speak to me about the *products* of their workshop experiences, both tangible and intangible. Typically, respondents spoke of basic, profound consequences: "They have us sit together, Muslim and Christian next to one another, and work

through problems together, and we see that we can do this...And there and then we all took it upon ourselves to serve as ambassadors for MCDF in our various states;” or, “...I came back to my community and am doing home work on peace and coexistence, particularly with the youth. Now I am a youth leader;” or, “We eat together, we come together;” and, “The training at Interfaith opened my mind and showed me that I can work with my Muslim brothers too. I started this organization to work with parents on these many issues, and you see. It is an interfaith project” (Interview 5, Muslim female, 4 August 2008; Interview 21, 8 August 2008; Interview 16, Christian male, 30 July 2008; Interview 36, Christian male, 7 August 2008). These recitations poured out of the program participants such that it was almost easy to miss the fact that these are transformation stories in their own right. These are the stories of today’s citizens, but perhaps among them is the beginning to a story of tomorrow’s “Pastor and Imam.”

Just as importantly, all of the stories that the Centre’s clients offered as testament to their *own* transformations also entailed close work with *other* community members, many of whom have participated in the Centre’s programming. The women’s forum involved dozens of women from across the country; the “youth leader” is working with young men who have no special training; and the same is true of the man who launched the child welfare association (Interviews 5, 21, 36). What participants are describing, in other words, is a process whereby they have become, as Marie Pace and Darren Kew foresee, “constructive catalyst[s] in the ongoing social transformation of values, norms and political cultures” (Pace and Kew 2008). Workshop participants who share their experiences with friends and relations are spreading “values learned at the micro-level within small groups” to “the largest group to which an individual belongs, including the state” (Pace and Kew 2008). In a very real sense, they are contributing to and changing the very discourse around interfaith relations in northern Nigeria, discourses that have

the “capacity to shape and reshape a sense of what is real and true” in the larger social setting (Pace and Kew 2008). These participants are actively challenging their “society’s ethical and moral logic about what is good and bad, right and wrong” including “the everyday logic through which actions are taken,” whether those actions be theirs or those of their fellow citizens (Pace and Kew 2008).

Finally, the Centre’s workshops seem to instill the habit of disciplined thinking that Joseph Bock suggests is necessary to help people “counteract, or at least [be] relatively immune to, hate-filled and often bigoted rumors” (Bock 2001). As the reverend I interviewed described, his Interfaith Mediation Centre training helps him ensure that conflict “typically does not escalate beyond where it sparks” because he is able to encourage careful information processing alongside dialogue with members of the other faith. “Someone calls me and tells me of some abuse they suffered from a Muslim,” he reports, “and I say please, don’t act, don’t say anything, don’t do anything, and they will wait.” After he has made contact with his Muslim counterparts at JNI he calls the plaintiff back and asks them to “please come over to my office, and when they hear that, they know that it is over.” They know, in short, that a visit to his office means it is time for reasoned conversation rather than reactionary anger. Such skills are the principles of conflict resolution in action, practiced in the Centre’s workshops and, critically, carried into real life conflict situations (Pace and Kew 2008).

Across the board, program participants spoke of these workshop ‘deliverables’ with evident satisfaction. These new relationships, forums, associations, shared meals, and reasoned conversations were theirs, their doing, and proof of their own accomplishments. Respondents clearly saw these changes as part of a larger shift in their lives, sounding as they spoke of them a

bit like proselytizers of a new faith. Describing what appeared to be deeply felt loyalty to interfaith peace, they used words like “duty,” “role,” “responsibility,” and “mission” (Interview 5, Muslim female, 4 August 2008; Interview 16, Christian male, 30 July 2008; Interview 23, Christian male, 8 August 2008; Interview 33, Christian female, 20 August 2008).

The Loyalty Outcome: Ambassadors of Peace

Philip Smith’s description of “the sense of mission and duty that defines the relationship between the [charismatic] leader and his or her followers” seems a remarkably good fit for what I saw and heard in Kaduna (Smith 2000). Smith characterized this relationship of admiration and obligation as a “moral bond” (Smith 2000). I heard compelling evidence that Interfaith Mediation Centre trainees feel precisely this sort of loyalty, to Ashafa and Wuye themselves, to the mission of Interfaith Mediation Centre, and to the faith that each trainee practices.

