

My first fieldwork in Nigeria began up in the air, as we were approaching the runway of Lagos' Murtala Muhammed Airport. The young man next to me, who'd been awfully quiet throughout the flight, took his camera and started making aerial pictures of Nigeria's economic capital at sunset. Clearly emotional he turned to me and said: 'I haven't been here in more than 10 years'. The Nigerian-born man left the country when he was sixteen and now had to return because his friend was getting married. 'Nigeria has changed immensely,' he continued with a strong British accent, 'these days you can no longer go out after 7 pm.'

Nigeria is not safe: a common perception about the country. It's being channeled by Nigerians and observed by in- and outsiders through the (social) media. Being friends with Nigerians and Nigerian news agencies on Facebook means you have to brace yourself for the occasional picture of charred bodies after a Boko Haram attack on a church or partially blurred images of half-naked girls who were raped and killed in the streets of Lagos. The description of insecurity in Nigeria in terms of terrorism, kidnappings and violence might well be a reflection of perspectives of insecurity expressed on these (social) media platforms. So in thinking about *duress* as the everyday experience of violence and the emotions it encloses, it's easy to consider these major instigators of insecurity in the country as its context. But while I was listening to the young man in the plane, I kept on wondering whether there's a discrepancy between the insecurity that is expressed through the (social) media and the forms of uncertainty that directly affect the day-to-day lives of Nigerians. Thinking further of the months ahead, I wondered whether the political situation in Cameroon is indeed what informs *duress* in that country – a country I had never visited before. Apart from the many discussions in the office in The Netherlands about the theoretical definition of the term *duress* and what it could be, it was now time to understand what its meaning could be practically, in the field. What is it for the people? And is there a difference in meanings of *duress* among Nigerians and Cameroonians? And last but not least, of course, (how) does religion play a role? This report touches upon the questions asked in this introduction by focusing on the different legs of my journey, as each of them inspired my thinking and each of them touched upon most of the themes of our research project.

The journey

I spent a total of three months in Nigeria and Cameroon and travelled thousands of kilometers by different means of transport. These journeys became data. After all, we are researching connections, mobility and ICTs in Middle Africa. So every trip on a bus, a plane or a boat developed into a collection of stories and experiences.

The Lagos-Ibadan Expressway

The journey began after I had said goodbye to my neighbor-in-the-air at Lagos airport. Friends who'd been so kind to pick me up, drove me to their house in Ibadan over the dreaded Lagos-Ibadan Expressway. Although I made this journey several times before, I never seem to get used to the endless highway with trucks carrying tons of oil overtaking minibuses with twenty people and some poultry, all at a speed of at least a 100 kilometers an hour. Not to speak of the many highly inflammable trucks parked at the side of the highway and the hawkers trying to sell their plantain chips and ice-cold water at points of major congestion (usually around the average aggravating police checks). During the two hour trip to Ibadan, one can observe many (important) aspects of Nigerian society. There's wealth: oil trucks, luxurious cars, advertisements for expensive foreign liquors. There's poverty: young street hawkers selling fresh eggs while risking death as they run in between

the cars. There's bad governance: dangerous potholes. There's corruption. There's insecurity. And is it any wonder that this highway is then also home to another important aspect of (southern) Nigerian life (or lifestyle)? Christianity.



Along the Lagos-Ibadan highway: advertisement for Airtel and lots of oil tanks

The Lagos-Ibadan Expressway is famous for the many camps of (Pentecostal) churches along the road. (Inter)national churches like Mountain of Fire and Miracles, Deeper Life and the Redeemed Christian Church of God all have their huge prayer camps and/or headquarters here, but one can also find more local religious camps, like the ashram of Guru Maharaj Ji, and the Laughter Bible Church that is ministering 'against' barrenness and infertility. Metaphorically, I started wondering whether insecurity (in the form of the 'danger' of everyday life on this expressway) and religion follow the same route in Nigeria.

