

Spiritual Well-Being and Fulfilment, or Exploitation by a Few Smart Ones? The Proliferation of Christian Churches in West African Immigrant Communities in Canada

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Abstract

Africans are spiritual by nature and hold strong beliefs in and their reverence for a Supreme Being, Spirits and their ancestors. The need for this strong spiritual attachment is not left behind when Africans migrate to Western countries. Often, the first step in their resettlement process is to join a religious grouping. One of such countries is Canada where there is a huge presence of Christian churches in the West African immigrant communities. While some have their origins from the continent, others were founded in Canada by some immigrants. Using Post-Colonial theory as basis for analysis, this paper, explores the phenomenal growth of these religious groupings within the West African communities in Canada, examines their backgrounds and modus operandi. The motives for founding or participating in these church groupings were found to be spiritual needs, socio-cultural and economic considerations. Among the followers, these include the use of the churches as conduits for maintaining religious and cultural identity, and ensuring security in foreign lands. For the leaders of these churches, the motives are about not only responding to spiritual needs but facilitating status improvement and financial gains.

Key Words: *immigrants; diaspora; Africans; religion; spiritual well-being; exploitation; post-colonial theories; Canada*

The Shortest Route to the African Mind is through his religion
Chancellor (1961)

1. Introduction

The large migration from the African continent to Europe and North America from the mid 1970s to the present has given rise to the "importation" and recreation of Christian religious groupings or the African forms of them in their new homelands in the diaspora. For African immigrant communities in Canada, this is a growing phenomenon which calls for serious attention and study. Mensah (2009) calls this trend the "growth of ethnic Christianity in Canada" (p.24), which has introduced new dimensions, and cultural rituals to the religious landscape of Canada. Much research on immigrant communities in North America and particularly in Canada has focused on their economic and linguistic adaptation (Connor, 2009). There is however a dearth in the literature on research on the religious adaption of immigrants, especially African immigrants in Canada. The role of religion in the integration and settlement activities of African immigrant groups in Canada are those that have received the least attention in the available research.

In recognizing this gap in the immigrant religion literature, especially in Canada, this study is therefore an attempt to shed some light on this important and critical aspect of their lives in Canada: religion. An important aspect of this study is on a disturbing phenomenon of splinter or breakaway factions of these immigrant churches in the diaspora especially in Canada. It begins with some historical perspectives dealing with religion in Africa, Canadian migration trends, African migration into Canada, and the growing religious diversity this migration trend has produced. Post-colonialism, which is the theoretical framework for the study, is then presented and briefly examined. Thirdly, an overview of immigrant experiences in new societies is presented. Next, the methodology used for the study is discussed. The last section of the paper highlights the findings from the study and ends with a discussion of some of the reasons or factors for the proliferation of Christian Church groups in the West African immigrant communities in Canada, and their modus operandi which has produced tensions and problems within the West African immigrant Christian communities in Canada.

2. Historical Perspectives: Religion in Africa and Canadian migration trends

The introduction of Christianity to West Africa dates back to the fifteenth century when Portuguese exploration and commercial voyages brought Roman Catholic missionaries to the West African Coast (Ojo, 1997). It is widely believed that these early missionary activities were the forerunners of the colonial conquests of many territories in Africa (Baffoe, 2002). The early Christian Missionary activities were led by the Orthodox Missions, mainly Catholic and later joined by the Presbyterians, Anglicans and Methodists. For a long time these were the main Christian Missionary Groups in West Africa (Gifford, 2004).

Colonization that followed the early missionary foray into West Africa brought new impetus to Christian missions and by the late nineteenth century, Christianity was firmly established in most parts of West Africa (Ojo, 1996). Roman Catholicism spread more in the French-speaking African colonies in the nineteenth century as a result of the policy of the French aimed at counteracting the growing influence of the British and their protestant missions (Sundkler, 2000).

The period from the 1970s has, however, witnessed a religious missionary revolution in Africa with the introduction of indigenous Pentecostal forms of worship. This new trend, referred to by some authors as the "Charismatic Renewal", has resulted in the proliferation of Pentecostal and Charismatic Churches in the West Africa sub-region and beyond (Ojo, 1996; Onyina, 2004). Through their dramatic growth and missionary vigour incorporating much of African drumming and dancing into their modes of worship, this Pentecostal missionary revolution has, as Ojo (1996) points out, contributed in shifting Christianity's centre of gravity to the non-Western world. Most of the early established Churches have been losing members to these Charismatic Churches over the past three decades (Gifford, 2004; Onyina, 2004).

