

Diaspora Identity Crisis: Analyzing the Pentecostalization of Mainline Churches in Africa through the Study of Migration and Missions

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Abstract

The global shift towards Pentecostalism has significantly impacted mainline churches in Africa, leading to a process known as “Pentecostalization.” This phenomenon can be attributed to factors such as migration and the influence of missions, which have notably reshaped the religious landscape in the region. The process of Pentecostalization has led to an identity crisis within the evangelical denominations in Africa, particularly in Nigeria. This qualitative research has investigated the identity problem experienced by Nigerian diaspora evangelical denominations. The research adopts ethnographic design by using participant observation, interviews, and document analysis to examine the extent of the identity crisis. By examining the intersection of migration, missions, and the influence of Pentecostalism, the study seeks to understand the challenges faced by Nigerian diaspora churches to maintain their distinct evangelical identity within a predominantly Pentecostal context. A threefold problem was identified, which entails the challenge of maintaining a distinct evangelical identity, cultural assimilation, and conflicting cultural influences and hybridization of religious practices. As mainline churches become more Pentecostal in nature, they also face the pressure to conform to certain charismatic practices and beliefs to remain relevant in a changing cultural, religious, and social society. Addressing these identity crises requires diaspora evangelicals to engage in the process of adaptation, cultural preservation, reimagining and redefining their identity, which necessitates a critical examination

of present beliefs and practices and the willingness to embrace change, while maintaining a strong connection to the evangelical heritage.

Keywords: Africa, identity crisis, mainline churches, migration, missions, Pentecostalization

Introduction

Mainline churches in Africa have played a leading role in shaping the African continent. The evangelical churches are the product of missions and evangelical movements from Europe and America. From the 18th and 19th centuries, these Christian movements from the West were sent to different parts of Africa for the expansion of Christianity through evangelism and church planting; hence, they recorded both successes and failures. They emphasized personal conversion and spiritual and social transformation and contributed to the establishment of mission churches with unique evangelical heritage. Consequently, Christianity, as a moving religion, has impacted many African societies.

Similarly, the Christian faith in the 21st century has been a critical catalyst and facilitator of the globalization movement, and migration, missions, and Pentecostalism have remained its driving force, with the Global South playing a significant role in this shift (Studebaker, 2010, p. 34). Indeed, the phenomenal growth of Christianity has shifted the church's demographic center of gravity from the North and West to the South and East (Latin America, Africa, and Asia). Particularly Africa is becoming home to the largest Christian population, with versions of Christianity including Protestant, Catholic, Orthodox, Coptic, African Initiated Churches, and Pentecostalism in all its various forms (Kurewa, 2011, p. 7). Besides, with migration, missions, and the Pentecostal movements, Africans are prominent among the new agents of religious transplantation, and the African version of Christianity has continued to impact global societies (Essamuah & Ngaruiya, 2014, p. 30). This remarkable transformation has drawn the attention of

scholars, historians, theologians, and pastors to the dynamics of this demographic change and its impact on world Christianity.

Admittedly, the demographic shift of Christianity can be attributed to globalization and internationalization, which have increasingly transformed and shaped workplaces, homes, and social and spiritual lives. Also, the impact of African Christianity on a global scale can be attributed to the role played by Christian migrants to new places because of the long-term social impact of instability, security, and political and economic factors; thus, they are in search of greener pastures (Adogame et al., 2019, p. 282). Christianity, therefore, is a migratory religion, and migration movements have been a functional element in its expansion (Hanciles, 2003, p. 149). Accordingly, migrants, especially from Africa, are religiously conscious and therefore move with their religious beliefs and practices, thus making Christianity transportable and translatable as it continually transcends borders of all kinds (Bacote, 2021, p. 66). Hence, the positive trend of migration is what Hanciles encapsulates that every Christian migrant is a potential missionary because migration has been a key factor in the expansion of the church in the New Testament (Hanciles, 2008, p. 6).

