The Nigerian Pentecostal Churches in the UK: Community Identity and Aspects of Boundary Maintenance

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Abstract
A measure of contemporary academic work has come to rigorously challenge the conventional view that in Western liberal democracies there is an observable narrowing of the fissure between the secular public square and the religious domain of faith communities. It is in the public sphere, so it is frequently presently argued, where religion can be seen as establishing a common space in the context of diversity and pluralism. This paper engages with such theorising by considering a relatively fresh wave of black Christian revivalism in the UK, a form of Pentecostalism originating in West Africa and subsequently transported to a localised setting of diaspora. The paper will conjecture that the churches involved conform to early academic surveys which interpret Pentecostalism as principally a means by which a black ethnic community is able to adapt and respond to social marginalisation and in doing so construct elements of boundary maintenance with mainstream society and the public sphere. The discussion will be with reference to the largest church of its type in the UK, the Redeemed Christian Church of God.

Recent academic theorising has come to critique the long held view that in Western liberal democracies there is a widening chasm between the secular public square and the religious domain which is increasing restricted to matters of private conviction. According to what amounts to a revisionist view of 'hard' secularization paradigms it is civil society, once all but taken for granted to be more or less secular, where the resurgence of religion can be detected, establishing a common terrain in the context of diversity and pluralism[1]. Two fundamental factors are said to augment this development. Firstly, the role of religion in the civil setting would seem to be enhanced by the decline of the welfare state and welfare provisions, thus opening up possibilities in the role of faith-based organizations in offering mutual self-help at a time of acute global economic recession. Secondly, that religion has increasingly been drawn into the public arena by the state through civil rights formations which engage with extending and transforming conceptions of citizenship related to equality and social inclusion which suggests the increasing recognition of the role religion plays in public life. The thinking behind both developments would seem to be captured by Talad Asad who suggests "….the categories of politics and religion turn out to implicate each other more profoundly than we thought, a discovery that has accompanied our growing understanding of the powers of the modern state"[2].

The major concern of this paper is to survey the role and function of a fresh wave of black Pentecostalism in the United Kingdom, a form of Pentecostalism originating in West Africa and subsequently transported to a globalised setting. The paper will suggest that the churches which form the mainstay of the movement measure up, albeit with significant departures, to early academic surveys that interpret it as principally a means by which black ethnic communities are able to acclimatise and react to social marginalisation and in doing so construct elements of sectarian boundary maintenance with mainstream society and the public realm rather than engage with this spheres by other means than religious-based evangelism. While the churches involve subscribe to selected aspect of Western culture including an emphasis on personal success and material wealth alongside providing practical and moral support to their members, they also distance themselves from 'evils' of wider society that is perceived as sinful and immoral and which consequently renders these churches politically passive. The discussion will be with reference to the largest church of its type in the UK, the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG).

In many respects, the rapid congregational growth among West African, mostly Nigerian churches such as the RCCG in the UK as elsewhere in Europe and North America, can be regarded as a genuine 'revival'. It is difficult to over-exaggerate the proliferation of these newly established West African congregations. At a time when the older 'classical' Pentecostal churches (including those of the earlier Caribbean and African traditions) and the predominantly white middle-class denominational churches have generally stagnated or declined, these emerging West African churches such as the RCCG continue to proliferate as a major segment in the religious marketplace. However, the true nature of that revival must be scrutinised in order to understand why such churches tend to withdrawal from public engagement and are primarily concerned with forging an ethnic minority religious enclave in what is perceived as largely a hostile environment.

The Redeemed Christian Church of God

Pentecostalism is not new to Nigeria and there have been various 'waves' of Pentecostal revival since the 1920s. Many of these 'waves' were boosted by strong associations with Western churches[3] and recently, as elsewhere in the world[4], have frequently come to advocate a health and wealth gospel of personal material advancement under the influence of North American Pentecostal ministries. A fair amount of scholarly work has subsequently been conducted in the growth of these churches in West Africa[5]. Many of these accounts explore how the emerging movement is genuinely a product of a particular regional location. As Ruth Marshall notes, while North American ministries were particularly influential, Nigeria had produced its own variety of churches which mirrored its own history and traditions which reflected the experiences of its peoples in relation to their everyday existence and immediate requirements[6].