Onyina, (2004) and Opoku (1990) argue that indigenous African Churches started to emerge on the African continent in the mid twentieth century when agitation for more scope for African leadership in the mission churches and the quest to make the church more indigenous, resulted in secessions from the mission churches. These secessions resulted in the emergence of African Independent Churches. They were known in Nigeria as Aladura churches, in Ghana as Spiritual churches and Harrist churches in Cote d'Ivoire (Ojo, 1996). These indigenous African churches witnessed tremendous growth as their mode of worship incorporating African cultural drumming and dancing was more appealing to the indigenous populations. Their evangelical zeal and emphasis on "healing" and "prophecy" was also attractive to their Africa adherents. They were able to attract Christians and non-Christians alike in large numbers (Turner, 1979). These movements have now become trans-cultural and international in scope.

Writers on African Charismatic Renewal (see Asamoah-Gyedu, 1998; Opoku, 1990; Tonah, 2007) document three phases of the growth of these West African indigenous Pentecostal and Charismatic missions. They position the first phase from the early 1970s to the late 1970s which was the era when the foundation for the missions was laid by evangelistic activity, with second phase in the 1980s witnessing the growth of mission consciousness and its sustenance with the formation of many indigenous mission agencies. The third phase, beginning in the early 1990s, was an era of rapid advance, a period when these indigenous African missions assumed an international focus. It is an aspect of this international focus and its current ramifications among West African diasporans in Canada that is the subject of this study

3. Immigrant Experiences in New Societies

Canada's demographic landscape has changed dramatically since the late 1960s, thanks mainly to immigration (Connor, 2009). Canadian immigration from the late 1960s to the present has been dominated by people from the previous non-traditional immigration sources of Northern and Southern Europe (Citizenship and Immigration Canada 2008). Most of the new arrivals have been from Asia, Latin America, the Caribbean and Africa. The periods from the mid 1970s and beyond, have seen the acceleration of African immigrant populations settling in Europe and North America (Onyina, 2004). Many of these have settled in Canada.

As at 2006, nearly twenty per cent of the Canadian population was foreign-born (Statistics Canada Census 2006). Many of this new wave of immigrants into Canada have been Africans. The earlier ones from the 1970s came as students and stayed on the completion of their studies while a large number of them also arrived from the mid 1980s through the 1990s as refugees as a result of political and social upheavals that swept through the African continent during this period (Torzcener, 1997). Canada has made great attempts to attract a growing skilled immigrant labour force, estimated at 62 per cent of all immigrants to Canada in 2001 (Citizenship and Immigration Canada 2008). With some of the Canadian Provinces also making strong attempts at attracting large numbers of skilled immigrants, including Africans, to boost their populations and labour force, the percentage of immigrants to the Canadian population is increasing. (Connor, 2009; Kelley and Trebilock, 1998).

First generation, new diaspora immigrants often choose to draw on the community expressive culture of their homelands to shape their group identities in their host country (Ekué, 2009). Through actively creating and re-creating

practicing and performing traditions from home, both among community members and in public settings, they use tradition and other forms of expression as tools to build a sense of community in their new societies (Connor, 2009). It is said that: You can take an African out of Africa, but you can never take Africa out of an African. African immigrants actively and consciously attempt to recreate their culture, eating habits, and other expressive items in their settlement in their new diasporan societies with the goal of maintaining cultural and other connections between their original homeland in Africa, themselves and their children born in the diaspora (Mensah, 2009).

Immigrants arriving in new societies become involved with religious organizations for a number of reasons. These include the desire for religious and spiritual support and the opportunity to socialize with others from their ethnic and language groups (Cadge and Ecklund, 2006). Immigrant religious congregations also provide formal and informal social services and networks that are needed to assist in the process of settlement and adaptation (Hurr & Kim, 1990; Blankston & Zhou, 1996; Ebaugh & Chafetz, 2000).

As Mensah (2009) explains, the Christian Religious groups in the African communities in Canada can be divided into two distinct groups: There are the overseas replicas or branches of mainstream Mission Churches like the Catholic, Methodist, Presbyterian, Anglican and Seventh-Day Adventists. The second group, the largest and ever-growing, consists of what has become known on the African continent and in diasporan settings as African Initiated Churches (AICs). These are Christian bodies that were established as a result of African initiatives, rather than on the initiative of foreign missionary organisations (Turner, 1979). This study will be looking at the history, and modus operandi of these churches in the West African immigrant communities in Canada.

The changing demographic face of Canada, as a result of immigration, has also led to ethnic and religious diversity across the country (Statistics Canada Census 2006). Immigration, voluntary or involuntary (as in the case of refugees), is a transition that often entails the severing of community ties, the loss of social networks, supports and familiar bonds (Berry, 1997). It can also, as Sonn (2002) puts it, mean the loss of taken-for-granted sources and systems of meaning (see also Ogbu, 1994). It has also been shown in some studies that the loss of interpersonal and social supports that may follow migration can contribute to negative social and psychological health outcomes for individuals and groups (Caplan, 1964; Cox, 1989).