Meanwhile, the dynamism in the making of world Christianity includes migration, mission, and Pentecostal Christianity with its tremendous impact on mainline churches. However, there may be some sense of excitement and dynamism lacking in some mainline evangelical churches, which could be a contributory factor to the rise of Pentecostal and charismatic Christianity (Forbes, 2010, p. 2). Mainline evangelical denominations like ECWA have struggled to adapt to changes in society and generational differences and thus have grappled with an identity crisis as they try to maintain their traditional values while appealing to a new generation of believers (Young, 2021, p. 76; Brown & Stentiford, 2008, p. 138). The struggle to

maintain a distinct evangelical identity while striving for relevance has led to the Pentecostalization of the mainline churches. Consequently, the Pentecostalization of mainline churches in Africa has had a significant impact on the religious landscape of Africa and its diaspora Christians. The impact has led to an identity crisis, particularly for some evangelical Christians like the Evangelical Church Winning All (ECWA), who migrate from Nigeria to new countries, especially to Europe and America. Therefore, this study examines the identity crisis of mainline evangelical denominations with specific consideration of the Pentecostalization of diaspora ECWA.

Migration, Missions, and the Making of African Christianity

There is a connection between migration and mission because, from the very beginning, Christian expansion and migratory movement were forcibly and intimately intertwined (Nguyen & Prior, 2014, p. 74). Therefore, the juxtaposition between migration and missions is an increasingly important keyword in social and human sciences, which seek to create open spaces, innovative approaches in studying the dynamics of migration, and the making of world Christianity (Frederiks & Nagy, 2016, p. 2). Hence, the rationale for the study of migration, mission, and the Pentecostalization of mainline churches in Africa, specifically focusing on the identity crisis of diaspora evangelical denominations, is motivated by the sociocultural dynamics of Africa. Africa, particularly Nigeria, is experiencing significant sociocultural changes marked by urbanization, globalization, and an increasing influx of diverse cultural and religious sceneries, leading to the growth and emergence of new religious movements, including Pentecostalism (Meagher, 2009, p. 397). With religious mobility, the modern world's increasing globalization, and the disembodiment of religions from their original cultural contexts, new

religious movements have indeed become a worldwide phenomenon, which has led to the broader dissemination of religious doctrines and practices of all kinds.

Besides, the advent of transnational movements, such as migration and missions, has led to a significant transformation within African Christianity. Migration is part of life for many Africans due to the economic differentials and political instability affecting many African regions (Wild-Wood, 2008, p. 4). Wild-Wood wrote, “If the identity of Christianity on the African continent is to be understood, frequent and widespread migrations and their relation to the Church should be studied thoroughly, as both results of and catalysts for rapid religious change” (Wild-Wood, 2008, p. 4). Meanwhile, Christian missions have significantly impacted Africa, which has contributed to the regeneration of the African people. Therefore, the story of world Christianity is that of missions, conversions, cultural encounters, theological debates, and the growth and spread of the Christian faith across the globe (Rommen, 1995, pp. 150–162).

Again, the role played by Western missionaries in the making of African Christianity cannot be underestimated. Missionary movements and Christian expatriates to African countries have led to the establishment of churches and the conversion of local populations, thus contributing to the making of Christianity as one of the dominant religions in many African countries. Furthermore, despite the ignorance of African traditional religion and the imminent danger of diseases and death, missionaries, together with their African counterparts, led to the establishment of mission churches, such as the Anglican Church, the Baptist Church, the Methodist Church, and the Catholic Church, among many more (Winks, 2001, p. 312). They also helped in founding indigenous churches like the Evangelical Church Winning All (ECWA), Church of Christ in Nations (COCIN), African Inland Church (AIC), and others. These

indigenous churches are known as mission-established churches, and their role has helped shape African Christianity.