On my way back to Lagos, after a few days in Ibadan with professor Obono and good friends, I decided to stay in one of the Christian camps along the way. Through connections of a church in the Netherlands, I quickly found a contact person at the camp of the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG). About 46 kilometers before Lagos we made a U-turn on the highway and I started my exploration of the camp from the moment I entered the gate. Streets and facilities were all biblically named, like Shalom Fast Food and Psalm 1 Shop. The aim of the visit was to look around the enormous camp and grasp the atmosphere. I would only spend about 16 hours (a night included), but this turned out to be enough to get an idea of the place. The camp is home to thousands of followers of the church. They don't buy plots of land, but they can freely obtain it once they've been

a dedicated member for long enough. Every first Friday of the month hundreds of thousands of people find their way to the premises for a special service that lasts throughout the night. During a tour over the premises in the afternoon, I tried to make pictures but I was quickly summoned to stop by a security officer on a bike, explaining that I couldn't take photographs because of 'obvious, schematic reasons'. I was able to make some, rather unclear, pictures with my phone.



Offering and tithes boxes in the hall



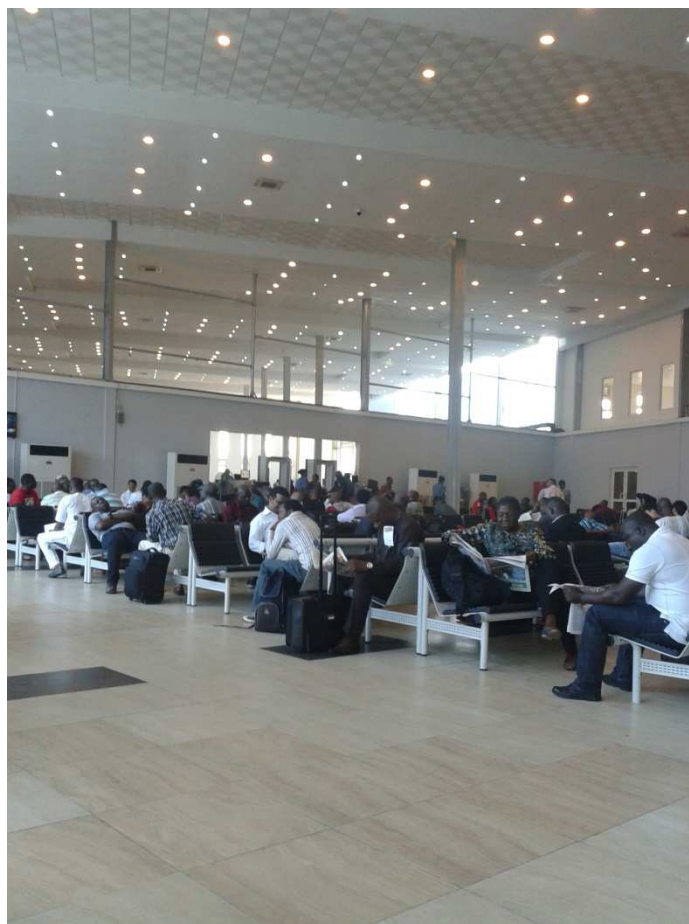
The altar in the church hall

In a few hours I explored 'a nation in a nation' along the Lagos-Ibadan Expressway. The RCCG camp has 24/7 electricity, something extremely rare in Nigeria. They generate their electricity from solar power and gas, and have a transformer. The church takes care of everything themselves: power, but also water (there's running water everywhere) and things like bottled and sachet water are made on the premises and have a RCCG brand. Including their own Redeemer's University. Another thing that really made this place 'a nation in a nation' is the fact that they have few or no fences around their (big) houses. Lawns in the camp are like those you see in American series, with well-kept gardens and without high fences and barbed wire. There is some surveillance and there is the main gate where every car is briefly checked. When I asked my guide about this, he said that hardly any crime, except from some petty crime, is going on in the camp. He continued saying that there is some kind of divine protection in the camp that makes everyone to feel safe even without fences. Compared to the other places I went to in Nigeria, this place indeed seemed very peaceful (the atmosphere was a lot less 'unsafe'), though the aggressive way in which one is confronted with RCCG in the camp can also make you feel like you are in a prison. At least, for an outsider.

