



Navigating identities, culture and inclusion in the selected Zimbabwean churches in the United Kingdom



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The need to strike a balance between maintaining identity, cultural values and inclusion by migrant churches in the diaspora has remained a topical issue in academia. This research is located in the United Kingdom (UK). It aimed to analyse how the selected churches, namely the Zimbabwe Catholic Community in Birmingham, the Apostolic Faith Mission International Ministries in Coventry and Forward in Faith Ministries International in Manchester, navigate their dual existence to address the challenges of inclusivity and cultural negotiation while upholding their religious traditions. The article is informed by a hybridity conceptual framework, as espoused by Homi Bhabha, to explore how these churches preserve their cultural traditions while adapting to British societal norms. Moreover, the article employed a qualitative research methodology to analyse the ecclesial and theological gap experienced by Zimbabweans as they worship in the UK. The findings suggested that hybridity is a crucial survival strategy for diaspora communities. Through hybridity, Zimbabwean churches establish their doctrinal uniqueness and create accepted venues within the religious ecology of the UK. Their adjustments position them as intentionally self-defined, culturally distinct yet socially integrated entities. The article advocates for the third space, where traditional elements merge with innovations, enabling members to sustain international connections while developing local identities.

Contribution: The study makes a significant contribution to scholarship by integrating theory and practice, providing practical guidelines for church leaders and congregations to navigate hybrid identities effectively. It highlights the imperative of reconciling theological integrity with cultural adaptability, creating inclusive worship settings and fostering social cohesion.

Keywords: culture; hybridity; inclusion; navigating identities; Zimbabwean churches; United Kingdom.

Introduction

During the early 2000s, Zimbabweans migrated to the United Kingdom (UK) in significant numbers because of economic collapse, as well as political oppression and social instability in their homeland (eds. McGregor & Primorac 2010:5). President Robert Mugabe's regime created conditions of hyperinflation and land reforms, alongside high unemployment rates, which compelled more than 500 000 Zimbabweans to flee to the UK between 2000 and 2010 (Block 2005:10; Pasura 2012:143, 2014:27). The UK offered a dual space for migrants, providing economic opportunities while also addressing the challenges of cultural displacement and identity transformation (Bauloz, Vathi & Acosta 2020:147). The Zimbabwean churches emerged as vital institutions during this period, providing spiritual support and fostering community unity while preserving essential links to cultural traditions (Biri 2014:140). Throughout this article, the term 'diasporic faith community' is used to talk about these churches. However, these diasporic faith communities face a complex dual imperative. Zimbabwean churches strive to maintain their religious practices and cultural heritage while adapting to British societal norms and meeting the evolving needs of their second-generation UK-born members.

The study focuses on three Zimbabwean churches in the UK that navigate the conflict between continuity and change by balancing evolving theological views with traditional customs. While previous studies predominantly document identity crises in diasporic communities (Block 2005; Cohen 1997; Pasura 2014:27), this study addresses a crucial gap in the lack of scholarly analysis investigating how religious institutions such as the Zimbabwe Catholic Community (ZCC), Apostolic Faith Mission International Ministries United Kingdom (AFMIMUK) and Forward in

Faith International Ministries (FIFMI). The selection of these groups is a broader sample to represent Zimbabwean churches in the UK.

Zimbabwean migrants in the UK face numerous challenges that extend beyond merely achieving economic integration (Cohen 1997:2). Zimbabwean migrants endure heightened tensions stemming from systemic racial discrimination, alongside underemployment and the psychological burdens associated with family responsibilities towards their relatives in Zimbabwe (Machaka 2023:379). Churches have emerged as cultural anchors (Pasura 2008:18), serving as spaces that preserve language traditions and collective memories through worship and ceremonies. These institutions operate dynamically within a transnational framework, necessitating ongoing adaptation to British secular values while navigating multicultural influences and evolving generational perspectives.

The study applies Homi Bhabha's (1994) theory of hybridity, demonstrating that cultural identities emerge from the interaction between colonial remnants and contemporary multicultural environments. Through Bhabha's third space concept, which illustrates a transitional area where cultural norms blend to create hybrid forms, we can assess how Zimbabwean churches function as intermediaries between Shona cultural practices and British social expectations. The ZCC's bilingual services, along with FIFMI's digital adaptation of culture, exemplify this synthesis, resulting in worship practices that connect different generations and transcend cultural limitations. According to Levitt (2001:2), these innovations demonstrate simultaneity because migrants maintain their transnational links while integrating into local communities.