Religion is seen to play a lot of roles in the lives of immigrants (Peschke, 2009). It affects various aspects of the immigrant's life in his/her new society which include the development of personal identity and the day-to-day aspects of his/her life. Some researchers have posited that immigrants, especially racial minority immigrants, use religious associations and religious practices to counteract the cultural shock, alienation and discrimination they encounter in their new societies (Krupinski, 1984). Some have also attempted to highlight the interconnections between religion and migration (Mensah, 2009, Bramadat, 2005). In this connection, Smith (1978) characterises immigration as often a theologizing experience. As Adogame (2003) succinctly puts it, the discourse on immigration often privileges political and socio-economic considerations in a way that glosses over the religious factors that stimulate and impugn transmigration processes. He further points out that "religion is largely at the pivot of immigrants' sense of individual and collective identities" (p.24). Adogame also strongly contends that "communities of the African diaspora (in Europe) organize themselves in such a way as to validate their sense of ethnic and religious identity, ensure and maintain security, and seek solidarity" (p.33).

There is a general agreement among most authors on immigrant adaptation that most immigrants put a lot of energy, when they migrate to new societies, into finding or rebuilding, in the host country, a faith community in which they can actively live out their faith (Sonn, 2002; Adogame, 2003; Mensah, 2009). Peschke (2009) also points out that religion is an important component of the personal identities for many people and in such situations their religion becomes the basis of their value system which also shapes their daily lives in new societies. Other authors assert that religion may also become an important part of the identity of an immigrant even if he or she had rather little interest in religious matters until leaving his or country of origin. Immigrants may join religious communities more eagerly as a way of seeking social and support networks in the absence of family and social links they have left behind in their home countries (see also Connor, 2009; Ekué, 2009).

Since immigrants are seen to be subject to arrays of adaptation pressures and challenges in their new society, they are likely to use their participation in religious congregations as mitigating factors (Connor, 2009). This has been observed as critical in the first phase of the immigrant's integration process where religious observance and attachment to a religious community may provide the immigrant with a feeling of home and belonging that instils a sense of security and mutual support (Hirschman, 2004). Statistics Canada in their commentary in response to the changing religious composition of Canada as unearthed in the 2001 Census concluded that immigrants remain faithful to their religion, and even increase their devotion, because it eases their transition to Canada, offers them comfort and provides a support group (Statistics Canada, 2001).

Other writers have also pointed to the fact that religion has, in some cases, acted as a pull factor for migration where religious communities may play an important role in directing migration movements (Hagan and Ebaugh, 2003; Peschke, 2009). Sometimes migrants choose the point of migration destination because of particular religious links in that place where it will be easier to feel at home and to receive support (see also: Connor, 2008; Finke and Stark 1992, Killian, 2001, Wuthnow and Christiano, 1979).

For the purposes of this study, it is pertinent to refer to other studies that have highlighted the characteristics of some Charismatic Pentecostal Churches in Africa, and in African communities in the diaspora, (see Adogame & Weisskoppell (eds), 2005; Anderson, 2001; Bediako, 1995; Ekue, 2009). They point to the spread of Pentecostal and neo-charismatic Christianity in Africa, especially on the West Coast, due to an intentional transnational outreach of individual evangelists and the accentuated mobility of many Africans across national borders (see also Komolafe and Sunday, 2004). Religion, according to Hagan and Ebaugh (2003), is now drawn into virtually all aspects of international migration. In most parts of Africa, it is not uncommon to see church or religious adherents consult with their pastors or church leaders on various aspects of their migration process: from the decision to migrate, the point of destination, the visa application process, other preparations for the journey, to the eventual arrival and settlement processes in the new society (Tonah, 2007; Hagan and Ebaugh (2003).

4. Theoretical Framework

This study and its findings are analyzed within the realms of post-colonial and post-colonialism theory. According to Ghandi (1968), post-colonial theory is a post modern intellectual discourse that consists of reactions to, and analysis of, cultural legacies of colonialism. It is also referred to as the cultural, intellectual, political, and literary movement of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries that is characterized by the representation and analysis of the historical experiences and subjectivity of the victims, individuals and nations of colonial power (Browne et al, 2005; Macey, 2000). Furthermore, postcolonialism is marked by its resistance to colonialism and by the attempt to understand the historical and other conditions of its emergence as well as its lasting consequences (Macey, 2000).