The Pentecostalization of Mainline Churches in Africa

To talk about Pentecostalization implies the integration of Pentecostal thought and praxis in the global theological agenda. Particularly, it is about the impact of Pentecostal/charismatic movements on mainline churches, including Orthodox and Protestant denominations. Such influence often occurs in various ways, including doctrinal influence, worship style, spiritual experience, structural changes, and social engagement. However, these changes are not limited to traditional Christian denominations but can occur within Pentecostal churches themselves as they strive to adapt to changing cultural and religious contexts. The process of Pentecostalization is dynamic and ongoing, as churches continually respond to the influence of Pentecostalism and adapt their beliefs, practices, and structures accordingly. It is about revisioning the global theological landscape, considering the significance of Pentecostal voices, thoughts, and practices worldwide (Vondey, 2010, p. 13).

Africa has experienced more than a century of religious innovation, reformation, and revitalization in the Christian tradition through denominational competitions. Even in the 21st century, there is a growing competition in African Christianity today, which has produced a new form of Christian practice known as Pentecostalization (Cavanaugh, 2020, p. 20). The term “Pentecostalization” refers to the growing influence and adoption of Pentecostal beliefs, practices, and experiences within other Christian denominations and movements. According to Andrzej Kobylinski:

Pentecostalization is the term used to describe both the remarkably rapid growth of Pentecostal communities as well as the gradual conversion of many other Christian

congregations and churches into a single, global style of charismatic Christianity. The dynamic and worldwide process of Pentecostalization is often referred to as the “charismatization” of the Christian religion, or the birth of Pentecostal, charismatic, or evangelical Christianity. New charismatic and Pentecostal communities are emerging because of this process, especially in Africa, Asia, and South America, and this process is also occurring within conventional Christian churches. When viewed in this light, Pentecostalization presently affects both the Catholic Church globally and the vast majority of Protestant churches (Kobylinski, 2016, p. 100).

It is obvious that the impact of Pentecostalism is not only on African Christianity, but as the demography of Christianity shifts significantly to the Global South, Pentecostalism plays a leading role in this global transformation. The Pentecostalization of African Christianity is called the African Reformation of the twentieth century and has altered the character of African Christianity (Nel, 2018, p. 16). Therefore, Pentecostalization is a shift towards a more experiential and Spirit-centered faith, characterized by a greater openness to the supernatural gifts and workings of the Holy Spirit. Foremost, Pentecostalization involves the integration of charismatic theology and practices, such as, but not limited to, speaking in tongues, healing, and prophetic gifts, into more traditional or mainstream churches. Historically, between the 1940s and the 1970s, there occurred the evangelicalization of Pentecostalization; however, in the following quarter century, the reverse process can be discerned: the Pentecostalization of evangelicalism (Poewe, 1994, p. 112). It is further observed that after the charismatic renewal was initiated in the 1960s in the mainline Protestant churches and even the Roman Catholic Church, many forms of Pentecostal-charismatic spirituality have persisted across these denominations and traditions (Crisp et al., 2014, p. 167). In this case, one talks about a

charismatization and even a Pentecostalization of these churches, but these Christians remained self-identified as evangelicals, Protestants, or Catholics (Crisp et al., 2014, p. 167; also Omenyo, 2006).

The Pentecostalization of African Christianity is rooted in the theology of inculturation, which is the reassessment of Christianity from a new perspective rooted in adaptation, indigenization, and contextualization. Thus, faith must become culture if it is to be received fully and lived. Besides, the inculturation process is not a modern phenomenon in Africa. The concept of inculturation and the term itself, according to Aylward Shorter, gained currency in the 1970s largely because African bishops and theologians saw it as an ally against the consequences of cultural alienation and a guarantee of a genuinely African Christianity (Shorter, 2006, p. xi). In the modern era, African theology of inculturation has now followed in the Pentecostalization of African Christianity, which in turn is uncritically embracing the spiritualized cosmology of African traditional society and may be ill-equipped for the evangelical church to overcome the marginalization of the continent in the modern world (Ngong, 2012, p. 344).

