

# Religion, Race and Migrants' Integration in Italy: The Case of Ghanaian Migrant Churches in the Province of Vicenza, Veneto

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## Abstract

The number of Ghanaian immigrants' Catholic and Pentecostal/Charismatic churches has kept growing since this group began to settle in Italy from the late 1970s. This paper examines that role that these religious congregations play to facilitate the migrants' integration in the province of Vicenza. The paper shows that while the churches offer opportunities for the migrants to find their place in Italian society by providing them a place to be at home, a sense of belonging, identity and resources, the type of integration that the migrants foment through the churches appears to be rather segmented along racial and ethnic lines. Therefore, the churches' integration role would be enhanced if they open up their ethnic and racial borders and provide channels for Ghanaian and Italian populations to interact.

*Key words:* Ghanaian Migrants, Italy, Churches, Integration.

## Resumen

El número de iglesias carismáticas católicas y pentecostales de los inmigrantes ghaneses ha ido en aumento desde que este grupo comenzó a establecerse en Italia a finales de los setenta. Este artículo examina el papel que desempeñan estas congregaciones religiosas a la hora de facilitar la integración de los inmigrantes en la provincia de Vicenza. El estudio revela que mientras las iglesias ofrecen oportunidades para que los inmigrantes encuentren su lugar en la sociedad italiana, proporcionándoles un lugar para sentirse en casa, un sentido de pertenencia, identidad y recursos, el tipo de integración que los inmigrantes fomentan a través de las iglesias parece encontrarse más bien segmentada por motivos raciales y étnicos. Por lo tanto, el papel integrador de las iglesias se vería fortalecido si reconciliaran sus diferencias étnicas y raciales y ofrecieran cauces para que la población de Ghana e Italia interactuara.

*Palabras clave:* Migrantes Ghaneses, Italia, Iglesias, Integración.

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## Introduction

The role of religion in the integration of Sub-Saharan African migrants in Western Europe needs greater attention than has so far been dealt with in Western European migration literature. Among majority of these migrants, Christianity or Islam is the main reference point for constructing communities, social space, identity and belonging.<sup>2</sup>

Sub-Saharan African migrants' Churches in Western Europe are not built upon any doctrinal or ideological motivation, but they respond to the migrants' quest for identity, a place to be at home and spiritual satisfaction.<sup>3</sup> One most important issue in studying these churches, however, is to understand the extent to which they enable the migrants to integrate in the host societies.

Studying Ghanaian migrant churches in the Netherlands, Van Dijk argued that they foster the formation of the concept of 'strangerhood' among the migrants in the host societies.<sup>4</sup> This same condition was observed by Ugba during his study of Nigerian Pentecostal churches in Ireland. He observed that through membership in these churches the migrants remain 'part' but 'apart' from the Irish society.<sup>5</sup>

But why do the black communities in predominantly white societies prefer to foment 'strangerhood' or distinct communities rather than binding social and religious structures that open borders for the local population? The explanation may lie in the context of the host society; historical experiences (colonialism and racism); and the migrants' desire to keep their identity; maintain bonds with African culture, cosmology, spiritual and medical practices.

Since Ghanaian migrants began to settle in Italy, the number of their churches, being Pentecostal/Charismatic or Catholic ethnic congregations, has kept growing with high levels of participation.<sup>6</sup> Do these churches represent a segregationist attitude in response to racial discrimination or they are a path to achieve social integration? The purpose of this paper therefore is to examine the role that these church play for the construction of identity, belonging and integration among the Ghanaian migrants in Italy within a context of racial diversity.

## 1. Theoretical Framework

Hirschman has argued that religion provides migrants 'refuge, respectability, and resource' during their settlement and integration process.<sup>7</sup> According to this author migrants seek 'refuge' from religion against the trauma of immigration, as it provides them with physical or psychological safety and comfort through membership and participation in rituals and religious activities. He further stated that through parallel religious social institutions (such as schools) migrants "find avenues for social advancement, leadership, community service, and respect than may have been possible in the broader community".<sup>8</sup> And, finally, through membership solidarity and religious groups' social services that cater for the more practical and material needs of the migrants, such as accommodation, information, solidarity, job opportunities and language courses, religion provides resources to migrants to facilitate their integration.<sup>9</sup>

However, the type of integration that migrants achieve in the host country through membership in a religious congregation could take different forms. Migrants' religion and churches

<sup>2</sup> Ugba, Abel (2008): "A Part of and Apart from Society? Pentecostal Africans in the 'New Ireland'", *Translocations*, 4, 1, pp. 86-101; Kaag, Mayke (2008): "Mouride Transnational Livelihoods at the Margins of a European Society: The Case of Residence Prealpino, Brescia, Italy", *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 34, 2, pp. 271-285; Van Dijk, A. Rijk, (1997): "From Camp to Encompassment: Discourses of Transsubjectivity in the Ghanaian Pentecostal Diaspora", *Journal Of Religion in Africa*, XXVII, 2, pp. 135-159.