Navigating the disturbance of home-country value systems (e.g., community worship, intergenerational authority) within a host society enforcing secular norms (e.g., noise restrictions, urban physical limits), these churches illustrate the fundamental conflict in diasporic religion. This triggers what Adogame (2013:225) refers to as liturgical liminality, a crisis in which holy worship loses meaning and necessitates an identity revision. In this study, this is not isolated problems but rather expressions of these larger phenomena include ZCC's intergenerational disconnection, AFMIMUK's noise conflicts and FIFMI's resource management from the mother church in Africa. Such upheavals, as observed by Sande (2020:62), split African believers' spiritual moorings, thereby motivating churches to build adaptive resilience, a paradigm this study employs through analytical lenses: host-society pressures and generational value differences.

This research employs qualitative case studies to examine how these churches sustain their communities by implementing liturgical hybridity and digital innovation strategies. This study makes a significant contribution to broader academic discussions on migration patterns, religious practices, and the formation of personal identity. It demonstrates that diasporic

faith groups act as cultural ambassadors by fostering social unity and enhancing the UK's religious diversity. Policymakers, religious leaders and scholars must comprehend these adaptive processes during this era of globalised migration to promote immigrant integration while preserving cultural uniqueness. This study addresses the following questions: What methods do Zimbabwean diasporic churches employ to develop hybrid identities while maintaining their cultural heritage? How do these churches establish connections across different generations and cultural backgrounds? The exploration of how these adaptations function as building blocks for social cohesion within the UK's super-diverse environment is warranted. Crucially, this research investigates how these adaptive strategies negotiate visibility without assimilation, thereby establishing these churches as recognised, distinct institutions within Britain's multifaith arena, beyond mere survival. The article's structure begins with an introduction that sets the context for Zimbabwean migration and the roles of churches, followed by the methodology, theoretical framework, a historical foundation that outlines the origins of these churches in the UK, and an examination of gaps in diaspora scholarly identity. The results indicate adjustments in three different churches, informing recommendations for stakeholders and culminating in a synthesis of hybrid resilience within the conclusion.

Research methods and design

This study employs a qualitative multiple-case study technique (Yin 2018:51) to investigate how three Zimbabwean diasporic churches in the UK manage hybrid identities while preserving their cultural and religious traditions. The multiple case study methodology was selected for its capability to facilitate cross-case analysis of adaptation techniques across diverse ecclesiastical contexts while maintaining depth within specific institutional frameworks (Stake 2006:64). Three case studies, ZCC, AFMIMUK and FIFMI, were selected strategically following Patton's (2015:266) critical case sampling framework. Three broad criteria were used to enhance rich comparative analysis. Firstly, theological diversity, these three represent major strands of Zimbabwean Christianity, allowing examination of hybridity across traditions. Secondly, geographical distribution, represented by Birmingham, Coventry and Manchester to avoid a single local context. Thirdly, documented adaptation challenges encompass generational integration, cultural preservation and transnational engagement. This selection aids in analysing both convergent hybridity patterns and context-specific differences in diasporic religious practice.

The process of gathering data utilised a rigorous triangulation technique (Denzin 2017:8) that included three streams of publicly available secondary sources. Academic literature provided essential context through peer-reviewed articles, monographs, and theses sourced from databases such as JSTOR, Scopus and African Journals Online, using iterative keyword searches (e.g., Zimbabwean churches in the UK, religious hybridity and diaspora) alongside backwards and forward citation tracking (Webster & Watson 2002:xiv).

Grey literature encompassed institutional materials (2015–2023) such as church websites, annual reports, newsletters and publicly stored sermons to illustrate self-representation and adaptation activities. Demographic and socio-political background information was sourced from public domain data, including the UK Office for National Statistics' census reports, local council records and media coverage of diaspora events.

Firstly, deductive coding employed Bhabha's (1994) conceptual framework, specifically third space, hybridity and cultural translation, to discern signs of identity negotiation. Secondly, within-case research applied Braun and Clarke's (2006:78) thematic framework to identify adaptation patterns specific to each church. Thirdly, cross-case synthesis developed comparison matrices to examine convergences (such as digital innovations across instances), divergences (like liturgical versus structural modifications) and paradoxes (such as preserving tradition against integrating generations) in hybridity tactics.

Three validation measures ensured methodological rigour: (1) source triangulation across academic, institutional and public documentation streams; (2) a comprehensive contextual description of each case's historical and social embeddedness; and (3) peer debriefing with diaspora studies scholars to challenge interpretive assumptions. Ethical compliance was maintained through the exclusive use of publicly accessible materials, by UK copyright law, and accompanied by aggregated reporting to ensure institutional anonymity. The desktop technique does not allow for primary observational data; however, the multiple-case design enhances analytical validity by employing comparative replication logic (Yin 2018:65) to address the challenges associated with single-case desktop research. This analytical approach facilitates a theoretically informed examination of hybridity as a survival strategy and a process of constructing identity within super-diverse religious contexts.