Beginning mostly in the interdenominational student cadres of the freshly-constituted Nigerian universities, such churches as the RCCG originally spread through the founding of small fellowships in the 1970s[7]. From the early 1980s thousands of new churches and ministries emerged in the cities and urban areas predominantly in the Christian south of the country. Although its origins can in fact be traced back to the 1950s, the RCCG's typified the new batch of churches since its prolific growth occurred in the 1980s during difficult economic and political

times and the detrimental social implications which were consequently generated.

Churches like the RCCG provided new strategies for survival and the restructuring of personal and collective relationships against a background of severe economic decline mostly attributable to the collapse of oil prices and wide-spread financial corruption. The Nigerian state's Structural Adjustment Programme (1986) only precipitated economic destitution in the cities with deep economic retrenchment and destructive price rises of many commodities. Against this backdrop the new Pentecostal churches offered an awareness of community solidarity, a work motivation ethic, and a philosophy of self-help. They also engendered distinct teaching related to purity and prosperity which have been replicated in the RCCG in the UK, although channelled through a distinct stratum of educational Nigerians.

With its distinct form of church organization, the 'parishes' of the RCCG constituted the basis for additional church 'plants' and evangelising initiatives which generated its expansion throughout Nigeria. In the early 1980s around 2000 'parishes' had been established in the country and an additional 1000 worldwide[8] under the leadership of Enoch Adeboye.[9] The RCCG also became renowned for its mass evangelising rallies – the monthly held Holy Ghost Service between Lagos and Ibadan with the average attendance of between 800,000 - 1,200,000 people. The RCCG now has its own Bible college and even its own Christian university.

The RCCG has proved to be especially zealous in its evangelism.[10] This can be measured in terms of its rapid global spread. In 1997 the church claimed to have some 300,000 affiliated members. Four years later this had risen to around 420,000 and by the end of 1997 to half a million. Membership of the church has now increased at such a rate that it is difficult to provide an estimate although at least according to its own claims, the RCCG now has around one million members globally. The driven desire to evangelise what was perceived by the Nigerian churches as the 'dark continent' of a secularised Europe, led to the 'planting' of numerous congregations out of Nigeria by individual parishes in Lagos or other large urban areas in the country.

RCCG in the UK

The RCCG is the largest and most successful church of its kind in terms of membership growth in the UK. Since 1985 when it first began to 'plant' a number of very small congregations, mostly in the capital, London, it has extended to 300 churches of various sizes and with a membership of somewhere in the region of 200,000 people meeting largely in rented buildings which include schools, hotels, churches of established denominations, and units of industrial estates.[11]

By way of doctrines, practice and cultural orientation, West African churches like the RCCG are in many regards significantly different from the largely black Caribbean Pentecostal congregations that have been present in the UK for well over half a century. This contrast is not only a matter of theological beliefs, but social demographics of the membership which seemingly challenge the long-accepted sociological frameworks regarding the origins and function of these black immigrant churches as havens for the economically deprived and poorly educated..

The principal observation in the key studies is that for several generations in the UK many of the exclusively black Afro-Caribbean churches embraced the dogma and practices of Pentecostalism. This variety of Christianity, with its emphasis on the empowerment of the Holy Spirit and display of the charismata (speaking in tongues, prophecy etc) seemingly brought an effective compensatory religious status for largely marginalised Caribbean immigrant communities[12] and provided the moral code and community environment which supported them in alien surroundings[13]. Such a distinct form of Pentecostalism appeared attractive since there was evidence that early immigrants were rarely welcomed by established white denominations and their more sedate forms of worship were alien to migrants used to more emotive and expressive forms of worship[14]. This led to a greater identity of the black community with their own independent Pentecostal churches which were more likely to articulate their interests and sentiments.[15] In terms of theology and orientation to the world there has always been a tendency for Afro-Caribbean Pentecostal churches in the UK to be sectarian in nature and to provide aspects of religiosity which stressed the future kingdom of God. This theological preference tended to conceptualise both a present and future hope of salvation from the conditions of this world[16]. Rather than confront white dominated society, the theology tended to endorse an "other worldly, idealistic mode of operation"[17].