From Lagos to Calabar

The next day I had to fly to the east of the country. The trip from to the airport in Lagos didn't take more than 40 minutes. Many of the people that live in the church camp take this trip every day, as most of them work in the chaos of Nigeria's former capital. I arrived at the domestic wing of the airport early, but was able to check in for my Arik Air flight. After I had checked in and gone through security, I was surprised to see the new departures hall they had built. From the outside the building looked like a complete wreck, but inside it could go for any small international airport in Europe. Every detail of the hall – the floor, ceiling and the lights – made it look luxurious and 'upmarket'. The

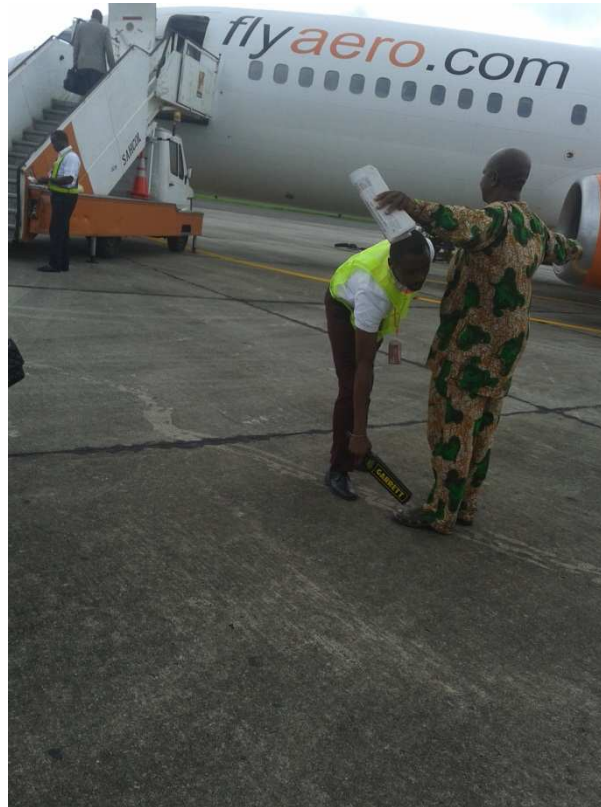
countless number of laptops, I-pads and Blackberry phones around me, added to the first class atmosphere. So did the prices of food and beverages. A simple chicken sandwich costs 1500 naira (about €7,50) and for a bottle of water one spends a 1000 naira, where you could buy one for 120 naira in a local shop. People actually buy it. And not only the super-rich. It brings me to an observation I did throughout my fieldwork in Nigeria. It seems to have become important to live a certain life style, which includes expensive 'needs' like (fake) designer clothes and accessories, holidays (abroad), big cars, luxurious perfumes, dining in fast food restaurants and consuming expensive bottles of alcoholic drinks. This is a life style that is arguably entering society through the (social) media and (inter)national celebrities. Although I realize that this is a life style only the (very) rich can afford, I do believe that it is dripping through to at least the middle class of Nigerian society and to a lesser extent in Cameroon society. Different life styles call for different definitions of poverty, and arguably different definitions of insecurity and different contexts of duress.



Departures hall of the new wing of Lagos domestic airport

After having waited for the flight for a few hours, all the passengers that wanted to board the flight had to go through another security check. Security checks at the airports in Nigeria are extreme, I could say more intense than in Europe. Especially at the 'local wings'. First, your luggage will be checked by means of an enormous X-ray machine, where you have to personally wait until the security officers ask you to open your suitcase. They will go through all your items and in case they can't find anything, they will allow you to check in. After check in, one goes through passport and ticket control and security. Here, hand luggage is checked through an X-ray, one has to walk through a security door and then a body search follows. Finally, upon boarding, every passenger has to point

their luggage before it is being loaded, after which a final body search just before boarding the plane follows. What do all these security checks represent?



Final body search upon boarding a flight at Calabar Airport

From Calabar to Cameroon

Upon arrival in Calabar nobody checks anything. The international airport (there's supposedly a semi-direct flight from London to Calabar) is undergoing renovation. Construction is going extremely slow, but I haven't been able to find out the reasons. Government wanted to renovate the airport in accordance with their policy to make Cross River State a tourist destination, and contractors started the work in early 2011.

My stay in Calabar was marked by two 'big' events and lots of new impressions and connections. These I will not get into in this report, but I will briefly mention the two main things I did. The first was the conference 'Calabar Through Time' organized by the History department of the University of Calabar. The two-day international conference on the history of the town and its hinterlands was a great opportunity for me to get to know (art) historians that work in my field. We had good conversations about combining anthropological and historical methods and I personally learned a lot about 19th and 20th century history of the region, which definitely broadened my research perspective. It was also a good test for myself to learn how to introduce myself and my research to an academic community that I wasn't familiar with. Discussions I had with, amongst others, Amanda Carlson (art historian at the University of Hartford USA), challenged me to think beyond my research proposal. Although I didn't have the opportunity to speak about my previous research for more than five minutes, I do consider my presence at the conference as important.