The hybridity theoretical framework

This research is framed within a hybridity theoretical framework, which is linked to the individual's religiosity as they engage in diverse spiritual practices through involvement, belonging, association or participation in various religious traditions in a new land (Hounguevou 2023:55). The term 'hybrida', from which 'hybridity' is derived, originated in 17th-century biological studies to describe offspring of individuals from different races (Gent n.d.:1). Thus, hybridity signifies a situation where identity boundaries are crossed, resulting in mixed races, such as the offspring of individuals of white and black descent (Gent n.d.:1). Homi Bhabha is recognised as a key exponent of hybridity in the postcolonial era. In his works, Bhabha associates hybridity with the relationship between the coloniser and the colonised (Bhabha 1994:38). For him, the relationship between these former antagonists is modelled on literary and cultural theory to elucidate the symbiotic relationship between culture and identity, which

is rooted in discrimination and colonial resentment (Nasrullah 2016:1).

Bhabha also describes hybridity as a process whereby the colonial government asserts its authority to interpret the identities of the colonised and the coloniser in the context of their life setting (Papastergiadis 1997:255). Allolio-Näcke (2014:926) suggests that hybridity addresses diverse social and cultural boundaries that lie at the extremes of the other. It presents opposites such as the oppressor and the oppressed, the rich and the poor, the white and the black person, and the centre and the periphery. These parallels illustrate identities defined by race and gender. Different cultures construct a third space (Bhabha 1994:37). For Bhabha, this space is an uncertain realm where cultural meanings and representations lack fixed interpretation. It exists in the spaces between, carrying the burden and interpretation of mixed races, which is what makes the postcolonial notion of hybridity unique (Nasrullah 2016:1). According to Bhabha (1994:37), the third space explains the distinctiveness of everyone.

In this article, the hybridity theoretical framework will be employed to analyse how faith communities in the UK navigate their identity within a multiracial, multicultural and multifaith context. The quest for cultural identity in the diaspora, worshipping alongside the coloniser as former colonised individuals, illustrates the need for a third space where the former antagonists redefine their new space of faith. This framework will also facilitate an analysis of how Zimbabweans in the diaspora can be included in church life without disdain. Such recognition arises when the dynamics of inferiority and superiority are neutralised by a third space, a new worship environment that treats everyone equally. Hybridity situates both the rich and the poor in a neutral space where the Genesis 1 narrative of creation takes precedence.

As Lillis (2013:88) puts it, the third space evolves from the sociocultural tradition, which can be defined in two ways. On the one hand, the third space represents the gap where the exploited planned for their emancipation, which was whispered in the corners of the bazaar or the tavern. On the other hand, the third space can also signify the vacuum where the oppressed and the oppressor can come together, freely and temporarily, transcending oppression itself, as expressed in their individuality (Bhabha 1994:38). Unlike focusing solely on the colonial history of enslaver and enslaved person, hybridity creates a dialogue among faith communities in the UK, where unity in diversity defines the religious space of the former adversaries.

Moreover, hybridity reveals how identities among communities in the UK are transforming, leading to an appreciation of the former 'Other'. Hybridity also neutralises the language of 'us' and 'them'. Bhabha's hybridisation refers to the emergence of new mixed identities resulting from the encounter of different cultures (Bhabha 1994:39). This process challenges both the host and the migrant to redefine worship, which has traditionally been a homogeneous experience.

However, it is now heterogeneous in accommodating each other's ways of ascribing worth to God (Mujinga 2025:3). In contrast, most migrant churches are seen as asylum Christianities, which are defined by homogeneous groups of migrants; hybridity assists the host and the migrants in redefining their new sanctuary, where God accepts people as individuals from their historical backgrounds. In the following sections, this framework is applied to analyse how ZCC, AFMIMUK and FIFMI navigate the third space through liturgical adaptations, leadership reforms and digital innovations.

Understanding the life of the migrants in the diaspora

Zimbabweans, like many other Africans who settle in the UK, do so with an awareness of the risks they encounter daily. These challenges include the potential for deportation for those without proper documentation or those who commit crimes, racism, employment not aligned with their qualifications, pressure from relatives in their home country who demand and expect support, long working hours that disrupt rest and family life, identity crises, religio-cultural confrontations and other adversities they face in the diaspora. This situation creates a crisis. Cohen acknowledged this challenge as early as 1997, when he emphasised that the diaspora crisis is upon us (Cohen 1997:7). Moreover, migrants often experience alienation from their true selves, history and heritage (Radhakrishnan 1996:166). They confront a new social system, a different language, culture and customs. Migrants are deprived of key elements that provide them with a sense of identity, such as culture and language (Rai 2022:65). The narratives of migrants are primarily reflected in diasporic literature, which addresses themes of alienation, displacement, existential rootlessness, nostalgia and the quest for identity among immigrants (Mayuri & Hakeem 2019:58).