The RCCG represents a very different black community, not only in terms of social composition and nationality and theology, but mission purpose. In no uncertain terms the RCCG has interpreted its entry into Europe as an act of God to evangelise increasing secular godless societies. Hence, the Christian religion, which was exported to the African continent with colonialism, was being revisited through the prism of a distinct mode of Pentecostalism. However, in reality, these churches in the UK have mostly failed to win white converts and remain the focus of identity and the source of inspiration for primarily Nigerian migrants who for the most part are fairly affluent and well-educated. Thus, in terms of their social functioning, they reflect both developments in Nigeria and operate in a constructive way for West Africans in what is in many respects an alien environment of the UK which nonetheless offers opportunity for future economic advancement.

The account below is based on an on-going survey of RCCG churches in the UK which was initiated in the year 2000 and focused on the movement's largest and flagship church based in London, known as Jesus House, with a congregation of about 1500 people[18]. The study involved questionnaires, interviews, participant observation and a content analysis of literature produced by this particular church and more widely the literature and web-sites of the RCCG parent organization. The questionnaire included questions related to the background of the church's members.[19] The findings suggested that the membership was largely drawn from a professional occupational background. 38 % were from higher professional employment and 41% lower professional. Of those not in full employment (about one-third), some 80% were students. In terms of education, 60 % had degrees and/or professional qualifications. 90 % had fathers who themselves were drawn from professional backgrounds. These were predominantly young church members with 10 % under the age of 20, 50 % under 30, and 93 % under 40 (by way of gender two-thirds were female).

In exploring the link between Pentecostalism and Caribbean identity in diaspora, Nicole Toulis (1993) identifies religion as primarily providing individuals with an interpretation of the

world as they experience their place in it and in the Western setting this was one which seemed hostile and threatening. In developing her argument she calls upon the work of Robert Bellah in that, as components of 'small (social) units', individuals may appropriate the religious symbols of their socio-cultural environment and appropriate them with their own religious problems of meaning, identity, and motivation[20]. By utilising this framework Toulis is able to state that black Caribbean Pentecostalism in Britain is simultaneously a part of society while remaining apart from it[21].

The insights advanced by Toulis also allow, to a degree at least, an understanding of the growth of the more recent West African churches such as the RCCG in the UK. The evidence suggests that they are a product of both developments in West Africa, especially Nigeria, and an adaptation to Western circumstances. Indeed, there is, the relationship between the two can be seen albeit at contrasting and complex levels. In short, these churches, as already noted, proliferated rapidly in Nigeria against a background of severe economic and political difficulties from the early 1980s, but also the orientation of a largely Nigerian community in the UK.

The doctrines and praxis of such churches reflect means of coping with, and responding to, adverse circumstances while at the same time, translated into the UK environment, they consequently assist their migrant community membership in adapting to a further range of social conditions. This means that in many respects these churches are distinct from the early 'classical' variety identified with the black Caribbean churches despite providing a sense of community solidarity. The core doctrines of those such as the RCCG certainly locate them within the broad nexus of Pentecostalism. However, there is sufficient evidence to suggest that these churches are of a distinct ilk with a theology and view of the world which not only articulate the experiences of Nigerians in their country of origin, but are in many respects world-accommodating and embrace an ideology which would seem to be in line with Western culture. Collectively, such churches, as we shall now see below, produce a philosophy of individual self-advancement which suggests such a confluence of values, both from a localised setting in Nigeria and those following wider Western cultural contours. At the same time, by offering a sense of community, the core teachings espoused would seem to suggest that these churches are important agencies in offering practical support of welfare and other benefits in the public and economic spheres. However, while this might suggest a high level of integration with the wider culture this is only at specific levels (such as employment and education and for specific utilitarian ends), the sense of community also permits a considerable emphasis on boundary maintenance with the host society which is seen in many ways immoral, decadent, and evil.