Postcolonial theoretical perspectives can contribute to understanding how continuities from the past shape the present context of issues and events affecting former colonial subjects (Browne et al, 2005). Christianity is a legacy of colonialism, and it is pertinent to examine its lingering practice among Africans, both on the continent and as immigrants in the diaspora, more than half a century after the end of colonial rule in Africa. It was believed in many African societies that the influence of religion will fade with the decolonization movements and subsequent attainment of independence by most African countries up to the end of the 1960s (Adogame, 2003; Mensah, 2009). However, the opposite has happened and the influence of Christian religion has rather expanded across Africa (Mensah, 2009). In the process, religious groupings, especially those professing the Christian faith, have also mushroomed and proliferated among African immigrant communities in the diaspora (Gifford, 2004; Adogame, 2003, Mensah, 2009).

I will argue that Christianity practices among Africans in the diaspora, the establishment of African Initiated Churches, must be linked to decolonization efforts, a process that centers on regaining political, cultural, economic and social self-determination as well as positive identities as individuals, families, communities and nations. Decolonization can be seen as a solution that draws on 'colonized time' and 'pre-colonized time' addressing the legacy of colonialism and drawing on knowledge and practices from pre-colonial times.

5. Methodology

I employed a qualitative research methodology which privileges the experiences and perceptions of the participants and allows for the development of a rich and in-depth understanding of the community from the vantage point of its members (Sonn, 2002). By giving priority to the voices of the participants through their lived experiences, the researcher was better placed to develop emic understandings of individual and group experiences of the research participants. I utilized a *Judgement sample approach*. Also known as purposeful sample, this is the most common sampling technique in which the researcher actively selects the most productive sample to answer the research questions (Marshall, 1996; Burgess, 1989).

6. Research Questions

The study sought to find answers to the following major research questions: Do immigrants of West African origins in Canada join religious groupings as part of normal integration process or as a cushion for the pressures of integration in a new society? Do leaders of religious organizations in West African immigrant communities in Canada tap into, and in

some cases exploit the spiritual needs of new immigrants associated with their integration for personal gains? Does religiosity or attachment to religious organizations increase or decline with time in the integration process among this group of African immigrants in Canada? In seeking answers to the above major research questions, the following questions, among others, were posed to participants during the study:

7. Research Participants

A greater percentage of the participants for this study were Ghanaian and Nigerian immigrants in Montreal, Toronto and Winnipeg, three of the Canadian cities with large African immigrant communities. The Ghanaian and Nigerian communities represent the largest, most widespread West African immigrant communities in Canada running a large number of the African Initiated Churches under different denominations and names (The Ghanaian News, 2010; Nigeria Canadian News, 2010). A few other participants were selected from the Liberian and Sierra Leonean communities in Winnipeg.

Names and contact information of West African immigrant community churches in Montreal, Toronto, and Winnipeg, were obtained from scanning two of the largest circulating community newspapers of the Ghanaian and Nigerian communities in those cities, The Ghanaian News, and The Nigerian Canadian News, all publishing out of Toronto. The sampling was purposive in that, many of the churches operating under different names were selected to give the sample a wider spread. Of the nearly seventy Ghanaian community churches spread among the three Canadian cities that were found advertised in their community newspaper, The Ghanaian News, fifteen were selected as potential participants for this study.

The Churches operate under all kinds of names, most of them as breakaway factions of their "mother" churches. Among these AICs are Holy Alpha and Omega Church, Redemption Faith Church, Evangel Assembly of God Church, Liberty Assembly of God Church, Lighthouse Assembly of God Church, End-Time Harvest Ministry, and Resurrection Power Evangelistic Ministries International and a number of versions of the Baptist Church.

The largest of these Ghanaian community churches is The Church of Pentecost Canada which operates as a Multinational Corporation. It boasts of about twenty branches spread across various cities in Canada with as many as seven branches in the Greater Toronto Area alone.

Using purposive sampling, twenty-five Nigerian community churches were identified from the Nigerian community Newspaper, The Nigerian Canadian News and information from some community members. Six of these were selected as potential participants in the study. All are variations of Pentecostal and Charismatic Church groupings. Some of them are: House of Praise, Victory House: The Chosen Generation, Jesus Family Church, God's Ambassadors Ministries International, The Redeemed Church of God, Mountain of Fire & Miracles Ministry, Faith Assemblies Mission International, and House of Fellowship, among others..

In all the church groupings selected for the study, two leaders and four members from each church grouping were interviewed for the study. This was done with the intention of obtaining the perspectives of both the leadership and general membership of these church groupings. As shown in Table 1 below, a total of ninety participants, thirty leaders and sixty individual members were interviewed from the Ghanaian communities. In the Nigerian community churches, a total of thirty-six participants, twelve leaders and twenty-four members were interviewed from the six church groupings. Ten other participants, two leaders and eight individual members, from the Liberian and Sierra Leonean communities belonging to other AICs in Winnipeg, were also interviewed. The total number of research participants was one hundred and thirty-six. All the participants have lived in Canada for periods ranging from four to twenty-five years. The range of the settlement period was deemed necessary to determine how early participants joined religious congregations on arrival and for how long they have remained attached to the religious congregations.