According to Pasura (2008:2), the term diaspora is formulated by the 'history of dispersion, connections with the country of origin and a combined identity'. These three formulations were reinforced by Sheffer (2003), who analysed the challenges faced by diasporans needing to feel at home in their destination country while maintaining close ties to their countries of origin to promote their culture and interests. Sheffer (2003:4) notes that, in this context, migrants continue to struggle to maintain their identity in foreign lands. They resist the urge to settle permanently and integrate into the host country while simultaneously preserving their home identity. For Sheffer (2003:5), migrants face the challenge of double loyalty, which results in a complex identity as they endeavour to balance their allegiance and contributions to both their home country and their new country of destination.

Migrants are often stereotyped and viewed through a negative lens rather than being recognised as agents of development in their home or host countries (Oucho & Williams 2018:2). This situation results in individuals suffering from a double 'un-identity', as migrants lose their

identity through migration and struggle to adopt a new identity in unfamiliar lands. Reflecting on the identity crisis faced by Zimbabwean youth in the diaspora, Sande (2020:57) argues that young migrants experience a series of socio-psychological challenges that not only confuse them but also compel them to grapple with establishing their identity in a multiracial environment. Machaka (2023:389) highlights the lack of resources and uncertain legal status as significant challenges faced by adult migrants in their countries of destination. These challenges support the assertion by Togarasei (2020:13) that in every society, migrants, religious minority groups, and refugees are ostracised, persecuted, and disregarded in the transnational world. Basch, Schiller and Blanc-Szanton (1994:7) define transnationalism as the processes through which immigrants forge and maintain multistranded social relations that connect their societies of origin and settlement. While most research (Cohen 1997; Pasura 2014:27) highlights identity crises in diasporic communities, it lacks an analysis of religious institutions as mediators of these conflicts. This research addresses an existing academic gap by examining churches as dynamic cultural negotiators rather than mere guardians of static traditions.

The challenges faced by migrants do not only culminate in their quest to navigate new identities in the host country and maintain their culture within the same environment, or in their desire for inclusion; they also impact those who carry their faith to new lands. The relationship between migration and faith is well presented by Mpofo, who maintains that 'when the people move, the church also moves' (Mpofo 2015:iv). Mpofo used the phrase 'when the people move, the church also moves' to emphasise the notion that:

The church is not merely a temple constructed within local communities. Instead, it represents a lived religious experience embodied by individuals who are unified through a family or community known as the church. As people relocate, they do not abandon their religious experiences (faith and beliefs); instead, they carry them along and express their migration experiences in the light of these personal religious convictions, drawing upon them for their perilous journeys and as survival strategies within host communities (Mpofo 2015:iv).

The moment the migrants join the host churches to express their faith, these communities of faith foster their identity in dialogue with evolving social and cultural contexts (Brouwer 2008). For Mujinga (2025:1), 'the coming together of the former missionaries and the former converts worshipping in the same church calls for a redefinition of the church as a hybrid community'. This hybrid community is characterised by hybrid faith and hybrid culture. For Allen (2024:7), cultural hybridity reflects the complexities of belonging and identity that individuals and communities experience as they navigate multiple cultural frontiers. Researching the role of literature in cultural hybridity, Allen suggests that authors utilise literature to analyse cultural hybridity, focusing on how characters negotiate their identities, experience cultural conflict, and seek to belong in a globalised world (Allen 2024:7).

This identity dilemma results in part from works from the colonial era (such as Hegel's Lectures on the Philosophy of History) that methodically portrayed Africans as ahistorical peoples, a cliché relevant to Zimbabwean churches today. For instance, the concept of FIFMI's *mushandirapamwe* can resemble what Mudimbe (1988:19) viewed as 'primitive' rather than holy, thus mirroring colonial denigrations of African spirituality. Fundamentally, deeply ingrained in Pentecostal conviction and Shona cultural ideas of community endeavour, FIFMI's *mushandirapamwe* is a potent, theologically motivated practice of communal spiritual battle and ardent supplication. Key reasons it becomes a source of misunderstanding or racialised critique (primitive, noise nuisance) in diaspora settings such as the UK, as indicated in the opening assertion, are its sensory intensity, nighttime nature, and distinct cultural representations. By emphasising community force, loud faith and concrete breakthrough, it stands as a unique form of holiness and interaction with the divine. Such issues resonate with Oladipupo and Tomoloju (2023:1), who contend that these dehumanising discourses compel diasporic churches to demonstrate their cultural legitimacy while negotiating inclusion, a conflict evident in all three case studies.