Self-Help and Community Support

On examining such churches as the RCCG there would appear that there is much to confirm Jules-Rosette's (1994) assertion that in developing countries a host of new religions create ideologies which bring a synthesis of indigenous and Western religious beliefs. Often such movements, exemplified by developments in Africa, represent the interests and everyday life experiences of distinct and sometimes emerging social constituencies. These theological constructs may then be subject to the process of globalization and thereby appeal to localised communities.

Moreover, it is evident in RCCG churches in the UK that congregations forge their membership into a collective which embraces a keen sense of belonging and community. This supplements the increasing tendency towards individualism in Nigerian society, and the prevailing ethos of self-interest which nonetheless underscores the theology of the RCCG. My research of a London congregation of the RCCG showed that some 75 % of church members had initial contact with the church through 'significant others' – relatives, friends, or work associates before joining. Some 50% already had connections with the RCCG in Nigeria. Much of the remainder had contact with other similar churches in Nigeria, with only a small percentage claiming to be previously unchurched.

Typical of similar churches, it is apparent that in the RCCG there is an attempt to blur the often stark social distinctions of its membership in order to establish greater sense of unity. Tribal affiliation is perhaps the most obvious and to a degree reflects the fact that, apart from the Christian-Muslim divide in Nigeria, racial and tribal discrimination constitutes the gravest threat to national harmony in the country. In many RCCG churches a detrimental adherence to tribal loyalties, whether Igbo, Yoruba or other smaller tribal groupings, is strongly rejected. Similarly, the distinctions of economic and occupational status are played down in order to generate an egalitarian spirit.

As already recognised, much of the early work on the longer established black Pentecostal churches focused on their purpose of providing places of welcome and community. This was especially the case for the first wave of Caribbean immigrants into the UK who experienced a feeling of unfamiliarity and hostility[22]. Much was exemplified by Calley's (1962) early study which showed that the Afro-Caribbean Pentecostal sect represented a deliberate attempt to create an ethnic enclave, sustain community solidarity, and to construct a refuge from wider society. These considerations are equally relevant when considering the more recently arrived West African churches and the growth of RCCG. Despite its claim to be 'A Church for All Nations' and that 'Everyone is Welcomed'[23], the ethos, culture, practices and beliefs of the RCCG are clearly West African and predominantly Nigerian orientated. Questionnaire responses to the national groupings of the church I surveyed found that the membership was almost 90% Nigerian, and 7% from Zambia, Ghana, Cameroon and Tanzania. The small remainder was constituted by Asians and Whites.

There were other signs that the RCCG church surveyed was predominantly West African. At Sunday church services most church members adhered to traditional dress, although some preferred smart Western styles. The church notice board and magazines featured advertisements for African wedding paraphernalia, African food, money transfers to Nigeria, West African fashions, and dry-cleaning companies specialised in African attire. One young female member of the church I interviewed put matters in perspective:

> People like to continue with the same set up, and with people of a similar background to themselves. I did join another church when I first came to this country, and it was a black one as well. But it was so different from what I was used to back home. You attract your own type of people…. I don't know how we get away from it. The, again why should we? I think that we should be allowed to develop our own cultures in this country.[24]

While, as noted below, there is a strict hierarchy in RCCG churches, there is also considerable lay participation in the running of congregations especially in terms of community self-help. Administration and pastoral care is deemed to be the responsibility of part-time voluntary lay men and women. Lay people set up nurseries and kindergartens and offer faith healing 'clinics' and counselling services. Neighbourhood prayer groups are common as a further means of enforcing community solidarity and not only to encourage others in faith, but to give guidance on other financial and other practical problems. Individual churches also engage in sponsoring members in a variety of educational and business endeavours related most often to the running and propagation of the church and its assets: transport, publishing, crafts and trades. Marshall sees these self-help activities in the Nigerian context as indicating not only the ability of these church communities to develop institutional alternatives to social services lacking or reduced by the state, but as an increasing attempt at self-assertion[25]. It is the latter which is especially significant in the UK context for the Nigerian migrant community.