<sup>3</sup> Adogame, Afe (2003): "Betwixt Identity and Security: African New Religious Movement and the Politics of Religious Networking in Europe", *Nova Religio* 7, 2, pp. 24-41.

<sup>4</sup> Van Dijk, A. Rijk, *op. cit.*, p. 135.

<sup>5</sup> Ugba, Abel, *op. cit.*, p. 97.

<sup>6</sup> Pace, Enzo and Buttici, Annalisa (2010): *Le religioni pentecostali*, Carocci, Roma, p. 115.

<sup>7</sup> Hirschman, Charles (2004): "The Role of Religion in the Origins and Adaptation of Immigrant Groups in the United States", *International Migration Review*, 38, 3, p. 1228.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1229.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1229.

could serve as medium for groups to build a distinct community, reproduce their ethnic identities and resist integration into the local community.<sup>10</sup> During her study of Korean churches in the United States, Chong argued that when a group feels marginalised because of its ethnic and racial status the ethnic church can play important role for the groups' search for identity and belonging.<sup>11</sup> In line with this, Warner has observed that race is a conditioning factor during migrants' negotiation of their religious identity.<sup>12</sup> He therefore argued that while the concept of 'segmented assimilation' has been employed in ethnic studies to analyse the integration of migrants along race and class-conditioned identities,<sup>13</sup> it is necessary to also examine the role religion plays in the formation of 'segmented assimilation'.<sup>14</sup>

When black migrants settle in a predominantly white society, what role does religion play to facilitate their integration? While one may expect that a black Catholic who moves to a predominantly white Catholic society would easily integrate due to common faith, studies have shown the difficulties that such integration entails. In his study of interracial communities in the US, Schwadel observed that religious congregations may provide few opportunities for social interaction along racial lines.<sup>15</sup>

It is therefore important to understand if the Ghanaian migrant churches and congregations in Italy are a reaction to racial discrimination or they rather open a path for the migrants to achieve social integration. Through the study of Ghanaian churches we will try to answer how migrants' religious congregations enhance or not the integration of black minority groups within a predominantly white Italian society. To achieve this, I will analyse the structural composition and membership of these churches.

## 2. Methodology

The paper is based on participant observation, in-depth qualitative interviews and focused group discussions among church leaders, founders and priests in Ghanaian Christian communities in the province of Vicenza in Italy between 2004 and 2007 and from May to June 2010. In addition to interviews, I also participated in church meetings and rituals such as baptisms, blessings, liturgical celebrations, funerals and religious feasts. The churches I visited include the *Immigrants Catholic Church of SS. Trinità di Angarano parish in Bassano*; the *African Catholic Community under San Pietro parish in Schio* and the *Immigrant Church of Arzignano under the Madonnetta di Arzignano parish located at Cusco*. I also visited the *Unity Pentecostal Church and Followers of Christ International Church (FOCIC)* which are both located at the outskirts of Schio. During several visits to these churches, I participated in religious activities, had formal and informal discussions with church members, youth groups and leaders. Additionally, I visited the homes of several church members, and individual interviews were conducted during these visits.

### *Migration from Ghana to Italy*

Migration from Ghana to Italy began in the 1970s, however, until the late 1980s this movement remained on a lower scale. From the mid-1980s increasing numbers of Ghanaians settled in Italy's southern regions of Campania, Puglia and Sicily. Naples and Palermo were the main places they concentrated. They were initially employed as seasonal farm workers, domestic workers, construction workers and hawkers. Following succes-

<sup>10</sup> Yang Fenggang and Ebaugh H. Rose (2001): "Transformations in New Immigrant Religions and Their Global Implications", *American Sociological Review*, 66, 2, pp. 269-288; Yang Fenggang, (1999): *Chinese Christians in America: Conversion, Assimilation and Adhesive Identities*, Pennsylvania State University Press, P-A.

<sup>11</sup> Chong, H. Kelly (1998): "What It Means To Be Christian: The Role Of Religion In The Construction Of Ethnic Identity And Boundary Among Second-Generation Korean Americans", *Sociology of Religion*, 59, 3, pp. 259-286.

<sup>12</sup> Warner, R. Stephen (2000): "Religion and New (Post-1965) Immigrants: Some Principles Drawn from Field Research", *American Studies*, 41, 2/3, p. 275.

<sup>13</sup> Portes, Alejandro and Zhou, Min (1993): "The New Second Generation: Segmented Assimilation and Its Variants", *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 530, pp. 74-96.

<sup>14</sup> Warner, R. Stephen, *op. cit.*, p. 276.

<sup>15</sup> Schwadel, Philip (2009): "Neighbors in the Pews: Social Status Diversity in Religious Congregations", *Interdisciplinary Journal of Research on Religion*, 5, article 2, p. 8.

sive regularisations, they moved to Italy's northern regions to work in industries, mainly as unskilled labourers.<sup>16</sup>

Majority of the early settlers entered Italy through the Mediterranean Sea from the Libyan capital Tripoli and the coastal city Benghazi.<sup>17</sup> Others entered Italy as tourists and stayed on. Ghanaian illegal migrants and asylum seekers whose applications were rejected in northern European countries, such as UK, the Netherlands and Germany also moved to Italy from the 1980s. From the mid-1990s immigration of married women and children from Ghana for family reasons also gathered greater momentum.