Table 1 *Research Participants*

Immigrant Community	Location	No. of Churches participating	No. of individual members interviewed	No. of Pastors/Leaders interviewed
Ghanaian	Montreal	4	16	8
Ghanaian	Toronto	11	44	22
Nigerian	Toronto	6	24	12
Liberian	Winnipeg	1	4	1
Sierra Leonean	Winnipeg	1	4	1
TOTAL		23	92	44

8. Findings/Analysis

8.1 Characteristics of African Initiated Churches in Canada

Many of the community members surveyed for this study had arrived in Canada as refugees from the mid-1980s to the early 1990s. Being unsure of their immigration status, combined with economic difficulties and social isolation in their early lives in Canada, seeking another refuge in the Pentecostal/Charismatic Churches was not accidental or surprising. It corresponds to the pattern of the growth of the Pentecostal/Charismatic Church movements in West Africa from the late 1970s and early 1980s, periods of serious economic decline and social difficulties in West Africa. When most people in West Africa during these periods of economic difficulties found it difficult to make ends meet, they took solace in religion and flocked to the then emerging Pentecostals/Charismatic Churches. These churches promised hope, confidence, economic and social salvation to their followers in times of national gloom and personal difficulties (Gifford, 2004; Tonah, 2007). It is therefore not surprising that many of the West African immigrants and refugees who came to Canada in the mid 1980s and early 1990s chose the African Initiated Pentecostal/Charismatic Churches as their first points of religious call.

The study unearthed a very strong presence of Christian religious groupings in the West African immigrant communities in Canada. A total of one hundred and thirty active Christian Churches were identified in the West African immigrant communities in the three Canadian Cities surveyed, the largest numbers in Toronto. This is a very high number considering the population of these communities. The researcher also learned that there were other “churches”, “prayer groups” and “healing organizations” that operate out of the basements of their founders and leaders which we could not reach or publicly identify to be part of the study. Majority of these religious organizations are of Pentecostal/Charismatic persuasions.

Most of the Pentecostal and Charismatic Churches in the West African immigrant communities in Canada are typically led by strong and powerful leaders who are usually the “founders” of these churches. A typical characteristic of these churches is that they do not have a clearly laid-down structure of leadership and a church hierarchy (Tonah, 2007). The management of these churches therefore rests largely in the hands of a small group of charismatic pastors, founders and small circles of trusted followers of the pastors and founders. It is these loose structures and the concentration of management and power in the hands of the pastors, founders and a few leaders that have created a lot of tension within these churches and led to some members breaking away to form their own churches where the same cycle of leadership and management continue.

Of the Ghanaian community churches surveyed for this study, all the five Orthodox and Protestant churches were led by pastors “imported” from the original homeland, Ghana. All, but four of the AICs were founded and led by pastors “grown” in the local Ghanaian community in Canada. The Orthodox and Protestant churches had management structures quite similar to the “mother” churches introduced by the colonial missionaries in West Africa. All the Nigerian community churches were led by “Canadian-grown” Nigerian pastors who, like their Ghanaian community counterparts, virtually “owned” their churches.

Most of the respondents indicated that they have joined, and continue to belong to, other social networks within their communities in addition to their membership in the religious congregations. They point out that their social networks, mostly formed around their ethnic groups, and the religious congregations, provide them with a sense of belonging as well as socio-economic benefits. Some claimed to have accessed jobs through networking information obtained from their church congregations. Many also expressed the emotional, social and economic support they receive from their religious congregations in times of joy and sorrow: on the birth and baptism of their children in their new strange society, and in their periods of sorrow, mourning the death of family members ‘back home’ in their countries of origin as well as on the death of friends or relatives here in Canada. The above is buttressed by Hirschman’s (2004) formulation of the three Rs: refuge, respect, and resources, as motivation for immigrant religious group membership in host societies.

In the case of the Ghanaian community members, it is estimated from responses from participants that, the formation of their African Initiated Churches (AICs) started in the early 1990s when many of them who arrived in Canada as refugees obtained their permanent residence status. Before then, from the mid 1980s to the early 1990s most of the respondents said that they attended mainstream Canadian Church Congregations in Montreal and Toronto. The Congregations of choice for the Protestants were the United Churches of Canada, the Baptist Churches, and the Catholic Church Congregations for those of the Catholic faith. An interesting reason given by most of the respondents for starting or joining the African Initiated Churches (AICs) was that they wanted to worship in their native languages and cultures.