Teachings of self help and ambition in the West African Pentecostal churches are supplemented by the theology and ethos of 'Divine Prosperity'. Material success is not shunned by such churches as the RCCG, but rather interpreted as an indication of God's favour. This teaching on prosperity may appear initially to indicate the influence of the so-called 'Faith teachings' of 'health and wealth' which originated in the USA. Such doctrines insist that guaranteed health and wealth are part of the confirmation of spiritual salvation rewarded by faith. In parts of Africa, including Nigeria, the American Faith ministries have achieved notable advance. Indeed, the growth of churches based on 'Faith teachings' has frequently dominated fresh waves of Pentecostalism in some national settings. Teachings of prosperity are important to such churches as the RCCG. To an extent this marks the early student involvement in the growth of the independent churches and their influence by the increased activity of the American Faith movement in the 1970s and early 1980s. Thereafter, rather than advocating a retreat from the world, pastors of the new Pentecostal churches in Nigeria and elsewhere in West Africa came gradually to adopt prosperity doctrines[26]. Yet, as noted below there is more to consider in relation to an ethos of material advancement.

Boundary Maintenance

As already briefly explored, recent developments within Nigeria Pentecostalism involve theology and teachings, alongside organization forms, which address issues related to the profound economic difficulties encountered by Nigeria since the 1980s. Hence, many of the core doctrines of the RCCG are focused on the integrity of the family, sexual purity, health, wealth and justice as well as economic life. The range of teachings expose an apparent materialistic and work-orientated ethic, thinly attired in theological constructs which dovetail, and not without some difficulty, with teaching on the subject of purity. These teaching are replicated in the UK setting and have a particularly resonance for an affluent or would be affluent membership and where purity and thrift often means distancing members from both the failing of Nigeria society and the secular culture of the UK.

For the RCCG the display of strict personal morals is the central evidence for a new born-again Christian life. Every aspect of everyday existence must exclude all lying, cheating,

stealing, quarrelling, gossiping, bribing, smoking, alcohol consumption, fornication and a reluctance to help those in need. Again, this may be comprehended as a reaction to developments in Nigeria where economic malaise and government corruption created a society frequently accused of being 'vulgar, dirty, ostentatious, dishonest, inefficient, undisciplined'[27].

The significance of teachings of purity is not merely an outcrop of the 'classical' Pentecostal tradition of spiritual growth but must be viewed by way of enforcing boundary maintenance. It is not only by education and migration that membership of the RCCG in the UK can differentiate themselves from fellow nationals who have neither the education nor finances to migrate. The new wave of Pentecostal churches in Nigeria had long symbolically separated its members from the moral chaos of society beyond their boundaries by a strong emphasis on purity of lifestyles strengthened and reinforced by mutually supportive communities.

With regard to the Nigerian context, the new Pentecostal churches appear to be practically and symbolically distancing members of their congregation from their surrounding society and social chaos. When incorporated within this closely-knit congregation, the encouragement of purity, clean and ambitious living is extremely effectual. This confirms Gifford's observations concerning the way that the new churches are linked to the elevation of social status and the forging of distinct lifestyle in Nigeria. In the church communities members find shelter, psychological security and solidarity. In this innovating association they create a new world, a world apart, a new existence for themselves away from the harsh and brutalising realities of the economic climate. They can forge a new notion of self…. 'In their group they develop a whole support mechanism to reinforce them in their new values and their new self understanding'[28].