The historical, sociological and geographical foundations of the churches are studied

Emerging directly from the significant migration triggered by Zimbabwe's sociopolitical crisis under Robert Mugabe's regime (2000–2010), Zimbabwean churches in the UK began to form. The UK became a primary destination because of colonial-era connections and English fluency, while hyperinflation, reaching an astonishing 89.7 sextillion per cent in 2008, violent land reforms and state-sponsored oppression (e.g., Operation Murambatsvina in 2005) displaced over 500 000 Zimbabweans. Early gatherings naturally evolved between 2002 and 2005 as lay-led initiatives within migrant communities: the AFMIMUK established its Coventry branch through Pentecostal networks; the ZCC began as a Birmingham prayer group for Shona-speaking Catholics; and Forward in Faith Ministries International (FIFMI) expanded to Manchester through missionary efforts from Zimbabwe. Especially regarding the ZCC, it is necessary to make a significant distinction. Within the context of the worldwide Catholic Church, it functions as a separate but distinct community of migrants. It acts with the approval of and in communion with the local British diocese, providing a culturally specific expression of Catholic liturgy for the faithful who speak Shona, while at the same time continuing to be a vital member of the global Catholic communion. Due to the multifaceted nature of this perspective, its navigation of identity and inclusion is extremely challenging and deserves more investigation.

Given the significant data restrictions, verifying the assertions concerning Zimbabwean churches in the UK requires careful

consideration. According to Pasura (2014:27), there are challenges in quantifying Zimbabwean diaspora groups in the UK because of the irregular status and migration patterns within this population. Although these churches are visible, accurate counts and specific attendance data are somewhat difficult to confirm authoritatively and typically depend on estimates, self-reports or localised research. The Zimbabwe Catholic Community is rooted in Catholicism, whereas AFMIMUK and FIFMI are rooted in Pentecostalism. These communities are theologically rooted in diverse spiritual traditions from throughout the world. Their practice is distinguished from that of their British counterparts within the same denominations by the fact that it is characterised by cultural manifestations, liturgical traditions and spiritual emphases that are distinctly Zimbabwean. For example, the ZCC combines Shona language, music and communal ideals into its liturgy, while at the same time sharing essential Catholic theology with the worldwide Church. Pungwe, which refers to all-night prayer vigils, and *mushandirapamwe*, which refers to community work and prayer, are two practices that are firmly ingrained in the religious and cultural settings of Zimbabwe. Both AFMIMUK and FIFMI, which are included in the larger Pentecostal traditions, place an emphasis on these activities. In accordance with the observations made by Asamoah-Gyadu (2013:92), churches that are part of the African diaspora frequently continue to uphold the distinctive spiritual ethos and practices of their mother churches and produce a singular combination of universal theology and specific cultural expression.

Findings and discussions – Challenges and mitigating approaches

Inclusivity-bridging generation and cultural divide

Case Study 1 Zimbabwean Catholic Community

The foremost finding is that Zimbabwean churches in the UK focus on inclusivity, attempting to bridge generational and cultural divides. For instance, the ZCC in Birmingham serves as an example. Founded in 2005, the Birmingham-based ZCC originally catered exclusively to Shona-speaking (Zimbabwean primary language) migrants, with Masses conducted in their native language. First-generation members found comfort in cultural familiarity through this approach; however, younger Zimbabweans raised in the UK felt alienated because they did not speak Shona and wished to participate in British Catholic practices (Moyo 2019). The church opted to revise its approach after youth attendance numbers fell by 40% by 2018, argued Moyo (2019:305).

The ZCC employed adaptive strategies to address its challenges. In taking this approach, ZCC commenced bilingual services in 2020, alternating between Shona and English. The Zimbabwe Catholic Community merged Zimbabwean hymns, including *Jesu Wangu Muponesi* (My Saviour Jesus), with British hymns such as *Guide Me, O Thou Great Redeemer* to create a cross-generational hybrid liturgy. This adjustment led to a surge in youth participation the following year, as

reported by ZCC in 2021. Zimbabwe Catholic Community formed a partnership with the historic Catholic St Chad's Cathedral in Birmingham to host an annual multicultural Easter vigil event jointly. The gathering of united members from Polish, Irish and Nigerian Catholic communities to initiate interethnic dialogue challenges the notion of isolation.

The multicultural Easter vigil of ZCC best illustrates racial boundary-crossing through hybrid liturgy. Shona prayers were accompanied by British hymns, thus creating a 'third space' where Nigerian drumming, Polish icon adoration, and Zimbabwean *kutsinhira* [call-response] singing coexisted. This allowed ethnic diversity to co-own holy space, thereby upsetting the UK Catholic standard of monocultural parishes (Vertovec 2007:1033). According to survey responses, 68% of non-Zimbabwean guests said the event 'made Catholicism feel less white-dominated' (Moyo 2019:303).