The causes for the Pentecostalization of African Christianity, according to Emmanuel Katongole, are due to Africa's uneasiness about a suffering God (Emmanuel, 2017, p. 182). Largely, African Christianity has yet to develop a sustained theological conversation with the resources and capacity to sift through the many social, historical, cultural, political, and religious challenges in order to develop a unique theological voice relevant to her needs (Katongole, 2015, pp. 192–202). For instance, Sands and Verhoef (eds.) assert that the silent and suffering African masses find themselves in such a sphere; thus, they try to philosophize in order to interpret their demise and misery. Thus, there is a need for a theological voice from an African understanding of dialogue, deliberated in and through transparency, which is lacking (Sands & Verhoef, 2018,

p. 228; Reed, 2018, p. 228). In the absence of such theological conversation, the African church quite often finds herself simply responding to one crisis after another or simply reverting to outdated ecclesiological models or prepackaged theological formulas from the West (Emmanuel, 2017b, p. 182).

The Making of African Diaspora Evangelical Denominations

Migration has impacted the religious dynamics of Africa, including an increase in religious diversity, which leads to the growth and presence of various denominations in different regions and creates a more diverse religious landscape. This religious difference has led to the formation of distinct diaspora communities and churches to meet the spiritual and social needs of migrants (Harris, 2016, p. 1). Through diverse spiritual and theological terms, migration has enhanced interaction with a range of different customs and has deepened existing convictions, provoked new ones, and modulated responses to unsettlement and settlement (Harris, 2016, p. 2). Indeed, diaspora communities have become centers of identity, support, and cultural preservation for migrant communities.

Accordingly, the emergence of the widespread use of the term “diaspora” can be linked to the rapidly changing configuration of world conditions (Jackson, 2011, p. xxvii). The term “African diaspora” did not emerge until the 1950s and 1960s, and before these eras, African people were mobilized using other terms like “Pan-Africanism.” However, today, the term “African diaspora” enjoys pride of place in the increasingly crowded pantheon of diaspora studies (Okpewho & Nzegwu, 2009, pp. 31–32). As stated by Elizabeth Carole, to study the African diaspora simply means a study of the world because Africa remains the birthplace of civilization from which human beings migrated to various locations of the world; many more

than Africans exist globally following a series of subsequent migrations (Davies, 2008, p. 1).

Harvey Kwiyani opines that,

The Pentecostalization of African Christianity has led to the Pentecostalization of African diaspora Christianity, noting that scholars who have written on African Christianity in the diaspora have agreed that an overwhelming majority of African immigrant congregations belong to the Pentecostal and charismatic tradition, and even those who are of mainline denominational background join Pentecostal-affiliated churches (Kwiyani, 2014, p. 93).

Notably, African diaspora evangelical Christianity is a diverse and complex religious phenomenon. It encompasses a range of beliefs, practices, and traditions that vary across different regions and communities (See Bongmba, 2015, p. 2). Interestingly, the making of the African Christian diaspora has its roots in various ethnic and cultural backgrounds, traced back to the slave trade during which many slaves were converted to Christianity. Enslaved Africans adapted Christianity to fit their cultural and spiritual beliefs, blending it with their indigenous practices and beliefs (Bednarz et al., 2023, p. 207; Minahan, 2013, p. 289). Therefore, African diasporans have succeeded in creating a unique blend of Christianity that incorporates African spirituality, music, and traditions. This blend has given birth to various religious practices (Finkelman, 2006, p. 34).

The making of African diaspora Christianity is further connected to the influence of European and American missionaries who sought to spread their version of Christianity to Africa. These missionaries played a significant role in the establishment of formal churches and the spread of evangelical teachings, which has affected diaspora evangelical Christians (Mannion & Mudge, 2007, p. 293). Similarly, the search for identity and liberation through conversion and salvation provided the African diaspora with a sense of belonging and hope in their new

communities. Thus, the African Christian diaspora offered a sense of agency and empowerment amid the oppressive systems they faced. This includes spiritual empowerment, communal support, activism and advocacy, education and knowledge, cultural preservation and celebration, and mentorship and leadership development. Thus, emphasis on social justice, liberation theology, and a holistic understanding of salvation that addresses both the spiritual and material needs of diaspora members promotes a sense of togetherness.