As we have already acknowledged, there is a strong health and wealth element to be observed. This is also reinforced from internal cultural dynamics and recent social and economic developments as much as the influence of the USA-style Faith gospel. In the RCCG material advancement and prosperity are to the fore and they are reinforced by teachings of financial management. Seminars and practical advice are directed towards helping members to deal with personal debt and the planning of finances. While RCCG teachings insist that God will inevitably bless the born-again believer, considerable stress is also placed on the endeavours that individuals make to their own careers and progression through self responsibility. Economic decline in Nigeria generated the growth of these teaching in that they may well reflect the increasing need to be frugal and provide an ethic of financial accumulation against the economic ravages since the early 1980s. Teachings are spiritual in tone and frequently cast as a spiritual battle against demonic forces that seek to 'steal' finances by tempting believers to follow a sinful lifestyle. Church members are taught to earn well and live prudently.

In the UK through teachings and publications issues such as the maintenance of strict personal hygiene and the need to refrain from violence, cruelty and infidelity in relationships are common themes. This also implies a greater fear of the moral incursion by the external influence of UK society into which West African Pentecostal church members are only partially integrated, as well as the strong need to excel and reject the slurs of corruption and squalor that have plagued Nigerian society.

In the case of the RCCG in the UK, there is more to consider. The organization's churches attract wealthier and more mobile social groups and this has led to a perceptible concern for this world as well as the next. This has particularly been the case in times of economic hardship for these more prosperous sections of Nigerian society. Hence, the teachings of self-help and entrepreneurial effort must be viewed as a reaction to the 'squandering' mentality which has become identified with Nigerian life in recent times. A human potential philosophy is evident in the common teaching that members should be 'the best they can be' in all areas of life including careers, finance and relationships which are deemed to be part of the spiritual life.

The theology of Jesus House, the church surveyed, is captured in an article found in its magazine *Impact*:

> To survive, one needs an action plan of career goals, training and needs analysis, and a period of review at least every three months. You cannot go through life trusting that the best will happen…. Write down the vision. Pray about it. Once you are convinced it is for you, act on it.[29]

For the RCCG, the teachings of prosperity are also played out in the concept of 'covenant'. This notion is significant in that all the needs of the church, at both community and individual levels are met if the members were pure, faithful and obedient to God. Implicit in this teaching of covenant is the insistence that the spiritual and material fortunes of its members are dependent on how much they give spiritually and materially to God and the local church. For the RCCG's General Overseer, Enoch Adeboye, there is a link between holiness and health and prosperity and described by him in his book *Holiness* in this way:

> When you are holy you will become like God so you will not need to pray for healing…. If you live holy you will not need to pray for prosperity…. When your soul is prospering, your health and wealth will also prosper. This is the will of God, above all things for you.[30]

In West Africa, including Nigeria, such churches have become politically active. Unlike the political quietism of earlier revivals, those which emerged in the 1970s embraced a political activism originating with the founding of the Christian Students' Social Movement of Nigeria in 1977. A defining aspect of this early political involvement was an accent on the dogma that spiritual forces governed the political sphere and conservative reform could be instigated through prayer[31]. In the 1980s, Pentecostals become mobilised in the inter-denominational Christian Association of Nigeria via the Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (the principal Pentecostal panacea organization in the country) and the Organization of African Instituted Churches[32] and this included the RCCG.

In the UK, in the same way as the older Caribbean churches, West African churches such as the RCCG, are, by contrast, largely politically reserved. The literature and web-site sources produced by the RCCG display a fear of moral incursion by the outside influence of UK society. While the virtues of the free market, competition and success are welcomed Western virtues, the breakdown of family life, disrespect for others, and sexual promiscuity are separated out as the undesirable aspects of UK society. A young female member interviewed stated:

> The first thing that people see about you is your lifestyle…. A lot of people get involved in things

> because they don't know that they are wrong. What you see as you are growing up affects you. For example, if your parents are promiscuous, and you follow on the same, at some stage someone is going to call you a slag, and your self-esteem is going to be damaged.[33]