It also emerged from the study that attachment to religious organizations and church attendance among the targeted study population increased during their stay and settlement process in Canada, contrary to findings from other research with other immigrant groups in Canada and the United States which show declines in religious attendance and

attachments with time in the settlement process (Beyer, 1997; Cadge & Ecklund, 2006; Connor, 2009; Smith, 1998, van Tubergen, 2006; Wuthnow, & Christiano, 1979). Most of the participants reported joining the religious organizations within the first few months after their arrival in Canada. Many of them have undergone internal migration in Canada after their initial stay in one city, but continue their attachment to religious organizations even after their move from one Canadian City to another.

8.2 Breakaway factions

Of significance to note, from the findings of this study, is the *multiplication* and *division* that have occurred within the churches established by these West African immigrant communities. An interesting finding from the study is that many of the members of the now established Catholic and Protestant churches in the West African communities in Montreal and Toronto were previously members of the emerging Pentecostal/Charismatic Congregations which were the first points of religious affiliation in their early years of settlement in Canada.

The breakaways from the Pentecostal/Charismatic Churches within the West African immigrant communities in Montreal and Toronto started with members who were originally of the Catholic and Protestant faith. After obtaining their permanent resident status and job security, many no more found the need for the message of hope, quick salvation and solace that is the central tenet of the Pentecostal/Charismatic Churches which the members loved to hear in times of uncertainty and fear. Other significant reasons for these breakaways, according to most participants, have been disagreements among the church leaderships and between the church leaderships and their followers on a number of issues, among which are the following:

- a. Disputes over church finances, their mode of generation and use
- b. Disputes over processes for choosing or selecting leaders known in most of the African Initiated Churches as "Elders", "Deacons", "Wardens", "Evangelists" etc.

These disputes and grievances that have erupted within many of the churches have led to suspensions and/or dismissals of members from the churches by their leaders (pastors). Some church members complain of dictatorships by the leaders of these churches. Some have been changing churches and starting new ones as a result of unresolved disputes and grievances within their churches. For example, information obtained from study participants indicate that the Ghanaian community in Toronto started out in the early 1990s with less than ten churches. By the end of 2010, in less than twenty years, there are close to one hundred churches within the community estimated to be around 70,000 showing a high per capita church rate among that immigrant community in Toronto (*The Ghanaian News*, October, November, and December, 2010 editions).

The "growth" in the number of churches does not result from a large increase in the community's population. They have been the result of divisions within these African Initiated Churches themselves due to unresolved grievances and disputes in the churches. For example, in the Ghanaian community in Toronto, what started as a small branch of the Ghana Methodist Church in someone's basement in the early 1990s has resulted in the formation and existence of three different branches of the same Methodist Church as a result of grievances and disputes over Church leadership and finances. They now have the Ghana Methodist Church of Toronto, the Ghana Calvary Methodist United Church and the Wesley Methodist Church all with their own pastors, either posted from their country of origin or "ordained" here in Canada.

The following are some excerpts from the interviews with some participants on the reasons for their breakaways from the churches:

One member lamented as follows:

Our pastor ran the church as his private property. Although we had a Council of Deacons and Elders in the Church, the pastor always took unilateral decisions, announced them in the church and demanded total agreement and compliance from the membership. It became clearer and clearer everyday that the so-called collective leadership we put in place in the church was a farce. He always appointed his cronies and those that never challenged his decisions to leadership positions especially those that involved finances. Over time, he and his wife had total control of the church finances and the membership had no idea what the financial situation of the church was. It was when all means for resolving the issue failed that we took the drastic step of breaking away to form our own church.

Another had this to say:

The problem we had in our former church was how decisions were taken by the pastor of and his small circle of loyalists in revenue collection. They will always come up with all kinds of new programs and demands for collecting monies. One of

such programs was his insistence that we buy him a big house to be designated as the Church Mission House. Some of us felt that our membership and revenue could not support the purchase of a house and monthly mortgage payments since we had a year before bought the pastor a brand new car valued at over \$27,000 which was being paid from the church funds monthly. This led to serious disagreement within the church. Eventually the pastor managed to get some of the church Elders to sign for the mortgage for the five-bedroom house. This led to serious conflict and disagreement and when some of us were not being listened to, we broke away and started our own church and we are doing well.

Another complaint:

Our church was run like a dictatorship by our former pastor and a few of his loyal cronies, if I may call them so. You see some of us run to Canada as refugees because of political repression and dictatorships by our military and political leaders on our country of birth. Since we are in Canada and everything is run democratically, the last place we hope or feared to experience another dictatorship was within the very church that we had taken a second refuge. But the pastor of our former church demanded absolute loyalty from church members especially those he considered church "elders". Whenever some of us disagreed with any of his directives and policies, he will use his next Sunday preaching to openly castigate us, sometimes describing our actions as driven by demons. Eventually he only consulted with very few people in the church whom I will describe as his "yes men". The central disagreement was about money. When some of us could no longer stand the church-run dictatorship, we left with other to start our Catholic Church, our mother church from home.