The representative of the Obol of Calabar (traditional ruler) during the opening of the conference

The second event that gave me new insights in my research during my stay in Calabar was the premiere of the Nollywood movie 'Red Hot', that I was invited for. Through Facebook, my friend Prince sent invitations for the red carpet event in Calabar. He invited everyone on his Facebook page to come and see the movie he had a role in. The event portrayed the glitter and glamour lifestyle of celebrities that is mediatized by famous Nigerian bloggers like Linda Ikeji (lindaiekeji.blogspot.com) and through other social media like Twitter and Facebook.



The present youth was excited to experience the red carpet and being interviewed by the invited press. They made lots of pictures of themselves with their favorite Nollywood actor as well. I made many pictures of Brenda, her friends and Uche Nwachukwu (popular actor) and was requested to immediately post them on Facebook and 'tag' them. This way, the pictures would also appear on their Facebook pages for all their friends to see. They were imagining their friends' exciting responses to the pictures. Unfortunately they didn't have direct access to social media, as their phones didn't allow an internet connection. On the pictures they posed like models: their appearance mattered a lot. Pictures on which they looked 'too fat' or 'boring' had to be deleted immediately. Flat shoes were quickly changed for high heels. It became impossible to see the difference between the Nollywood actors and most of the members of the audience. Everyone was styled to perfection. It then became clear to me how Nigerian youth are so much into visuals and I then started wondering whether visuals are the attraction of the social media. The horrific pictures of disasters Nigerians post, the pornographic videos and photos that sometimes appear on their pages, and the many 'selfies' (self portraits), got me thinking about visuals and aesthetics as a theme for my research. The celebrity lifestyle of the rich and famous that drips through to (middle class) Nigerian society. The opposite of duress, but maybe also a factor of duress in this country?



Brenda and friend posing with famous actor Uche Nwachukwu

Apart from these two 'big' events that I wanted to highlight in this report, I made contacts with new respondents of various backgrounds. I talked with youth about the issues that matter to their lives: unemployment, lack of money, relationship troubles, etc. was what we mainly discussed. But interestingly, though not surprisingly, religion was always the recurring theme in our conversations.

Uche, who's in his late twenties and currently unemployed, told me for example that in order for anyone to get a job in Nigeria they 'should know someone that knows someone that knows someone'. Uche didn't have so many connections, but he wasn't so worried about this as 'there's always the divine connection', referring to God. Even the première of *Red Hot* was a 'religious event'. The writer of the script is the wife of Hermon City, a Pentecostal church hailing from Calabar with a second branch in Abuja. The church was one of the main sponsors of the film and the red carpet event, and most of the people in the audience were members of the church. Some of these members had been assistants during the production of the movie, like Prince (who also played the role of a policeman). The entertainment before the show, a comedy and dance show, was equally organized by cultural groups from Hermon City. Interestingly enough, I didn't know all this until after I saw the movie and the movie also hadn't given me the idea that it could have been a movie written by a pastor's wife: it showed nudity, sex and a lot of violence. According to one of the church members 'the writer of the script wanted to show how she saw life in Abuja since she went to live there', and that's why she couldn't leave out the sex and violence. 'That's all really happening there'.



Posing for the camera and making 'a selfie' (self-portrait) with a tablet: pictures were posted on Facebook the same day



*Left: Evangelist Chijioko Ukadike (First Love Ministries, Port Harcourt) makes pictures of his children with his I-Pad
Right: Reverend Father of the Presbyterian Church (Ugep) using his smartphone to make a picture of his congregation*

After three weeks in Calabar (with a weekend trip to Port Harcourt), it was time to go to Cameroon. Getting an extension of my visa at the Nigerian Immigration Services in town took me a whole Friday, but eventually I received the right documents to travel with. I briefly visited Ugep and Ikom (border town) to meet with my local supervisor and former respondents. The main southern border post between Nigeria and Cameroon is at Mfum, which can only be reached through Ikom. The latter has really become a border trade town, with many Igbo's having settled there in the last half of the 20th century.