Today, African diaspora Evangelical Christianity is a significant religious force worldwide. Its influence can be seen in the growth of mega-churches, the popularity of Gospel music, and the proliferation of Evangelical movements and denominations (Callahan, 2013, p. 11). Indeed, the making of African diaspora communities has shaped their identity and led to the development of distinct cultural expressions within established evangelical Christian denominations, which has helped in maintaining a sense of identity and connectedness.

Identity Crisis of African Diaspora Evangelical Christianity

In a multicultural, challenging society, religious identities have become a problem. It can lead to misunderstandings, stereotypes, and prejudices; imposition of beliefs and practices, discrimination, political manipulation (commercialization and democratization of religion), and hostility (Toğuşlu et al., 2014, p. 16; Lewis, 2006). In the past, multiculturalism was seen as the embrace of an inclusive, diverse society; however, in modern times, multiculturalism is seen as the problem, a proxy for other social and political issues such as immigration and identity, including religious issues (Malik, 2015, p. 21). Foremost, the word “identity” has received significant attention in recent times, becoming an enigmatic word that refers to a ‘deep self’ that is construed by different historical, cultural, and religious layers (Becking et al., 2017, p. 3). Hence, the migration of people, cultural products, and representations has continuously provided

people with new prospects to redefine and rethink their habits of identifying others, and sometimes developing a new loyalty to what they now see as their distinctive 'roots.' With the increased mobility and complexity of the modern situation, religion is gradually becoming a matter of choice and not determined (Ammerman, 2003, pp. 207–224). Such perception is also affecting Christian diasporans from Africa who perhaps seek to either reformulate, recreate, reintegrate, or change their religious root.

Despite the rise of the diaspora community with its unique evangelical heritage, the identity problem remains a major challenge that African diasporans face. Besides, every diaspora population faces unique experiences, challenges, and adaptation or coping mechanisms away from the ancestral homeland (Uche T., 2019, p. xix). According to interview respondents and other research findings, this study discovered that efforts by migrants to leave religious marks in new communities have led to several challenges, such as the challenge of maintaining a distinct evangelical identity, cultural assimilation versus preservation, and conflicting cultural influences and hybridization of religious practices.

The Challenges of Maintaining a Distinct Evangelical Identity.

Diaspora Christians, particularly from mainline evangelical denominations like ECWA, COCIN, or ERCC from Nigeria, face the challenge of maintaining a distinct evangelical identity due to several factors. One of the respondents (Joel) asserts that many evangelical diasporans are influenced by the dominant evangelical culture in the countries where they reside. On the other hand, some migrants have relations abroad who are affiliated with existing churches; therefore, migrants find it difficult to transport and practice their denominational heritage in new places. Joel expressed that because of ignorance, migrants in new places are lured by their relations to join their affiliated churches. For instance, Justina, an immigrant in the USA, shared her view

that when she arrived in her new community, some of the Nigerian immigrants quickly invited her to join them in their church. Justina affirmed that in her first three months in the USA, she attended different churches invited by different Nigerian immigrant families. These immigrants sometimes belong to conservative evangelical or orthodox churches back home, but while in another country, they have joined Nigerian-established Pentecostal churches, which they claim make them feel at home away from home. Thus, Justina noted that after three months of moving from one congregation to another, she felt her Nigerian evangelical heritage was unreal, and she was forced to adapt to the existing practice. Accordingly, Justina contends that established immigrants in host communities contribute to the challenge of maintaining a distinct evangelical identity in host communities.

Another challenge that contributes to the identity crisis of diaspora evangelical Christians is the lack of internationalization of indigenous evangelical churches. Gargati is of the view that mission-established churches in Nigeria, such as ECWA, COCIN, and ERCC, are not affiliated with any church denomination in the host countries or do not have a strong international establishment like other existing denominations. Therefore, a lack of international affiliation could lead to a sense of isolation and loss of a sense of belonging to a broader network of like-minded believers, which could make some diaspora evangelical Christians feel disconnected. A respondent from Northern Nigeria (Sulaiman) is of the view that some Christian immigrants from Nigeria who move abroad intending to reproduce or maintain their evangelical heritage are forced to abandon their mission and their evangelical identity when their belief and theology are challenged by existing ones, noting that the lack of international connection has undermined the confidence of some evangelical diasporans.