Other disputes arose from the selection processes of church leaders. Some respondents pointed out that their complaints and grievances in their church revolved around issues of how leaders were chosen. While some complained about the selection processes involved in choosing the church leaders, other complained about the practice of importing "pastors" from their countries of origin which involved additional costs and strain to the churches' financial strength.

Some excerpts from respondents:

A constant issue that always generated problems in our church was how Church Elders and Deacons were selected and/or promoted. There were no laid-down procedures for electing or even selecting the Elders and Deacons of the Church. Some members got "promoted" because of their close relationship with the pastor or because they don't complain when things were going wrong. So we had situations where long-time members were by-passed for recent members in appointments as Elders and Deacons or membership to influential church committees

Another on processes for "importing" pastors from the country of origin:

Some of us were strongly against bringing in pastors from Ghana to head our church here. We suggested sponsoring some of the youth of the church who were graduating from universities here in Canada to train as pastors to lead the church as against spending huge sums of money to bring in pastors and their families from Ghana. That process cost a lot of money if you consider accommodation, transportation, the salary of the pastors and other expenses. We always had to buy a new car anytime a new pastor was posted from Ghana. Our suggestions were always overruled and this constant posting of pastors to the church from Ghana has cost a lot of money. Many people complained but were not listened to. That is the major reason why we broke away from the church and formed a new one. In our new church, we insist that the pastors have to be already residents of Canada. It has helped a lot.

Another complaint:

We have had three pastors posted to our church from Ghana since we started our church nearly ten years ago. The first stayed for three years and was transferred to another city in Canada. The second spent a full five years and was "recalled" back to Ghana. When the General Apostle in Ghana decided to send another from Ghana, some church members complained about the cost. The issue is that church members here in Montreal are never consulted on the selection of the pastors from Ghana. Some of us believed that this is our church; we started it before we got affiliated with the Head Branch in Ghana so decisions affecting our own church should be taken in consultation with our leadership here in Montreal. Our concerns and views were ignored and eventually this current pastor was sent from Ghana with his whole family of his wife and six children. We had to bear the cost of their transportation and settlement running close to \$20,000. People are not happy but many don't complain openly for fear of being branded. But I am afraid trouble is brewing and may explode one day which will affect the church

Most of the church members with grievances against their leadership point to the lavish lifestyles led by their pastors. Many of them point to the large houses and flashy cars driven by their pastors all of which are purchased by the churches ostensibly as church "property" but have never been returned to the churches when the pastors either leave the churches or return to their countries of origin at the end of their duty tours in Canada.

The responses from the pastors/church leaders were equally interesting. Almost all of them claim that their motivation for starting, leading or taking over the leadership of these AICs in Canada stem from the need to minister unto the religious and spiritual needs of their followers. They point to other social services and emotional support they provide to their members which include personal and marriage counselling, some financial support and avenues for networking for all kinds of needs for their members. An interesting excerpt from an interview with one pastor:

Our church, like the life of Jesus Christ, serves as the pillar for our members in their lives in Canada. We offer them hope where there is gloom, counselling in times of difficulties and even financial help where needed. I can say confidently that we have done more than the government agencies in assisting immigrants who come to our churches to find their way in settling in Canada

While some admitted that their congregations have experienced some difficulties and even breakaways by some members at some points in time, they sought to put a religious spin to those grievances and crisis insisting that some of those problems with their congregations were either “temptations” or work of “the devil” which Christians must strive and pray constantly to overcome. They virtually dismiss the accusations some of the members levelled against some of the church leadership of personal financial gains, with some even claiming that those breaking away from their “mother” churches are either driven by greed or, to put it in religious parlance, succumbing to the “work of the devil”. An interesting spin on the breakaways by another pastor:

As a leader, when you are running a church, like the Lord’s vineyard, and ministering unto the flock, you must bear in mind that there will be temptations and the devil will always be at work to try to scatter the Lord’s sheep. You need to stand up to the devil and fight to protect the Lord’s flock. This is what I see happening in most churches here in Toronto. The devil is busy at work and we, as the Lord’s chosen commanders of his army need to stand up and fight. This is what I have done in my church by the power of God. Some people have left but I think they represented the hand of the devil which we managed to cut off to save the righteous ones and to protect the Lord’s work

9. Discussion

Migration, as many authors maintain, is undoubtedly a transitional phase in which people experience both vulnerability and strength (Ekué, 2009; Ganiel, 2008; Miroslav, 1996). Being uprooted from familiar cultural contexts and resettling in new societies can cause serious acculturation problems. In these transitional phases therefore, the new migrants need safe spaces where these tensions can be articulated and shared with others. Most new immigrants in diasporan settings have sought solace in religion and religious organizations as cushions for their uncertainties. As Ekué, (2009) points out, migration churches, and in the case of West Africa immigrants in Canada, the AICs, offer such spaces, allowing people to express and live their faith in a new cultural context.