The bilingual approach of ZCC demonstrates how churches serving diasporic communities can balance the preservation of cultural heritage with the inclusion of diverse members. According to Levitt (2001:6), transnational religious practices exhibit 'simultaneity' when migrants simultaneously preserve connections to their original country while participating in the societies they have moved to. The ZCC maintained its Zimbabwean identity while serving as a cultural link between societies by adopting English liturgy. The emergence of new identities through cultural blending reflects Bhabha's (1994) concept of hybridity as a way of building a new space with a new identity.

This multilingual liturgy embodies Bhabha's third space, a hybrid world in which Shona and English coexist free from hierarchy. The ZCC has created an unfixed interpretative zone where cultural meanings are continually renegotiated by refusing to separate the languages; that is, Shona for elders and English for the young. Such spaces challenge the narrative of cultural purity, argues Bhabha (1994:38). Young people affirm the effectiveness of this third space in overcoming generational estrangement while maintaining international links (Samushonga & Sande 2020:10). The hybrid approach helped the ZCC to maintain and redefine its identity as Zimbabwean in diaspora.

Cultural negotiation: Redefining traditions in a new context

Case Study 2 Apostolic Faith Mission International Ministries United Kingdom

Rooted in Zimbabwe's classical Pentecostal movement, AFMIMUK faced significant sociopolitical challenges while establishing itself in the UK. The historical trajectory, which included traditional *pungwe* vigils (all-night prayers) characterised by loud music, clapping and testimonies, clashed with British urban noise regulations and residential aspirations, leading to threats of eviction in several buildings. Meanwhile, AFMIMUK's initial male-dominated leadership style, reflecting its patriarchal background from Zimbabwe, resulted in subtle conflicts with UK gender standards

(Sande 2024:468). This situation contributed to a generational and gendered dilemma, as younger British Zimbabwean women increasingly sought spiritual groups that aligned with their experiences of gender equality (Sande 2024:472; Sande & Manyanga 2020:67).

In responding to their religio-cultural crisis, the AFMIMUK in diasporic settings, particularly in the UK, encounters the significant challenge of adapting while maintaining its Pentecostal identity. According to historical research, the origins of the AFMIMUK involve migrations and religious exchanges, necessitating a move away from merely reproducing national customs (Sande 2019:1). This diaspora context primarily affects younger individuals who are caught between their heritage and British culture, leading to complex identity struggles that may result in crises of belonging and participation in religious activities (Sande & Manyanga 2020:70). Consequently, effective ministry requires the adoption of Diaspora Practical Theology, which involves actively considering how culture, ethnicity and national identity influence theological understanding and church expression within the UK context (Samushonga & Sande 2020:3).

Proactive approaches are essential. Addressing the issue of young identities requires establishing committed and secure learning environments, implementing mentoring initiatives, and incorporating both legacy and host cultural aspects into ministry (Sande & Manyanga 2020:70). Furthermore, the church should closely engage with the types of African Pentecostal masculinity prevalent in its community. In this new context, the health of families and churches relies on a reconstruction towards better, Christ-centred expressions characterised by service, emotional maturity and the fostering of faith (Sande 2024:468).

Another component of mission planning is rethinking. A contextualised Spirit-led missions theology shifts the emphasis from primarily 'sending back home' to discerning the Spirit's guidance for successful cross-cultural involvement within the diverse UK community, utilising unique transnational linkages for global influence (Sande & Nyadzo 2022:19):

All adaptive initiatives must fundamentally be based on intentional intergenerational ministry and knowledge transfer, thereby preserving essential spiritual values while allowing for contextual expression, underlined by ongoing Spirit-led discernment to faithfully and effectively navigate change. (p. 18)

Preservation of religious traditions: Innovation and transnational ties

Case Study 3 Forward in Faith Ministries International in Manchester

The Zimbabwean Apostolic Church, Forward in Faith Ministries International (FIFMI), encountered difficulties in conducting *mushandirapamwe* (communal labour) outdoors within Manchester's urban setting.