This migration movement was motivated principally by deteriorating socio-economic and political conditions that Ghana began to experience from the 1960s; the mass expulsion of Ghanaian migrants from Nigeria in 1983 and 1985; the armed conflict in West Africa; chain migration, as well as the restrictive immigration policies of the northern European states (Britain, Netherlands, Germany and Belgium) that used to be the main destination of Ghanaian migrants coming to Europe.

### *Volume, Distribution and Demographic Characteristics*

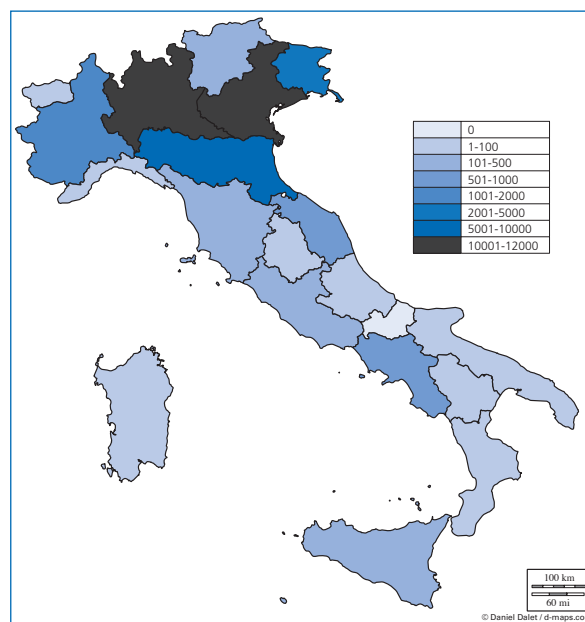
At the end of 2009 there were 44,353 Ghanaian migrants officially resident in Italy, making it the third largest Sub-Saharan migrant community in the country. This shows that the Ghanaian population in this country multiplied by four within two decades, because in 1990 there were only 11,000 Ghanaians in Italy.<sup>18</sup> As illustrated in Map 1, more than 90 percent of Ghanaian migrants with legal residence permits live in northern Italy, mainly in the regions of Lombardy (12,335), Veneto (12,150), Emilia Romagna (10,184) and Friuli-Venezia Giulia (4,997). They are concentrated in the industrial provinces of Brescia (5,750), Vicenza (5,498), Modena (5,259), and Reggio Emilia (2,736). Less than 10 percent live in central and southern Italy.<sup>19</sup> However, it is important to underscore the fact that majority of those without legal residence permit settle in southern Italy.

<sup>16</sup> Andall, Jacqueline (2007): "Industrial Districts and Migrant Labour in Italy", *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 42, 2, p. 292.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Van Moppes, D. (2006): *The African Migration Movement: Routes to Europe*, Migration and Development Series, Working Paper, 5, Radboud University, Nijmegen.

**Map 1**

Regional Distribution of Ghanaian Migrants in Italy



Source: Author (based on 2010 ISTAT data of migrant population).

### *Family Settlement, Children and Working Age Population*

The most important demographic characteristics of Ghanaian migrants in Italy include family settlement (43 percent are women), high percentage of children under eighteen (31 percent) and high working-age population (69 percent) as shown in table 1.

The implication is that the migrants will have tended to settle permanently in Italian soil. High under-aged and working populations provide an important relieve for Italy's ageing population.

<sup>18</sup> Caritas (1991): *Dossier Statistico Immigrazione 1990*, Anterem, Roma.

<sup>19</sup> Istituto nazionale di statistica (ISTAT) (2010): *Demografia in Cifre* ([www.demo.istat.it](http://www.demo.istat.it)).

Table 1

Age group of Ghanaian migrants in Italy on 1<sup>st</sup> January 2009

Age Group	0-17	18-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	45-49	50-54	55-59	60-64	65+	Total
Num	14,116	5,236	3,546	5,386	6,301	6,294	3,156	1,412	393	118	88	46,046
%	30.66	11.37	7.70	11.70	13.68	13.67	6.85	3.07	0.85	0.26	0.19	100.00

Source: Author (elaborated from ISTAT data of migrants' population structure).

Consequently, significant and inclusive integration policies that respect ethnic, cultural, religious and racial diversity, and provide equal opportunities, particularly for migrants' children, are required to foster brighter prospects for social cohesion in Italian society in the near future.