The Mfum – Ekok border and beyond

From Ikom I was brought to the Nigerian border post at Mfum, a ride of about 25 kilometers. The Igbo man that drove me from Ikom was experienced with the route and the border controls. He usually drives about 6 Nigerians in his very old car from Ikom to Ekok in Cameroon. He waits for them at the controls, pays bribes on the Cameroon side of the border, and advises his passengers on what to do and say. Each of the passengers pays 1000 naira (about 5 euros) for the complete journey. He insisted on driving me alone, because I was white and could cause some extra delays at the many controls. As I was a 'family friend' I only had to pay 4000 naira for hiring the car and the driver. On the Nigerian side of the border everything went relatively smooth. There was one border control before we reached Mfum, where I had to show my passport. The immigration officers were very relaxed and extremely friendly. We could continue to the border without any problem. At the border I was to fill in two forms on my whereabouts in Nigeria, previous visits and reasons of stay. The immigration officer said I would have some trouble with my visa upon my return, but when I explained to him that I had a multiple entry visa, he immediately took back what he said. The driver was waiting outside for me to finish. It was around 8 o'clock in the morning and besides me, there was only one other man that wanted to cross the border. It was extremely quiet and I hadn't expect that, because it's the only official border between Cameroon and Nigeria in this part of the country.

After my passport was stamped by Nigerian immigration officials, I went onto customs. They didn't check any of my luggage. We crossed a small bridge (by car) and I had to come down immediately after to see the first Cameroonian border official. He welcomed me to his country, looked at my passport and visa, and asked me some questions of which he wrote the answers on the back of an old document. I expected much more complications at the border and wondered why this man didn't stamp my passport. As I was getting worried, my driver told me that we would now go to the next immigration officer. To reach him, we first had to experience a kilometer of 'Cameroon roads', my driver told me with a cynical smile on his face. We literally entered the bush. The difference between the Nigerian side of the border and this side was beyond imagination. People and my travel guide had warned me for the bad state of the roads in Cameroon, but this was worse than I expected. We reached 'le chef de poste frontiere'. I waited here for about 20 minutes, answering all kinds of (irrelevant) questions in a strange mix of languages (French, English and German). Whether I was married or had children, the profession of my dad, my favorite football club. But the conversation was again relaxed in a very friendly atmosphere. While I was with the immigration officer, the driver was arranging a car to Mamfe for me. When I came back from the border post, he had already loaded all my luggage in the car for the second leg of my journey. There I was, in Ekok, in Cameroon. I had to wait for the car to Mamfe to fill up and it seemed nobody ever crossed the border. I waited in chief Kalu's shop that overlooked the border posts and my suitcase in a deserted car. In the two hours I waited in his place, I got to realize that Ekok was not really a Cameroonian village: it was filled

with Nigerians. I could pay with naira and, according to chief Kalu, call with my Nigerian number, but unfortunately I failed in doing that. I was told that Ekok is mainly inhabited by Nigerians.

It took long before the car was filled up, but eventually we started our journey with 6 passengers (two in front next to the driver, four in the back). Again, the driver was well known along the route, which seems to be very important to avoid too much trouble at checks. One of the passengers was Cameroonian, but the other four were Nigerians (all of them Igbo) who, according to their Cameroon resident permits, were farmers in Mamfe. In reality, they were businessmen. Since we were squeezed together in the back seat, we soon had long and interesting discussions about migration and the tensions Nigerians residing in Cameroon experience. We were stopped by gendarmerie four times on the 70 km route from Ekok to Mamfe. The journey by car, but through bush paths, took more than 3 hours. I was questioned twice, the answers were again written down on a small piece of paper. But the officials along the way were not relaxed and not friendly. They were intentionally intimidating. One officer asked me in perfect English whether I spoke English or French. When I answered, in English, that either language was fine for me, he started speaking complicating and extremely fast in French. Asking me one question after the other, without giving me time to respond. Threatening me that my visa was not in order, etc. etc. The Nigerians were clearly used to all this and told me that they each carry 4000 CFA for bribe any time they take this route. Along the road they negotiated with the gendarmerie on the amount of money they'd give them. The Nigerians told me that the gendarmerie is usually telling them that their papers are not in order, because they don't have an international passport. 'But you don't need an international passport when you have a Cameroonian residence permit and they know that, but there's nothing you can do', exclaimed one of them frustrated after the driver had negotiated for them over the bribe with some officers at the third control post.

Apart from the many gendarmerie posts, we were also delayed by the deplorable state of the road. Currently Chinese contractors are working on a tarred road between the border and Mamfe, but they haven't reached beyond a few kilometers out of the latter. The first 60 kilometers from the border into Cameroon are through a small and sandy bush road that is turning into a long trail of mud in the rainy season. Fortunately, I found out a few days later, the Chinese have finished building the road from Mamfe to Bamenda to a far extent, making it a much more pleasurable ride (there's also hardly any control posts along that road).