To address their challenges during the coronavirus disease 2019 pandemic, FIFMI utilised Zoom to livestream

mushandirapamwe practices from members' gardens and connect UK churchgoers with their relatives in Zimbabwe. Through digital screens, participants carried virtual representations of tools such as hoes and watering cans to redefine collective work practices in today's digital society (Gumbo 2022:90). Additionally, Rev. Tinashe Gumbo shifted cultural reverence teachings into spiritual legacy lessons, which UK-born youth connected with through their interest in genealogy. Digital *mushandirapamwe*, created by FIFMI, combines Shona communalism with British techno-culture. From genuine agricultural instruments to Zoom emojis of hoes, the ritual's evolution shows Bhabha's cultural mixing. Consistent with British eco-activism, UK young people viewed community gardening as a form of environmental stewardship, upholding the principles of Shona *nhimbe* (collective labour).

Digital innovations introduced by FIFMI demonstrate the capability of digital platforms to sustain transnational religious networks. The research of Oosterbaan (2017:211) demonstrates that digital diasporas enable migrants to maintain a sense of sacred proximity to their homeland's worship. Theologians adapt religious teachings to reflect Asamoah-Gyadu's (2013:8) concept of African Christianity in diaspora, illustrating how doctrines evolve to meet the needs of diasporic communities.

Negotiating value tensions: Continuity and rapture

Deeper fault lines between Zimbabwean community ideals and British individualistic standards are illustrated by the adaptive techniques of ZCC, AFMIMUK and FIFMI, which compel members to engage in continuous negotiation. Young people are still negotiating issues of dress and culture to bridge the generational gap. Furthermore, they are utilising digital adaptations as leverage to navigate cultural dynamics and the British environment. As digital natives, their activities resonate with the concept of permitting sacred proximity, as echoed by Oosterbaan (2017:211). The use and perception of cultural tools as eco-justice emojis demonstrate Bhabha's cultural translation. Third spaces in the diaspora primarily serve to overcome the conflict between urban displacement and spiritual belonging through this digitally mediated environment.

Synthesis: Adaptive resilience in diasporic churches

The analysis of ZCC, AFMIMUK and FIFMI case studies identifies three crucial themes.

Hybridity as a survival strategy

Zimbabwean traditions have merged with British cultural norms across all three churches. The bilingual services of ZCC, alongside AFMIMUK's renewed vigils and FIFMI's digital practices, serve as prime examples of Bhabha's (1994) concept of the third space, where cultural synthesis leads to the creation of new identities.

Youth agency and intergenerational dialogue

The need for modernisation among youth has driven innovations, including FIFMI's transition to digital channels and AFMIMUK's commitment to including more women. According to Levitt (2001:5), second-generation migrants frequently serve as mediators who bridge their heritage cultures with their new societies.

Advocacy and visibility

The ZCC's interfaith partnerships and AFMIMUK's council negotiations with local authorities and non-Zimbabweans have contributed to enhanced societal legitimacy for these churches. This resonates with Bhabha's (1994) notion of newness as an everyday theology of resilience. These strategies reflect patterns seen in Pasura's (2014) examination of Zimbabwean diasporic activism. Hybridity enables youth agency (e.g., FIFMI's digital worship), while advocacy efforts legitimise hybrid practices, creating a cyclical process of adaptation.

Opportunities

The UK-based Zimbabwean churches such as ZCC, AFMIMUK and FIFMI demonstrate how diasporic religious organisations overcome marginalisation by adapting resiliently. Through their reinvention of traditions and adoption of digital platforms alongside hybrid cultural practices, they sustain their cultural heritage and contribute to the UK's diverse social tapestry. Employing hybridity, ZCC, AFMIMUK and FIFMI each assert their own theological and cultural territory. They transform adaptation into assertion, claiming legitimacy not as peripheral migrant communities but rather as unique contributions to the religious plurality of the UK by including Shona hymns (ZCC). This enables them to transition from unseen diasporas to acknowledged participants in Vertovec's (2007:1043) model of super-diversity. Future studies should examine how these adaptations affect the identity of Zimbabwean youth over time and the cohesion between different generations.

Recommendations for theory and practice

The following suggestions aim to enhance the resilience and societal impact of diasporic faith communities, drawing on adaptive strategies from ZCC, AFMIMUK and FIFMI. The recommendations will be categorised into different sections, for both the church and for future research.

Enhancement of hybrid worship

The church leaders need to consider fostering liturgical hybridity and intergenerational dialogue. This is achieved through hybrid worship practices that create bilingual or multilingual, structured liturgical services that blend cultural traditions, such as Shona hymns, with local elements such as English liturgy. Moreover, clergy training for hybrid worship design should draw inspiration from ZCC's effective increase in youth engagement. Once the hybridisation of the church

has been enhanced, it also helps to retain the youth. This will be assisted by youth leadership platforms that collaborate with church leadership to develop worship activities tailored to the needs of young members. This recommendation is coming in the context that youth contributions form the basis for FIFMI's digital *mushandirapamwe* adaptation, which led to its success in the diaspora.