Many churches typified by the RCCG carry their cultural and religious views into Western contexts where more liberal views of sexuality are accepted, for example, where homosexuality is more tolerated and the rights of sexual minorities are advanced. In such environments social boundary maintenance with what is often perceived as a morally inept 'host' culture becomes imperative. The view that homosexuality is a specifically Western phenomenon is impressed on a younger generation of Nigerian Pentecostals. The church's Sunday School Teachers Manual of the RCCG includes a 'Prayer Point' instructing young people to 'Pray that God will deliver the nations of the world from the sin of homosexuality and lesbianism' understood to have originated as a liberation movement in the West. In outlining what constitutes homosexuality and lesbianism these sexual orientation are seen as being on par with paedophilia and bestiality. Homosexuals and Lesbians are said to "….use their money, intellect, power and position to fight God's word and invariably to fight God Himself" [34]. While such churches are often outspoken in dealing with such moral issues, those such as the RCCG remain politically inactively and generally speaking do not engage in the wider UK political and public sphere and thus safeguard the significance of boundary maintenance between the religious community and the external social order.

Cutting across the egalitarian ethos of the RCCG and similar organizations is a church structure which forges boundaries of internal hierarchies which, in turn, enforce the ethic of purity and demarcation with the external social environment. This is most obvious in a gender divide. Traditional Pentecostalism had always tended to promote, along with sexual purity emphasis, the doctrine that preached the submission of women to men and their responsibilities in the domestic sphere. The earlier so-called 'holiness' churches in Nigeria display very strict edicts about women's dress and usually confined women to the lower levels of church administration. The new Nigerian churches are more open to ideas of women in the work place but church authority remains in the hands of a male pastor and male leadership and subservient authority at a global level.

Discussion and Conclusion

This paper commenced by acknowledging the impact of so-called 'revisionist' academic views that it is civil society and the public sphere, once believed to be increasingly secular, where the resurgence of religion can be observed and that two fundamental factors are said to augment this development. Firstly, the role of religion in the civil setting would seem to be enhanced by the decline of the welfare state and welfare provisions, thus opening up possibilities in the role of faith-based organizations in offering mutual self-help at a time of acute economic recession. Secondly, that religion has increasingly been drawn into the public arena by the state through civil rights formations, including religious rights, which engage with extending and transforming conceptions of citizenship related to equality and social inclusion which suggests the increasing recognition of the role religion plays in public life.

Clearly the UK is a primary instance of how the state encounters and promotes religious rights as a matter of systematic policy and this relates to changing and extending conceptions

of citizenship forged by constructs of egalitarianism and social inclusion. Thus religion can be said to be increasingly be drawn into the public arena through policies of 'accommodation' and the encouragement of faith groups into be actively involved in the public sphere. In some extent this marks an acceptance of the endurance of religion and means that it is inevitably drawn into state and public discourses. In the UK, as elsewhere in Western Europe, there is the increasing acknowledgement of the role religion plays in public life. Moreover, the UK state is now obligated to actively provide the space for religion to flourish in the polity as part of the requirements of a pluralist society and order policy accordingly. As Habermas suggested, liberal states are not merely enjoined to religious tolerance, but are potentially at least cognisant of a functional interest in public expressions of religion as key meaning-making and locus of identity[35].

For two decades UK governments had embarked on a strategy of bringing religion and faith communities within centres of political decision-making in the restricted sense of soliciting the opinions of religious groups. From one perspective such policies can be interpreted as empowering religion in the public sphere. The broad framework forge by Labour governments (1997-2010) were a series of policies around transforming inclusive concepts of citizenship that seemingly sought to accommodate the religious in recognition of the pluralist context of a liberal democracy. The idea that citizenship suggests a wider public benefit is also implied in early policy pronouncement of the current Conservative/Liberal coalition. The notion of the 'Big Society' was the touchstone policy idea of the victorious Conservative Party during the 2010 general election with the aim 'to create a climate that empowers local people and communities, building a big society' which will 'take power away from politicians and give it to people'. Nonetheless, the notion of the 'Big Society' also included reference to social inclusion and citizenship. In terms of religion, Prime Minister David Cameron has subsequently stated in expanding his notion of the 'Big Society' that religious communities are a source of social inclusion particularly for many citizens 'on the edge of society'[36].