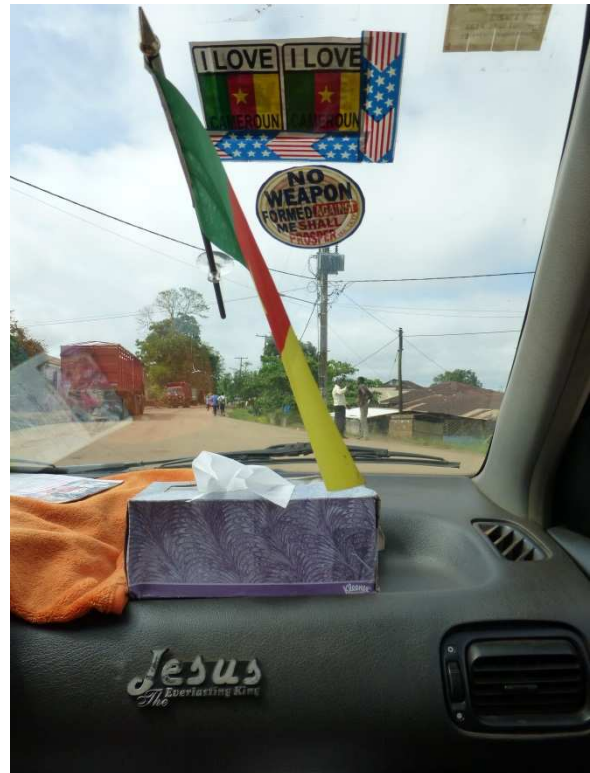
I stayed in Mamfe for a few days and was taken excellent care of by Felicia, a stylish lady in her forties that I got to know through contacts in Nigeria. She owned a boutique with hair extensions, shoes and bags in the market. I spent most of my time in her shop watching the controversial Nigerian prophet T.B. Joshua on television with her and customers. The Nigerian has his own television station that is extremely popular with Cameroonians (far more popular than in Nigeria). Although many people in Mamfe belong to Presbyterian and Catholic churches, and despite the fact that they referred negatively to Pentecostals as people belonging to 'mad churches', most of them were big fans of one of the most controversial Pentecostal leaders in the region. My days in Mamfe marked the first exploration of Cameroon and its religious landscape.



The bridge between old and new Mamfe. Women coming back from their farms



Rice to be exported by river to Nigeria, empty jerry cans to bring back fuel from Nigeria to Cameroon



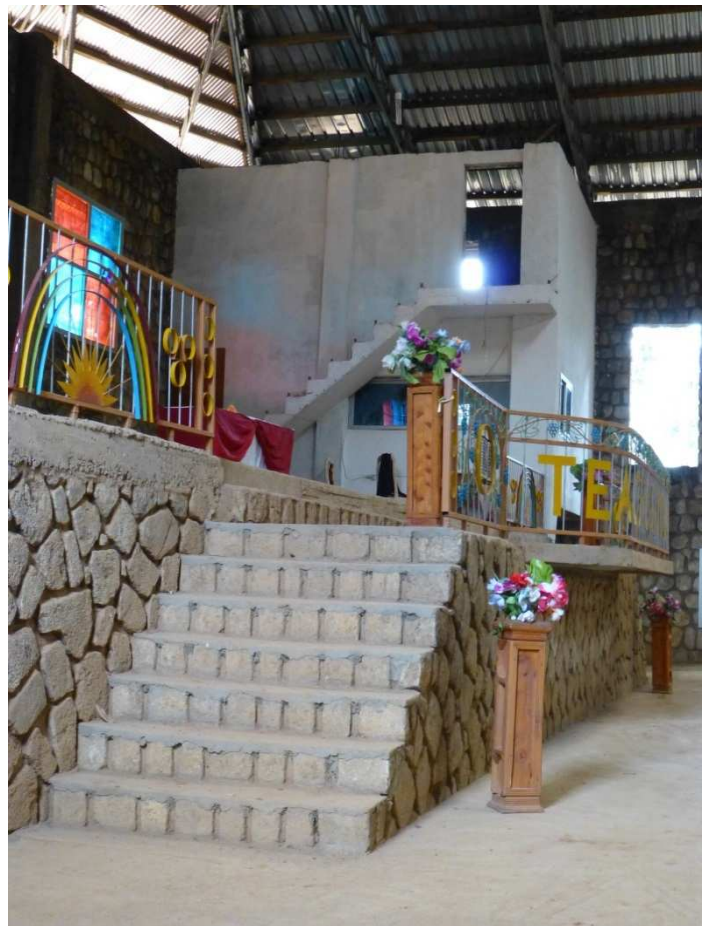
Inside of Felicia's car: Flag of Cameroon and the USA and lots of references to her Christian beliefs.