#### *Identity Negotiation, Integration and Exclusion*

While Italy has become an important destination for Sub-Saharan Africans since the late 1970s, recent studies have shown that this group struggles to incorporate into Italian society due to the level of exclusion and discrimination that they encounter.<sup>20</sup> The origin of this exclusion has been traced to colonial heritage and Italy's class structure,<sup>21</sup> the bad image associated with African migration to Europe, seen as invasion,<sup>22</sup> and, more importantly, the use of immigration by both right-wing and left-wing political parties in Italy as symbolic resource to create 'new regional identities'.<sup>23</sup> The presence of black

African migrants and other 'unwanted' immigrant populations has been employed by Italian political parties, most notably the Northern League, to create a territorial identity (*la Padania*) through the production of an 'imaginary enemy', impersonated in the immigrants.<sup>24</sup>

Society's reaction to political manipulations has been to shrink its borders against the immigrants seen as enemies, even when they have been born and bred in Italian soil. Consequently, black Africans in Italy, whose skin colour symbolically enacts the presence of the imaginary enemy suffer various degrees of rejection in all ambits of society, including access to housing,<sup>25</sup> skilled employment,<sup>26</sup> and Italian citizenship.<sup>27</sup> Additionally increasing numbers of African women are pushed into sex work or in-service domestic work, irrespective of their educational attainment, generating what Andall has described as new 'service-caste'.<sup>28</sup> Migrants' exclusion in Italy is legally backed by what Calavita describe as "amorphous regulations, administrative discretion, and 'street level bureaucracies'".<sup>29</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Kaag, Mayke; *op. cit.*, pp. 271-285; Calavita, Kitty (2005): *Immigrants at the Margins: Law, Race and Exclusion in Southern Europe*, Cambridge University Press, New York; Cole, Jeffrey (1997): *New Racism in Europe: A Sicilian Ethnography*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, United Kingdom.

<sup>21</sup> Carter, D. Martin. (1997): *States of Grace: Senegalese in Italy and the New European Immigration*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis.

<sup>22</sup> De Haas, Hein., (2007): *The Myth of invasion: Irregular migration from West Africa to the Maghreb and the European Union*, International Migration Institute, James Martin 21st Century School, University of Oxford, Oxford

<sup>23</sup> Saitta, Pietro (2011): "Between Kafka and *carnevale*: an introduction to the immigrant condition in Italy", *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, 16, 3, pp. 317-320.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 317.

<sup>25</sup> Kaag, Mayke; *op. cit.*, pp. 271-285.

<sup>26</sup> Reyneri, Emilio (2004): "Immigrants in a segmented and often undeclared labour market", *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, 9, 1, pp. 71-93; Cole, Jeffrey (1997): *New Racism in Europe: A Sicilian Ethnography*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, United Kingdom, p. 100.

<sup>27</sup> Andall, Jacqueline (2002): "Second Generation Attitude?: African-Italians in Milan", *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 28, 3, p. 400.

<sup>28</sup> Andall, Jacqueline (2000): *Gender, Migration and Domestic Service: The Politics of Black Women in Italy*, Ashgate, Aldershot.

<sup>29</sup> Calavita, Kitty, *op. cit.*, p. 100.

Ghanaian migrants who constitute one of the major black communities in Italy live at the margins of society. According to a sample survey in the Lombardy region, only 3.5% of Ghanaian males and 10.6% females associate more with Italians than with their fellow nationals. Their social space revolves around family, work and church.<sup>30</sup> This is one of the main reasons why the Ghanaian migrants' churches have developed in Italy to serve as a point of reference for identity formation.

### 3. Christianity in Ghana and the Ghanaian Diaspora

Ghana is a predominantly Christian country. Christianity accounts for over two-thirds (68.8 percent) of the country's population, followed by Islam (15.9 percent) and Traditional religion (8.5 percent). Roman Catholics represent the single largest Christian denomination in Ghana, with 15 percent of the total population. Protestants constitute 18 percent, and numerous Christian churches classified as Charismatic/Pentecostals and other Christians represent 24 percent and 11 percent respectively of the total population of Ghana.<sup>31</sup>

To better understand the origin, growth and activities of these churches among Ghanaian migrants in Europe, it is necessary to go back to their roots in Ghana. This is because, rising Pentecostal/Charismatic Churches have a lot of influence in Ghanaian society today.<sup>32</sup> During the colonial era many Christian sects rose up in Ghana in "response to inadequacies and discrimination in European colonial administrative and religious establishments".<sup>33</sup> They used African culture in their theology and worship. And their main activities included healing, prophesising about impending dangers or misfortunes, interpreting dreams and helping to alleviate social problems.

The first wave of Pentecostal churches began in Ghana in the 1930s. However, it was not until the 1980s that these churches began to spread rapidly in urban centres in Ghana, recruiting

most of their members from the mainstream churches. While they commanded more than half the Christian population in Ghana in 2000, they were only 2 percent of the Ghanaian population prior to the 1980s. Most of them are linked to Charismatic churches in the United States. The most influential and successful ones include Nicholas Duncan-Williams' Christian Action Faith Ministries (CAFM) in Accra; The International Central Gospel Church (ICGC) founded by Mensa Otabil also in Accra; Redemption Hour Faith Ministry; International Bible Worship Centre; Victory Bible Church; Evangelical Church and Living Waters Ministry, all in Accra.<sup>34</sup> They are characterised by speaking in tongues (glossalalia), baptism in the Holy Spirit by immersion and the use of African music and dance in worship as a way of expressing joy.