In Nigeria such churches as the RCCG would seem to display a willingness to engage the public sphere in political terms and by fostering notions of the morally upright citizen. For instance The RCCG University 's Mission Statement says:

> We have a vision for a better nation; a Nigeria of frank and candid academicians, dependable and honest artisans, God fearing and faithful pastors, decent and law-abiding citizens, trustworthy and upright youths, caring and compassionate doctors, honourable and truthful politicians, open and sincere business community, courageous and reliable public servants …. [37]

As a representation of an ethnic community in the diasporic context of the UK this ethic is still important for such churches as the RCCG but falls short of direct political involvement. This is due to its nature and function. In this sense the revisionist critique of the previously taken-for-granted 'decline of religion' thesis is correct in that it frequently led to the failure to recognise the significance of religion in both forging and articulating aspects of identity in the contemporary Western context and how this is related to aspects of boundary maintenance with the wider cultural environment and this can mean self-imposed marginalisation rather than some significantly contributing to the return of religion to the public sphere.

As Stuart Hall notes[38], there is an increasing tendency for the cultural identity of ethnic minorities in disapora to be something which is constructed and negotiated in the West. Religion, nationality and morality are important resources in the construction of identity which may be transitory and characterised by an unfolding and development of meanings established by individuals and communities. This is concomitant with Wade Roof's (1994) assertion that, religion may only survive in Western societies by accommodating cultural values and proves relevant to the experiences of individuals in *this* world. Hence, the advancement of achieved or self created religious identity is primarily based on person life-styles and taste. Roof is clear in suggesting that the 'individual-expressive' tendency of contemporary religion is not necessarily confined to privatised introspective forms. Rather, it may still have community dimensions. Indeed it may constitute a search for community life.

The importance of such churches as the RCCG in an era of globalisation is not merely with reference to a unique expression of West African Pentecostalism. Rather, they are significant in that they constitute an international movement which has worldwide implications. As part of an increasing phenomenon of what is frequently dubbed 'reversed proselytisation', these new West African churches have a self-styled mission to evangelise widely. In the case of the RCCG this has meant planting churches as widely as India, the Caribbean, Hong Kong, North America and Europe. The impact and relevance of the exportation of a fiercely evangelical Nigerian church such as the RCCG, driven by a vision of winning converts, is that it furthers a unique opportunity to analyse its impact at a local level.

This paper has attempted to analyse rapidly growing congregations constituted by a fairly marginalised and isolated ethnic and national community which in real and practical terms caters for the needs of a particular clientele. Differentiated from other Nigerians through elevated status, wealth and education, a vibrant form of Pentecostalism also separates the membership again as a community establishes lifestyle ideals and purity boundaries which are profoundly important when we take into account the high rate of crime, violence and corruption in that country. While they are to some extent integrated at work and university through career advancement strategies and hard endeavour in the UK, Nigerian nationals are grouped together as a religious community when it comes to church gatherings, finding solidarity and relevance within a church of co-culturals, taking refuge from surroundings which may be hostile and demanding. Other Nigerians, more wealthy segment of the country's population, may continue to come to the UK to take their place in the educational opportunities and the employment market. While they continue to do so the RCCG offers a home from home, one which encourages them to succeed in all aspects of their lives and to what they materially aspire. Their teachings of prosperity and self-reliance, as well as community provisions, is an import from Nigeria as a response to economic difficulties from the 1980s and clearly predates post-2008 global financial crisis and austerity measures imposed by the state in many Western countries. The provision of services and self-groups is thus only incidental to UK government policy. Moreover, there is a reaction against the 'sinful' aspects of UK society but no significant political stance against the culture that surrounds them. Rather their ethnic drawing together is an instrumental one where individuals seek support from each other, and also find a spiritual setting which is relevant to their mutual ethnic and national background.

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