I continued to Bamenda where I stayed at Langaa. At first Bamenda seemed one big chaos. Especially compared to Calabar, which is a very organized city. Having done most of my research so far (MA and PhD) in Calabar, there were so many (for others 'normal') things that surprised me in Bamenda. The many open air shops and workplaces along the roads, the many potholes on the roads within the city, etc. In Bamenda I mainly worked in and with (Nigerian) Pentecostal churches and I mainly asked questions about people's religious background and reasons to 'convert' if they did.



Big difference between Calabar and Bamenda (or is it Nigeria & Cameroon?): furniture is being made and sold along the roads. I've never seen it in Nigeria like this. Where do they get their furniture from?

I worked in two churches: Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG) Solution Centre the Full Gospel Mission Jubilee Gospel Center, the latter being the oldest Pentecostal church in Bamenda. Although I participated in both and did interviews with pastors and members in both, I was more integrated in the RCCG. This church was close to where I was staying, so I could attend night services and the members lived in my area. This allowed me to participate in their lives more. Still, getting good and deep contacts with them was rather difficult. Much more difficult than in Nigeria. I spent a lot of time in the churches, almost daily, and got acquainted with their ways of worship, the themes they discuss during sermons and their ideas about Christianity and life (in Cameroon). In another paper I want to describe these churches in much more detail, but for this paper, I'll stick to a photo impression of the two churches. Soon a video of the RCCG will follow on the website.



Full Gospel Jubilee Gospel Center. The Full Gospel Mission is trying to establish the biggest church of Bamenda. The building is there, 'now we need the church', said pastor John, referring to more attendants/members. The building made of iron and stone and partly built in construction with the mountain, is huge and thousands of people would be able to attend. About 1000 members attend every Sunday at the moment, but the church is not even half full.



Choir of the Redeemed Christian Church of God Solution Centre.



During Sunday morning worship in RCCG Solution Centre, Ntarinkon

In RCCG I was particularly acquainted with some of the church members, mainly women. When they invited me to join them to Yaoundé for a regional women’s conference of the church, I was curious and decided to follow them. Not only would it allow me to have an idea of the church at its national level, but it would also give me the opportunity to get to know some of the members, as I hadn’t been able to really get good contact with any so far. A three day stay in Yaoundé with these women and in a regional conference of the church really helped me further in my research. This leg of the journey will also soon appear online in video.



The National HQ of the Nigerian Pentecostal Church RCCG and women praying during conference

Conquering the high sea

After having spent 7 weeks in Bamenda (of which I was sick for about two unfortunately), and travelling from Bamenda to different parts of Cameroon (Ndop, Njinikom, Yaoundé, Buea), it was time to go back to Nigeria. My final journey (before travelling back to Lagos) brought me from Tiko (Cameroon) to Calabar. I decided to go by ship, because so many people had told me that this was the most convenient route. Many people explained that it was the preferred route for business travelers and missionaries. So, even though I was a little hesitant about the journey on the Gulf of Guinea (which is nowadays supposedly getting more dangerous than the waters around Somalia), I decided to go the way many Cameroonians and Nigerians go. The boat left on a Thursday morning. We were supposed to leave at 1 am, but eventually we departed Tiko at around 3.30 in the morning. I had been at the harbor since 9 in the evening and was patiently waiting for the ship to go and for my passport to be back in my possession.