An interesting issue that emerged from the study is the fact that the issue of identity construction and consolidating a sense of belonging and acceptance in their new society are central themes for African immigrants in the diaspora. The quest for identity therefore becomes rooted in religion. New West African immigrants in Canada get attracted to these AICs as a way of creating spaces where these transnational situations can be articulated in familiar symbolic languages and cultures, drawing from a common world view and ritual action. In worship, in religious praxis, as Ekué, (2009) maintains, migrants are sending strong signals of self-esteem, pride and belief, “but also signs against the experience of injustice, suffering, and alienation” (p. 393).

The findings from this confirm some of the attributes of post-colonial theories: former colonial subjects engaging in actions or symbolisms seen as attempts to rid themselves of the vestiges of colonialism. Many of the study participants actually view their establishment and attachment to the AICs as attempts to worship in their own indigenous ways, different from the mode of worship introduced by the colonialists. It was inferred from the responses of participants that the post-colonial struggle was only used as a mask by its initiators in the leadership of these churches to reap some benefits from unsuspecting followers. The leadership of the AICs in the diapsora, as shown from this study, hold on tenaciously to this Mission House lifestyle where they insist on the Churches purchasing huge bungalows, also designated as ‘Mission Houses’ and automobiles for the Pastors and Church leaders. Nothing has changed much. The situation is likened to what Fanon (1952) called ‘Black Skins, White Masks’.

While recognizing their need to worship within the comforts of their own cultures and languages as one of the earlier motivating factors for setting up these AICs, this “motivating” reason is negated by the fact that visits made by the researcher to many of these Church Congregations revealed that all of them conducted their services in English, the colonizers’ language. In a few of the churches, the pastors preached in English and translation to the native West African languages was provided by interpreters. Apart from the addition of African drumming and high energy dancing, the mode of worship remains the same as those introduced by the colonizers on the African continent. As Ghandi (1968) points out,

the mere repression of colonial memory is, never in itself, tantamount to a surpassing of, or emancipation from, the uncomfortable realities of the colonial encounter.

It is clear from the reactions of members of the religious congregations studied that, in some cases, religion is used by the leaders/pastors to promise worldly happiness as well as heavenly salvation. But the reality seems to betray both religion and the legitimate pursuit of worldly happiness. The constant friction between some of the pastors/leaders of these immigrant churches and their members over finances and leadership positions point to motives other than religion and spiritual fulfilment.

10. Conclusion

This study has been an attempt to scan another area of research into the religiosity of immigrants: the motivations and experiences of both founders and adherents of African Initiated Churches in the diaspora. Furthermore, it has provided evidence for the fact that many immigrants get attached to, and attend religious organizations that include large numbers of people from their ethnic backgrounds, language, or national group, to maintain and sustain their ethnic heritage and traditions. It also confirms the fact that immigrant communities in Canada, like their counterparts elsewhere in the diaspora, join religious organizations for social, legal and spiritual support. However, findings from the study also point to the dissatisfaction of some of the church members with their leadership on suspicions of exploitation for personal gains.

A number of respondents felt that they have not and are not getting a good return on the massive investments they have made in the churches in terms of time, money and emotional capital. Despite these views, they still see their churches as institutions for social and emotional support in new homelands. On the other hand, the pastors/leaders strongly maintain that they have provided and continue to provide for, and support the spiritual needs of their followers which, according to most of the pastors/leaders, are what they promise, not materialist prosperity. But, as Ehrenreich (2009) has suggested, and as this study discovered, many of these churches and their pastors/leaders exhibit behaviours or engage in lifestyles that are not explicitly religious. The leaders also strongly maintain the need to have congregations and mode of worship that is in line with their own cultures and indigenous ways. However, as Memmi (1968) argues, the colonial aftermath is fundamentally deluded in its hope that the architecture of a new world will magically emerge from the physical ruins of colonialism.

Post-colonial subjects, Memmi (1968) maintains, usually underestimate the psychologically tenacious hold of the colonial past on the post-colonial present which entails visible apparatus of freedom but the concealed persistence of unfreedom, always clinging to the structures and ways of life of the colonizer. The post-colonial leaders in this study, church leaders/pastors, pretend to be shedding memories and vestiges of colonialism, but maintaining the colonial structures that ensure or provide them with the same benefits enjoyed by the colonial masters, a situation of Black Skins, White Masks (Fanon, 1952). It is my hope that this will generate interest in further studies on the motivations of the leaders/pastors who found and lead these religious organizations in the diaspora.

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