Religious, political, economic-sociological, psychological and anthropological explanations have been given to explain their proliferation and influence in Ghanaian society. According to Sackey "the insider or church view attributes the formation of the churches to a divine revelation...to win more souls for Christ, to turn people from idolatry and fetishism, to overcome the power of Satan".<sup>35</sup> However, critics or outsider perspectives attribute their growth to the socio-economic situation in Ghana during the 1980s. Their preaching of hope and prosperity, establishment of prayer camps for healing services (for poor people who had no money to go to hospitals) made them more attractive to the ordinary Ghanaian than the older mainstream churches. Gifford has emphasised that the economic-motivated theology of these churches, exemplified in pastor Duncan-Williams' book, *You are Destined to Succeed!* And Mensa Otabil's book, *Four Laws of Productivity: God's Foundation for Living*, made them more attractive and convincing to the educated youth, due to high unemployment rates and poverty in Ghana.

He further observed that while leadership positions in the mainstream churches were a reserve of the educated elite and

<sup>30</sup> Stocchiero, Andrea (2008): *Learning by Doing: Migrant Transnationalism for Local Development in MIDA Italy-Ghana/Senegal Programme*, Working Papers, 48, CeSPI, Roma, p. 10.

<sup>31</sup> Ghana Statistical Service (GSS) (2002): *2000 Population and Housing Census: Summary report of final results*, GSS, Accra.

<sup>32</sup> Gifford, Paul (1998): *African Christianity: Its Public Role*, Hurst and Company, London.

<sup>33</sup> Sackey, M. Brigid (1999): *Proliferation of Churches. Impact on Ghanaian Society*, A Lecture at St. Paul's Catholic Seminary, Accra, p. 2.

<sup>34</sup> Gifford, *op. cit.*, pp. 77-84.

<sup>35</sup> Sackey, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

older generations, the new churches offered such positions to the youth. Consequently, "the Pentecostal churches were seen as the young creating their own space where they can exercise some responsibility".<sup>36</sup> Moreover, by offering leadership and clerical positions to women in the same manner as men, these churches were more responsive to the matrilineal Ghanaian culture. Finally, the organisational structure of these churches is also one of the main factors for their growth. Because local churches cannot pay a full-time pastor, each local church is run by a presiding elder. About thirty of these fall under a district pastor or overseer. And anyone who wanted to begin a church on behalf of the church of Pentecost was allowed to do so and no specific educational qualification is required.

The growth of the Pentecostal/Charismatic churches in Ghana coincided with the beginning of large-scale emigration to Western countries, and they spread among the immigrants for several reasons. According to Van Dijk two main factors account for this. The first is the *sending discourse* which represents the situation whereby prospective migrants turn to prayer camps for spiritual help and protection in their transnational journey. The second is the *receiving discourse*, which relates to the figure of the Pentecostal/Charismatic church leader as *abusia pinyin*, family head, who provides close personal assistance, support and leadership to members.<sup>37</sup> Other explanations include the freedom given to individuals to start churches on behalf of the Pentecost/Charismatic church in Ghana. Therefore, individual migrants were able to start new churches in the immigrant communities and later obtained endorsement and support from a mother church in Ghana. Additionally, due to the need for the Pentecostal/Charismatic churches founded in Ghana to gain a broader international recognition and source of income, some church founders and pastors in Ghana also reached out to the Ghanaian diaspora in Europe and North America to establish new churches.<sup>38</sup>

In the case of Italy, the Ghanaian Catholic migrants became more conscious of their religious, ethnic and national identity and began to press for religious services in their language and culture as a result of the growth of the Ghanaian Pentecostal/

Charismatic churches. Additionally, the difficulty of worshipping in a predominantly white society and culture with little room for cultural diversity was another reason for the establishment of Ghanaian Catholic congregations. We shall discuss these developments in Italy, focusing on the nature and structure of the Ghanaian diasporan churches in the province of Vicenza in Italy.

#### 4. Ghanaian Diasporan Churches in the Vicenza Province

Ghanaian migrant churches began to spread out in this province during the late 1980s. They are of two main types. The first group consists of Pentecostal/Charismatic churches while the second group are Catholic migrant congregations established by the local Catholic Church for migrants.

The Pentecostal/Charismatic churches were founded by the Ghanaian migrants when they first settled in the Vicenza area in the 1980s. The number of these churches in the province is hard to determine. However, the most dominant ones include: the Christ Cornerstone International Church (Vicenza), Resurrection Power and Living Bread (Caldogno, Bassano), Followers of Christ International Church—FOCIC (Schio), Unity Pentecostal (Schio, Brescia and Bassano), New Life Pentecostal (Schio), Church of Pentecost (Malo).