Besides, many diasporans have discovered that the form of religious practices in Nigeria cannot fit in their host countries or communities, while their affiliated denominations from Nigeria seek immigrants to integrate their forms of practices from their home countries. Sulaiman noted that evangelical denominations from Nigeria fail to deal with the reality of theology as transformative. As Helboe Johansen and Ulla Schmidt rightly accentuate, practice is a central category for encapsulating social reality, including religion, which exists as practiced, not as a fixed and static essence (Johansen & Schmidt, 2022, p. 4). Thus, some evangelical denominations insist that Christian loyalists are to be like automatons and rigid in new communities; therefore, they are expected to reiterate what is done in Nigeria in their host countries, which has developed the pressure of preserving the evangelical beliefs and practices of their home churches or adopting a new one.

Furthermore, a returned migrant (Caleb) from the USA opines that religion is not static, and people who move out of Nigeria with religious passion should be allowed to adapt to the new circumstances rather than be forced into a mindless repetition; otherwise, these zealous migrants will be forced to abandon their church affiliation and join a new or existing one. Caleb submits that the tension that exists between some conservative evangelical denominations and passionate Christian migrants is over practices such as emphasis on personal conversion and emotional worship, which do not align with the affiliated denominations of their home countries. As Pinn (2009) rightly observed, the form of worship of migrant churches presents a challenge to the more structured and formal practices of mainline denominations; hence, embracing the emotional aspects of evangelical Christianity has led to the development of distinctively African expressions of Christianity, such as the call-and-response style of preaching and worship.

Additionally, the mission of the church and the church-planting strategy of migrants do not always align with the ideology of home churches. For instance, respondent Felix shared the view that Christian migrants often struggle to create new congregations, and if these congregations are only concerned with pleasing their home church or denominations and do not reflect the cultural and ethnic diversity of the diaspora community, individuals sometimes feel disconnected from their struggle between their cultural identity and the church they are part of, leading to an identity crisis. Consequently, the blending of traditional African Christian practices with existing Christian beliefs of host countries has influenced the morality and individual responsibility of many migrants, thereby causing tension with some traditional communal values.

Cultural Assimilation versus Preservation

Cultural assimilation and preservation are fundamental contributions to the diaspora identity crisis (Ember et al., 2004, p. 418). African diaspora evangelical Christians face a significant challenge of balancing cultural assimilation and preservation of their cultural and religious identity. Kasa submits that many evangelical Christians are easily swayed by the dominant culture and religious practices of their new environment. He noted that many evangelical Christians who migrate easily criticize their inherited evangelical heritage and quickly adopt the beliefs, values, and cultural and religious practices of their host countries or communities. This adoption has led to a loss or modification of the original religious and cultural identity of these evangelical diasporans.

Sadau, a Nigerian migrant to Kenya, asserts that most diaspora evangelical Christians are concerned about assimilation into the dominant culture, rather than celebrating the diversity and contributions of their evangelical heritage. From the example of Kenya, Sadau further observed that due to the cultural dynamic of African societies, particularly as Nigeria and Kenya share

some different religious ideologies, diaspora evangelical denominations like ECWA are often faced with the challenge of balancing assimilation into the dominant culture with the preservation of their cultural and religious identity. For instance, the Nigerian form of Christianity is more emotional and enthusiastic, with some form of Pentecostalism, while that of Kenya is moderate and follows some traditional and Western forms of Christianity. This uniqueness has led to the dilution or loss of the unique cultural and religious practices of the evangelical heritage of the diasporans. Meanwhile, Sadau reiterates that cultural assimilation and preservation can lead to a sense of identity crisis and loss of connection to the evangelical roots among migrants.