Moreover, intergenerational forums that establish regular exchange meetings where elders share traditional cultural stories (such as oral histories of Zimbabwean Christianity) and the youth propose contemporary methods of engagement (such as social media outreach) should be engaged. These forums facilitate the hybridisation of worship among the three churches under study (Levitt 2002). These platforms will be discussed alongside longitudinal youth studies that help to investigate how second-generation Zimbabweans construct their identities throughout their lives, while examining the impact of digital worship, such as FIFMI's Zoom worship, on their connection with their communities.

Most Zimbabweans struggle with policy issues that either render them free migrants or free church members, as discussed earlier. It is also recommended that legal pathways for recognition be enhanced by simplifying the process for migrant churches to obtain charitable status through less bureaucratic procedures. This will enable them to access public resources and grants while serving as cultural ambassadors.

Recommendations on religio-cultural life

The intersection of religion and culture remains at the centre of the complexities of migrants. The three churches are encouraged to establish noise mitigation grants that will be allocated to soundproof religious venues, such as churches like the AFMIMUK, that require their loud worship. By adopting this strategy, local communities can avoid conflicts while preserving dynamic cultural practices, such as *pungwe* vigils. Given that churches must participate in multicultural events, multicultural event funding will also support interfaith festivals that adhere to the collaborative model of the ZCC's Easter vigil. These events, which focus on diasporic contributions, help combat stereotypes while fostering social unity in cities with high levels of diversity. In addition, the establishment of Interfaith networks helps diasporic churches create platforms to collaborate with local institutions, following the example set by the ZCC's partnership with St. Chad's Cathedral. Collaborating on community initiatives, such as food banks and cultural workshops, enhances visibility and dispels myths about insularity.

The introduction of cultural sensitivity training offers educational sessions for UK residents to learn about diasporic customs, such as *pungwe* vigils, to reduce social tensions and foster respect between communities. Stakeholders

implementing these measures will assist diasporic churches in developing as centres of cultural preservation and social integration while ensuring their sustainable role as spiritual sanctuaries and connectors between communities. Church partnerships with local councils and engagement in interfaith collaborations illustrate their commitment to fostering social cohesion. According to Vertovec (2007:1049), these communities transform potential disputes, such as noise complaints, into opportunities for cross-cultural interaction that challenge migrant insularity stereotypes and reinforce the UK's super-diverse framework.

Conclusion

The research demonstrates that Zimbabwean diasporic churches in the UK exhibit resilience and ingenuity as they navigate the challenges of hybrid identity while preserving their culture. The study reveals that ZCC, AFMIMUK and FIFMI employ adaptive strategies, including bilingual liturgies, gender-inclusive leadership and digital ritual practices, perceiving these as proactive redefinitions of faith and community rather than mere assimilation efforts. Congregants in these churches exemplify the hybridisation of the church, where traditional elements merge with innovations, enabling members to maintain international connections and establish local identities.

The research also reveals that youth agencies are essential in driving transformative change. Second-generation migrants, who navigate between their cultural traditions and British cultural standards, compel churches to implement inclusive actions such as FIFMI's digital *mushandirapamwe*. The younger generations serve as cultural intermediaries, which is validated through these institutional adaptations, which uphold the importance of diasporic organisations within multicultural societies. Intergenerational dialogue is crucial, as exemplified by ZCC's hybrid hymns, which preserve Shona traditions while embracing inclusivity in the English language.

The research demonstrates how hybridity serves as a vital survival strategy for communities living in diaspora. It urges policymakers and religious leaders to recognise the dual role of such churches. Although their broader social impact necessitates empirical research beyond this desktop analysis, our study suggests that these churches may function as archives of cultural legacy and potential venues for cross-group interactions. Future research should investigate how these changes impact youth identity and community dynamics, particularly as digital platforms facilitate the expansion of transnational religious practices. Ultimately, these churches express their uniqueness by integrating Zimbabwean spirituality into British social systems through language, ceremonial innovation or gender-inclusive leadership. Rather than assimilating, they establish distinct niches as organisations redefining sacred space (e.g., FIFMI's digital shrines) and promoting cross-cultural legitimacy. This illustrates how diasporic religious sects intentionally establish themselves in host countries. These findings emphasise to church leaders the

importance of engaging different generations through practices such as involving young people in liturgy design. Government officials must recognise diasporic churches as essential partners in fostering social unity through financial support for interfaith initiatives.

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CRedit authorship contribution

Nomatter Sande: Conceptualisation, Investigation, Writing – Original Draft, Formal Analysis. Martin Mujinga: Methodology, Data Curation, Writing – Review & Editing. All authors reviewed the article, contributed to the discussion of results, approved the final version for submission and publication, and take responsibility for the integrity of its findings.

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