The second group of churches, which are made up of Catholic migrant congregations, were established by the Italian Catholic diocese of Vicenza (which roughly coincides with the territorial boundaries of the Vicenza province) during the 1990s to offer religious services in English to the migrants. These churches were initially entrusted to missionary priests who were mostly Italians and later joined by Ghanaian priests. At the time of this research there were four of such congregations in the diocese. They include the Immigrants Catholic Church of SS. Trinità di Angarano parish in Bassano; the African Catholic Community under San Pietro parish in Schio; the Immigrant Church of Arzignano under the Madonnetta di Arzignano parish located at Cusco and the Immigrant Church of Vicenza.

<sup>36</sup> Gifford, *op. cit.*, pp. 88-89.

<sup>37</sup> Van Dijk, A. Rijk, *op. cit.*, p. 143.

<sup>38</sup> Tonah, Steve (2007): *Ghanaians Abroad and Their Ties Home: Cultural and Religious Dimensions of Transnational Migration*, Centre on

Migration, Citizenship and Development, Working Paper, 25, Bielefeld, p. 16.

### Structure and Composition

In order to understand the place of the Ghanaian migrant churches in Italian society and the extent to which they facilitate integration, we find it necessary to examine how they are composed in terms memberships, leadership, locations, language and culture, dominant social activities and transnationalism.

*Membership:* The Catholic congregations aggregate migrants from different nationalities. A common language (English) is the main denominator for the formation of the groups. Ghanaian migrants constitute the dominant group in all the congregations. However, they worship together with other nationals such as Philippines, Indians and Nigerians. The migrant congregation in Bassano is made up of Ghanaian and Pilipino nationals; the one in Arzignano is made of Ghanaians and few Indian migrants, while the church in Schio is made of Ghanaian and Nigerian migrants. Membership in the Ghanaian Pentecostal/Charismatic churches is predominantly made up of Ghanaian migrants. In few churches it is possible to find a few other African nationals from English speaking countries. But there are no non-African population in these churches. Membership in both Catholic migrant congregations and Pentecostal/Charismatic churches ranges between thirty (30) and three hundred (300).

*Clergy and Leadership:* The Catholic congregations are led by Italian priests (majority), Ghanaian priests and other nationals. The clergy plays dominant leadership roles. However, there is strong lay leadership (catechists, presidents, secretaries, organisers and cashiers). The lay leaders are mostly men and most leaders are well educated. The clergy of the Pentecostal/Charismatic churches is made up of Ghanaian pastors, some of who are founders of the churches. Other pastors are periodically invited from Ghana and other European countries for short visits. Nearly all members, men and women, young and old, play various forms of leadership roles. Persons with high or lower education hold roles. Church attendance and commitment is the main criteria for the selection of leaders.

*Language and Culture:* English language and Akan (Twi) are the main languages used in the Catholic congregations during service. However, depending on the national and ethnic composition of the church, other languages are used. In the church of Schio, for example, the Gospel is also read in Italian followed by a short sermon in Italian language for the migrants' children, before the main mass proceeds in English and Akan. In the Pentecostal/Charismatic churches Akan (Twi) is the main language used with simultaneous English interpretation, when necessary. Songs are in English and Twi. Modern Ghanaian gospel music is

**Table 2**  
Structure and Composition of Ghanaian Diasporan Churches

	Catholics	Pentecostal/Charismatics
<b>Membership</b>	Ghanaians with Nigerians, Philippines, and Indians.	Ghanaians with few other Africans
<b>Clergy and Leadership</b>	Italian and Ghanaian priests; strong lay leadership.	Ghanaian pastors and founders; most members have roles. Important female leadership.
<b>Language and Culture</b>	English, Akan (Twi), other languages.	Akan (Twi) with English interpretation.
<b>Location</b>	Small chapels and sometimes main parish	Outskirts of towns and villages. In industrial areas.
<b>Social Services</b>	Have no formal structures. Depend on the local Catholic Church. Provide informal services.	Have no formal structures. Provide informal services to members.
<b>Transnationalism</b>	Less home-oriented; but reproduces African culture and religious identity.	Home-oriented. Reproduces African culture and cosmology. Linked to churches in Ghana and the diaspora.

Source: By author.



dominant. The King James Version of the Bible and the Akuapim Twi translations are used for service.

*Location:* In the Catholic migrant congregations religious services are held in small chapels, most often far from the migrants' parish. Periodically, and depending upon the pastoral arrangement of the immigrants church, the migrants celebrate mass together with the local church community in a selected parish. The Pentecostal/Charismatic churches, on the other hand, are mostly located in the outskirts of the towns and villages. Normally, an unused industrial building is rented for their religious services. Worshippers commute to these places from various locations on Sundays. The Churches normally provide private transportations for their members to go to the places of worship on Sundays.