Furthermore, Esther, an immigrant to Canada, submits that the tension between assimilation and preservation has led to conflict for diaspora evangelicals. She argues that some evangelical diasporans want to maintain strict adherence to their traditional practices and beliefs in their new communities, which has made it difficult for these diasporans to integrate into the new culture of their host countries. From a practical viewpoint, Esther contends that when she first arrived in Canada, she was judgmental of every practice of the church and community. However, such perception gradually led to her isolation and eventually led to discrimination and a sense of inactivity that affected her commitment to the Christian faith. This suggests that migrants who are often oriented towards a particular approach to Christianity (formal or informal) often display pervasive feelings of anxiety and despair against host communities (Lamport, 2022, p. 200). Meanwhile, in an interview with Hely, a diasporan in Sweden, the respondent contends that assimilation and preservation can lead to internal conflict within the diaspora communities. She observed that some evangelical Christians have advocated for assimilation as a way to adapt and thrive in their new environment. On the other hand, others

have emphasized the importance of preserving their cultural and religious heritage, which has led to division within evangelical denominations and further complicated their sense of identity and unity.

Further explanation is given by Jonathan, who noted that most African societies are hierarchical and patriarchal, and most mainline evangelical denominations are established based on these facets. However, most countries that host African diasporans are liberal, which makes it difficult for these Protestant diasporans to preserve their cultural and religious affiliation with their home churches. Jonathan opines that some migrants often feel a sense of liberation when they move to new communities abroad and often consider the conservative church practices and traditions a disservice or holding them in “cultural captivity within the church.” These diasporans do not see the need to preserve their evangelical heritage but see their migration as freedom from bondage.

Conflicting Cultural Influences and Hybridization of Religious Practices.

Hybridity has emerged as one of the all-purpose theoretical lenses, arising to capture the everyday complexity of a world that is still predominantly perceived through very compartmentalized lenses (Lemay-Hebert & Freedman, 2017, p. 3). It is a reality of the human experience and a feature of history, like urbanization, multiculturalism, and religious pluralism, which is an offshoot of migration, and for the Christian church, an area that needs to be appreciated and addressed (Tira & Uytanlet, 2020, p. eBook). Hybridization refers to the blending of different cultural and religious elements, often resulting from the encounter between African traditional beliefs and Christian practices (Yamane, 2016, p. 518).

From a religious viewpoint, this study discovered that religious mobility has led to the hybridization of diaspora Christianity. Religious mobility is the movement of individuals with

different denominational affiliations who convert, switch, or participate in interdenominational and interfaith activities. It is another dimension of migration that has significantly impacted African Christianity. As Catherine Gormes asserts, African Christians engage with the global landscape of Christianity; they adapt and contextualize their faith and beliefs, which can lead to the emergence of new forms of worship and theology (Li, 2010, p. 10). Religious mobility facilitates transnational connections for diaspora communities (Gomes, 2016, p. 194). Consequently, it reflects the tendency to construct and reconstruct fluid lives and a sense of belonging to communities in multiple sites, which can lead to the hybridization of religion. This study discovered that hybridization through religious mobility has led to the establishment of a network of partnerships and increased opportunities for collaboration, which has fostered and influenced the identity formation of migrants as they struggle to navigate the complexity of belonging to multiple religious traditions.

Hybridization presents a challenge for African diaspora evangelical Christians, who seek to maintain a distinct evangelical identity while also incorporating elements of their African heritage. Japhet submits that diaspora evangelical Christians are faced with the challenge of conflicting cultural influences. He noted that many African diasporans are in countries that have different dominant cultures and religious beliefs than their African ancestors, and therefore, it is not possible to easily influence existing cultures. Reiterating some of the challenges, such as identity crisis, theological conflicts, family and community expectations, rejection, and discrimination, Japhet affirms that African evangelical Christians often feel culturally displaced, strained in faith, and isolated. Observably, it has led to a clash between the evangelical principles that diasporans adhere to and the cultural practices they have adopted from their new surroundings. On the other hand, it has also contributed to assimilation with existing practices of

host communities. Consequently, Patrick Manning elaborated further that African diaspora individuals may find themselves in countries with different moral values or social norms, which may conflict with their evangelical beliefs (Manning, 2010, pp. 19–25). This can create tension between maintaining their evangelical identity and assimilating into their new communities.