Ticket for the ship (The 'Endurance') that would take me from Cameroon to Nigeria

At 2 o'clock in the night I got my passport back, stamped, and we were asked to enter a small bus. The bus would bring us to Tiko (the first harbor we were in Limbe). In Tiko we were all expected to be in line to give our passports back to the ship personnel. They would keep it in possession until we would reach Calabar. We entered the ship as we waited for another bus or two to arrive with passengers. I booked first class, as I had traumatic experiences with a first class night boat somewhere in Tanzania, but in retrospect, the second class deck seemed pretty fine as well. The first class deck was upstairs and interestingly enough it was filled with Christian missionaries. While waiting for the last passengers, a dock worker gave his life to Christ (converting) to a Pentecostal

pastor on the boat and next to me sat a Presbyterian reverend father with his children. The two television screens showed a Don Moen (American Christian artist) movie of the nineties, that would be repeated the whole night. When everyone was on board, we did a communal prayer that was led by the captain (I immediately wondered why this doesn't happen in local flights in Nigeria). Opposite me the Pentecostal pastor was praying with some passengers. It was all so surreal: in the middle of the night I ended up in the middle of my research. We were on a boat, moving to another country, people were praying: it was a common language. An American sang 'Hallelujah' on the background.

I fell asleep for about an hour and woke up murmuring the songs of Don Moen. Breakfast was served and while the attendant put on a Nigerian movie about two reverend sisters and the temptations of the world, the ship slowly came to a standstill. We were told that we had to wait for the Nigerian navy to come and escort us into Nigeria: we were at Bakassi, which used to belong to Nigeria but is nowadays part of Cameroon. Entering without security was supposedly not safe enough. We waited for the navy for a few hours. Looking out of the window, I saw an oil platform in the Gulf of Guinea for the first time of my life.



An oil platform on the high sea. Picture taken while waiting for the Nigerian navy to escort us

It was impressive to see, yet it made me to be very conscious about the fact that we were in the insecure oil rich waters off the coast of Nigeria. The sea was calm, the people were calm. It was like nothing is actually going on in these waters. Until the Nigerian navy arrived. With two heavily armed speedboats they escorted us to Calabar. I really felt as if I entered a James Bond movie, though I still didn't feel unsafe. Upon arrival at the port, we were told that the trip had taken so much longer (we had been on the boat for 9 hours instead of 5), because 'two suspicious vessels' had to be passed and this had taken some extra time. Reading about journeys with the ship and through this part of the world, I believe the captain has negotiated over money with pirates, as this seems to happen most of the time. Just before we got off the boat, the captain thanked God through the microphone. And so

did the Pentecostal and Presbyterian 'men of God' next to me. I think I only realized long after I got back to The Netherlands how risky this journey actually was.

I felt at home in Calabar immediately. It was my fourth arrival in Nigeria and I was therefore surprised that I was picked out to meet the State Security Service, while all the Cameroonians could continue their journey at customs and immigration. I was being interrogated while I was waiting for my passport. Why only me? So Cameroonians aren't a security threat? The SSS officer let me go after about 15 minutes, because he concluded with a broad smile that I could never be a risk to his country. It was only then I realized that the Cameroonians were all having trouble at immigration. They were standing in a long line (while I was being escorted to the director's office immediately) waiting to enter a room with about 5 immigration officers. There, they were all having some sort of problem with their ID's and visa. I saw a few passengers giving some money to the officials. Naira, that they had been able to obtain from some money changers during their wait in the queue. After customs, where my bags were thoroughly checked and two nuns were not allowed to take their luggage because it contained food, I was ready for the last leg of my journey: a week in Calabar and some days in Ibadan with my supervisor, rounding off some work, reflecting on Cameroon and seeing Nigeria in a whole new light!

The Dutch connection

Ten days later my fieldwork 'ended' the way it began: in an airplane at Murtala Muhammed Airport. It was Thursday evening and I had just boarded my flight to Amsterdam. I was making myself comfortable, when I saw a man approaching on the other side of the plane. I recognized him immediately: it was the regional pastor of a Pentecostal Church in the The Hague region. I called him and we started talking. I was the last person he expected to be on this plane. I hadn't expected him there either. He is a Nigerian working in Asia for Shell, but living with his wife and two children in The Netherlands, where he coordinates a group of churches. He told me that he was on his way to Holland to pick up his wife and kids. The man was transferred to Nigeria by the oil company and they had decided to relocate to Nigeria. Interestingly enough, he told me he would remain the regional pastor (and coordinator) of the church in The Netherlands. This pastor was not the only one I met during my fieldwork that has a strong connection with Europe. I visited another church leader in Port Harcourt and discussed the links with the West with many pastors in Cameroon. It made me to think of an interesting religious connection, and an important one: the connection with the diaspora in Holland and/or Europe. The internet and social media have opened up the world and we can therefore not ignore these long-haul networks and connections. Not only might these connections create a larger audience for these churches, it might also create more opportunities for criticism and negative publicity.