*Social services:* By social service I refer to the services that these churches provide to their members in terms of language courses, schools, training, information and aid to find employment, housing, etc. No formal structures exist in the Catholic migrant congregation or Pentecostal churches that provide such services. The Catholic migrants, and of course non-Catholic migrants too, depend on the local Catholic Church institutions (*Caritas* and *Migrantes*) for these services. But the migrant churches do not play any active role in these institutions. However, both migrant Catholic and Pentecostal/Charismatic churches use informal channels to provide various forms of aid and support to their members.

*Transnationalism:* the Catholic congregations are less home-oriented even though they reproduce African culture and religious identity. There is however, collaboration at the hierarchical level between the Italian clergy and the clergy in Ghana. On the contrary, the Pentecostal/Charismatic churches are strongly home-oriented. They have strong links with mother churches in Ghana. And they rely on African cosmology (power of witches, devil, healings, etc) during services. The social organisation is also based on the African concept of family and community, with the church leaders playing the role as elders in the diasporan community, who people turn to for support and help to resolve differences, such as marriage problems. The Catholic lay leaders and Ghanaian priests also play such roles in the communities. Additionally, the Pentecostal/Charismatic churches have strong ties with other diasporan Christian communities in Europe and North America.

## 5. The Churches and Migrants Integration

After presenting the structure and composition of the Ghanaian migrant churches in the Vicenza province, we can now critically examine the role that these churches play for the integration of the migrants. Obviously, the Catholic congregations and the Pentecostal/Charismatic churches provide various forms of avenues and social capital for the migrants to participate or not to participate in Italian society.

The Catholic diocese of Vicenza plays a forefront role in the activities of the migrant Catholic congregations. Italian priests have dominant role in these congregations. And their intermediary role as a bridge between the migrants and the local community as well as the local authority is obvious. Additionally there is coordination with the Catholic clergy in Ghana that sends priests to support the mission. Moreover, there is strong lay participation in leadership activities of the migrant congregations.

Therefore, such pastoral structure apparently opens channels for the migrants' inclusion in the Italian local church and community. In the first place, the migrant congregations are considered integral part of the Catholic Church in the diocese of Vicenza and the diocesan bishop is the overall boss. The collaboration between Italian and Ghanaian clergy makes these congregations look more inclusive. Additionally, membership is not limited to Ghanaian migrants only, but aggregates various nationalities with a common language (English in this case) as the main denominator, while a lot of space is given to migrant languages and culture during worship. Therefore the Catholic spiritual care for migrants is guided by the principle of unity in diversity. While ensuring that the migrants remain an integral part of the Catholic Church, their culture is respected.

However, these congregations are physically separated from the local church communities and their activities. The migrants normally worship in small chapels that are not frequented by native Catholics except for individual devotional activities. One remarkable observation is the absence of Italian worshippers in the migrant congregations. Consequently, there are no common activities between the migrant congregations and the autochthonous congregations except in special celebrations such as first communion, baptism, religious feasts and funerals when the migrant communities are invited. This presents a

parallel church model between migrants' congregations and the local population within the same religious community, as has been observed in the United States.<sup>39</sup> The pros and cons of this structure are obvious. While it gives a chance for Catholic migrants to express their faith in their own language and culture, it provides little opportunities for them to share their religious experiences and faith through dialogue and daily interaction with the local church members. When I posed this problem to the church elders in Schio, one of them said:

We do the service at Salesiani, every Sunday at 11am. However, the last week of the month we go to the main parish to celebrate Mass with the Italians. We want to have integration. Because we had a course and the bishop was telling us that we shouldn't exclude ourselves from the Italians. A time would come that the immigrant churches would be dissolved, so we need to have integration. That is why we do join the Italians (Schio, May, 2010).

Whether the migrant congregations need to be dissolved, and how, is also another problem. However, once the structure has been erected it is difficult to simply dissolve it, as it will easily pass on to other generations. While the solution of worshipping in the 'main parish' together with Italians once every month is a good step, it appears not to be far reaching enough. This is because, the migrant congregations do not appear to fit in well with the territorial structure of the Catholic Church, which begins at the local level as parish, then a deanery and a diocese, etc. Since, for example, migrants in parish 'A', 'B' and 'C' have to all go to parish 'D', where the migrant church is located, for religious services, they are unable to participate in religious and social activities of the parishes where they belong (territorially). However, parish level participation could have implied local community-level participation, which would have enhanced migrants' integration at the local community or grassroots level. But, once the migrants have to move to other places of worship, which are in most cases far from the parishes where they belong, they remain estranged members to their fellow Italian Catholics in their own parishes and communities. Therefore, there appear to be some kind of imbalance between the structure of the migrant congregations and the integration of

church members of Italian or immigrant origin. It appears that the Catholic Church in Vicenza has placed major importance on the ethnicity and national origin of its members rather than a common faith.

The Pentecostal/Charismatic churches do not have the same benefits as the Catholic Church with *a priori* institutional structures to promote their activities. They are new in Italy and closely linked to immigration. In the Ghanaian churches the head pastors and those who hold key leadership positions are Ghanaians. These churches are closely tied to African migrants and do not aim to reach out to the local population. When I raised this issue to the head pastor of Followers of Christ International Church (FOCIC) in Schio he said: "We are open to everyone. White people sometimes attend our church services, but they do not stay. Maybe it is because of the language barrier", (Schio, June, 2010).