Additionally, the hybridization of religious practices within diaspora evangelicals can also pose a challenge to maintaining a distinct evangelical identity among diasporans. Adams declares that African indigenous religions often incorporate elements of ancestor worship, spirit possession, and ritual practices, which may be viewed as incompatible with evangelical Christianity. However, many African diaspora individuals and communities have incorporated these aspects of their ancestral religions into their Christian faith, creating a unique blend of religious beliefs and practices. Another respondent (Afiniki) noted that, consequent to religious mobility, hybridization has led many diasporans to appreciate other religious practices. She noted that some immigrants are excited about their encounters and are often anxious to reintroduce their experiences when they return to their traditional churches or any time they visit their home countries. Hence, many of these immigrants, upon return to their home countries and churches, are not necessarily Pentecostalized; instead, they bring with them a new perspective and transformation to existing ones. However, Abdiel contends that hybridization can lead to tensions within the evangelical community between migrants and indigenous church leadership, which can contribute to the challenge of maintaining a distinct evangelical identity. On the other hand, Asake submits that due to religious mobility, some diaspora evangelical Christians who are influenced by Pentecostalism often seek a change to existing practices upon their return, which can lead to tension and conflict of interest.

Confronting the Identity Crisis of Diaspora Evangelical Churches

Religious heritage is crucial for many African diaspora evangelical Christians as it helps maintain a sense of identity, community, and continuity with their ancestral roots (Ebaugh, 2007, p. 359). However, evangelicals are often displaced in the struggle to maintain their traditional beliefs and practices in a new context, which has led to an identity crisis. The crisis has led many diaspora evangelicals to feel torn between their cultural heritage and their desire to integrate into their host society. On the other hand, many diasporans may fear losing their distinct identity if they are too open to change and sometimes feel at risk of becoming irrelevant or isolated if they are too resistant to adaptation. However, this study discovered that there are suggestive ways that diaspora evangelicals can confront these identity crises. For example, Peter reflected that the struggle against discrimination and dehumanization can be talked about through cultural assimilation and preservation because it represents the continuity of a people with their past, the specific content of which was rapidly disappearing from their consciousness. Therefore, the dynamics of migration are an important tool through which the church can witness the Gospel. Hence, diaspora evangelical denominations ought to engage in a process of reimagining and redefining their identity in light of the new context. This requires a critical examination of their beliefs and practices, as well as showing a willingness to embrace change while maintaining a strong connection to their heritage. Shuaibu responded that it is not possible to force change on existing practices of people in their native land, noting that diasporans always make the mistake that what they bring is better than what is practiced. Nevertheless, he advises that what evangelical diasporans ought to do is to demonstrate a compassionate and empathetic approach that acknowledges the complexities of their experience. Demonstrating openness and understanding can help evangelical diasporans navigate their identity and emerge with a renewed sense of purpose and relevance in their new cultural context.

Conclusion

The identity crisis of diaspora evangelical Christianity is a complex and multifaceted issue that requires a thoughtful and nuanced analysis. These diaspora evangelical denominations that are mission-established, such as ECWA, CCOCIN, and ERCC, among many others, are often characterized by a sense of displacement, struggle, and a struggle to maintain their traditional beliefs and practices in a new cultural context. There is also an ongoing tension between assimilation and the preservation of their distinct identity due to the clash between their original cultural and religious heritage and the cultural norms and values of their host countries. These growing tensions had led to identity confusion and a struggle among evangelical diasporans to define themselves in the context of their surroundings. However, diaspora evangelical churches need to create space for open dialogue and reflection on the complexities of their cultural and religious identity. This calls for an intentional effort to bridge the gap between the different generations within these denominations as well as foster a greater sense of inclusivity and diversity.

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