The ultimate impact of geography-based intervention combined with the practical workshop experience appears to be a profound sense duty to, and practical ownership of, the ‘role’ of interfaith peacemaker. As one Christian woman said to me, “We are ambassadors of self-sufficiency and peace” (Interview 33, Christian female, 20 August 2008). Here, of course, the “we” represented her fellow Muslim and Christian women. “Interfaith [Mediation Centre] trained us, and now we should try to bring sanity and unity between the women, both Muslim and Christian. We carry our values with us and watch for sparks of conflict” (Interview 33). A Christian man put it this way: “I know the imams to call [after training with the Center] and we patrol together. We are on duty twenty-four hours a day” (Interview 16, Christian male, 30 July

2008). More than indicating the obligation felt by a “moral bond” (Smith 2000), both declarations had some passion behind them.

Loyalty to the mission of the Centre resulting in the kind of “self-sufficiency” (Interview 33) and deep personal investment that some Interfaith Mediation Centre trainees display has significant potential implications for the field of conflict resolution generally. First, if the Pastor and Imam’s combination of inspirational *theography* and experiential skills-building is transferable across conflict contexts, it may represent replicable outcomes, a promising possibility both for local conflict resolution practitioners and for funders seeking initiatives to support. Second, if the Pastor and Imam’s apparent ability to command loyalty from followers can withstand flashpoint crises, and can “prepar[e] people to stand up for peace when violence is imminent,” then Wuye and Ashafa (or others like them) are capable not only of what Joseph Bock might consider obedience-based peace, but also of what he calls “preemptive” peacekeeping, an essential component of durable peace (Bock 2001).

Conclusion

Beyond specific outcomes, this study points to the need for a better understanding of the relationship between the narrative and workshop components of Wuye and Ashafa’s work. Preliminary indications suggest a vital and complementary connection. The *theography*-workshop model exhibits the capacity to produce program participants with a powerful sense of personal mission comprised of allegiance to Wuye and Ashafa, commitment to faith, and a personal desire to support peaceable interfaith coexistence. Perhaps most excitingly, Ashafa and

Wuye's model appears to "give license or even encourage others to behave authentically as well," promoting what Shamir and Eilam might call the contagion effect. The Pastor and Imam's model produces 'alumni' who themselves become positive "role models" (2005) for authentic, *theographical* living and even leadership, promising a potentially lasting legacy of improved interfaith relations.

Many questions remain. Have program participants' attitudes and behaviors been permanently affected? Will recidivism become a challenge as time passes? What social, political or cultural shifts will most challenge or best support the program participants' ability to sustain their dedication to interfaith peace? Are multiple trainings or regular follow-up programs required in order to initiate and maintain sustained change? How many people would the Centre need to train in order to produce a critical mass of citizens ready to stand for peace? This study offers an initial glimpse at a conflict intervention model that offers exciting possibilities in Nigeria and beyond.

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Appendix A

Sample Questions for Semi-Structured Interviews with Program Participants

1. Would you tell me a little bit about yourself? (Followed up as needed for demographical information: hometown, religious affiliation, age, etc.)
2. How would you describe relations between Muslims and Christians in Nigeria, or northern Nigeria?
3. How and when did you first hear about the work of the Pastor and Imam, or of Interfaith Mediation Center?
4. What do you think about the Imam and Pastor's work? Do you feel that the Imam and Pastor's work is impacting/helping the community? Why or why not?
5. How has interfaith tension or conflict affected your life?
6. What do you think about their history and the story of their change from militant youths to peacemakers? How do you think that story affects the people they work with? What do you think about this story?
7. Which of their programs did you participate in? Why?
8. What happened during the program? Who else participated?
9. Did you find their program helpful? What did participating mean for you?
10. Has anything changed for you or your community since you participated in one of their programs? Has anything changed for you personally?
11. Do you still go to Interfaith Mediation Centre, or do you still see or talk to the staff?
12. How do your friends or family feel about your work with Interfaith Mediation Centre?

13. How do you feel about the future for Christian and Muslim relations in Nigeria?
14. What else do you think I should know about Interfaith Mediation Centre's work or about your experience with them?