While the head pastor identified language barrier as one of the main obstacles preventing the local population from joining them, there was no interest to address the issue, as it appeared no steps have been taken to make their churches attractive to the local population. Additionally, the churches' preference for Ghanaian language (Akan) instead of Italian makes them incapable to incorporate other nationals. FOCIC is among the earliest Ghanaian churches in Vicenza, yet I noticed a remarkable absence of other African worshippers, particularly Nigerians. But the head pastor explained: "We used to have Nigerians with us. However, their number became big and they decided to form their own church to be able to use their own language".

Most of the Pentecostal/Charismatic churches are located in industrial areas and in the outskirts of the towns. Members commute to these places by private transportation system provided by the church or church members. Such locations physically separate the church from Italian society and do not seem help much in terms of integration.

However, these churches' relations with the Italian local population and its institutions are very low, they provide strong avenues for leadership roles, especially for women,<sup>40</sup>

<sup>39</sup> Sullivan, Kathleen (2000): "St Catherine's Catholic Church: One Church, Parallel Congregations", in Ebaugh H. Rose and Chafetz, J. Saltzman, *Religion and the New Immigrants: Continuities and Adaptation in Immigrant Congregations*, AltaMira Press, Walnut Creek, CA.

<sup>40</sup> Pace, Enzo and Buttici, Annalisa, *op. cit.*, p. 115.

and in-group identification. They also forge strong transnational ties with mother Pentecostal churches in Ghana and other diasporan communities in Europe and North America. Their members regularly organise and attend international conventions which permit them to interact with other migrants in other countries.

## 6. Conclusion: Migrant Churches and Segmented Assimilation

At the beginning of this work I asked if the Ghanaian migrants' churches represent a segregationist attitude in response to racial discrimination or they are a path to achieve social integration. I think that they serve both ends. The fact that migrants who move to predominantly Christian countries are Christians does not necessarily mean that they would easily integrate into the Christian churches of the destination country. In some cases ethnic, cultural and racial factors have more weight than a common religion for the structural adaptation of migrants in churches. There is abundant literature about the bad experiences of Italian migrants in American churches during the period of large-scale Italian migration.<sup>41</sup>

From my study of the Ghanaian churches, I see that on one hand the churches provide opportunities for the migrants to find their place in Italian society by providing them with a sense of belonging, identity and resources. Additionally, they provide opportunities, albeit sporadic, for the migrants to negotiate their place in Italian society and find avenues for integration. However, on the other hand, the type of integration that the migrants foment through the churches appears to be rather segmented along racial, ethnic and class lines.

Therefore, behind the churches' organisational structures, membership participation and activities hide deep racial divide between black Africans and Italians within the Italian society. During an interview with the founder of Unity Pentecostal Church, which has a branch in Brescia, Bassano and about twenty branches in Ghana, he told me he is a baptised Catholic

and he used to attend the Catholic Church when he first came to Italy. However, he founded his own church due to language barrier. He said:

We started the Church in 1990 in Schio, and then we joined it with a Church in Ghana called Resurrection Power. When we first came here, we used to go to the Catholic Church. But we did not understand the language and we really wanted to worship and pray. So I started prayer meetings in my house. We used to meet and pray in my kitchen. Then more migrants started joining us and our number became very big, so we started a church. We named it Unity Pentecostal Church (Schio, May 2010).

Yet in the course of the interview he began to raise important issues of deep racial concern. He complained he is a building contractor but does get contracts because of his colour. He went on like this:

Let me give you an example, a few days ago I was returning from Vicenza by bus. I sat in the middle seat and there was another empty seat beside me. People came and occupied the seats behind and in front of me. And even though the bus was full and many people were standing on their feet no one came to sit at the empty seat beside me....My children have often returned from school with tears, complaining they have been racially abused. Other times it is their school authority who have brought me reports that my children have attacked someone (Schio, May 2010).

The main challenge for the migrant churches in Italy, therefore, is to break the racial barrier between the Ghanaian and Italian populations. This could be achieved in the Catholic Church if it facilitates and puts up appropriate channels that permit migrants to take up active roles in the main parishes. With regards to the Pentecostal/Charismatic churches, their ability to open up and attract members from the local population is indispensable if their desire to become part and parcel of Italian society is to be realised. Otherwise these churches and their members are likely to remain at the margins of Italian society and the task of surpassing racial borders would be insurmountable. When this happens the Ghanaian migrants will continue to be estranged from Italian society as the political pressure to exclude migrants mounts.

<sup>41</sup> Prencipe, Lorenzo (2010): "La religione dei migranti: tra repiegamenti ghettizzanti e possibilità di nuova coesione sociale", *Studi Emigrazione/Migration Studies*, XLVII, 178, pp. 278-279.

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