



Cultural Challenges about Migration in the Apostolic Faith Mission International Ministries United Kingdom: An Ethnographic Approach

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Abstract: Apostolic Faith Mission International (AFMI) is a classical Pentecostal denomination with branches all over the world. In Africa, it has more than one million members spread in countries like South Africa, Zimbabwe, Zambia, and others. The AFMI in Africa has managed to grow due to its ability to minister relevantly to the people of Africa and their cultures. However, through an observation participation method, the study found that there is a different trend in the growth of Apostolic Faith Mission International Ministries United Kingdom (AFMIMUK). AFMIMUK has grown in the past three decades, but the church is not able to penetrate the local context due to local cultural challenges. As a result, their growth is based on gathering African immigrants in the UK. The article discusses these cultural challenges identified as individualism, reserved liturgy, monoculturalism, and unilingualism within the theoretical framework of ethnography to find a possible solution.

Keywords: *Ethnography, Culture, Migration, Apostolic Faith Mission, Pentecostalism*

Introduction

The Apostolic Faith Mission International Ministries United Kingdom (AFMIMUK) is an integral part of the global community of national churches affiliated with AFM International (AFMI). The AFM was founded in May 1908 by John G. Lake in Johannesburg, South Africa (SA) who before his trip to South Africa had contacts with William Seymour of Azusa Street Revival-Los Angeles, the United States of America at the dawn of the twentieth century (Kgatla 2016). The AFMIMUK has other sister churches—AFM in South Africa (AFMSA) and AFM in Zimbabwe (AFMZ). Since its inception in 1908, history shows that the church has grown in the past eleven decades (1908–2018) in Africa with more than one million members. The growth of AFM is very much linked to the church’s ability to minister relevantly to the people of Africa and their cultures. However, there is a different trend in the growth of AFMIMUK; its membership is based on immigrants from the Global South. The reason for this according to Adogame (2013, 207) is that churches like AFMIMUK lack “cross-cultural appeal.” Hence, they remain African in their membership. For example, most of the assemblies of the AFMIMUK do not have any British members but many immigrants. Thus, it remains a challenge for the AFMIMUK to reach the host society.

The phenomenon of growing through immigrants is not peculiar to the AFMIMUK; in the words of Okyerefo (2014, 95), “The presence of the South in the North largely takes the form of immigrants from the South.” This article locates the phenomenon to cultural challenges, in other words, the way culture affects the growth of AFMIMUK. One of the

mission activities of the church is to win souls which also contributes toward church growth. Therefore, to achieve maximum growth, the AFMIMUK needs to overcome cultural challenges by assimilating into the host culture. In the words of Adogame (2013, 208), “the fast-changing nature of religious landscape requires a new kind of inculturation of African Christian communities within the host societies.” Thus, the AFMIMUK needs to inculturate itself into the UK to grow more than the current numbers. Therefore, the purpose of this article is twofold—one, to highlight cultural challenges to the growth of the AFMIMUK, and two, to propose ways in which the cultural challenges can be addressed. As a theoretical framework, ethnography will help to arrive at conclusions on the challenges facing the AFMIMUK and figure out ways for AFMIMUK to reconstruct itself—to use Adogame’s words—in the host society, that is, the UK. In its discussions about how to achieve these goals, the article is divided into four main sections:

- The history of Apostolic Faith Mission International Ministries in the United Kingdom
- The nature of the growth in the Apostolic Faith Mission in the UK
- Cultural challenges
- Ways of addressing the cultural challenges

Theoretical Framework

The article uses ethnography as a theory that assists in understanding how culture as practiced by some assemblies of the migrant church, AFMIMUK, affects them in reaching out to the British people (Adogame, Barreto, and Da Rosa 2019). Ethnography is about allowing people in different contexts to tell their own stories and experiences for the ethnographer to have authentic and reliable results (Fetterman 2019). Ethnography in this study will assist in allowing the members and leaders of the AFMIMUK to share their insights on the factors affecting the growth of their church. Another function of ethnography is an understanding of different cultures between two distant places (Hine 2000). In this study, ethnography will assist in understanding how the culture in the UK is different from the culture in Africa. Therefore, ethnography will be applied to understand different cultural dimensions and challenges to the church growth of the AFMIMUK.

Methodology

This study uses the participant observation method used in humanities with qualitative research. This method is used to assess the cultural challenges faced by the AFMIMUK together with ethnography. Participant observation is used in social sciences specially to understand different cultures in a better way in ethnographic studies. The researcher is part of the group and concludes the participant observation method. In this type of method, the researcher must do their best to understand the cultural environment to avoid biases (Reeves et al. 2013). Participant observation method, according to Kawulich (2005, 1), “is being interested in learning more about others, being aware of the propensity for feeling culture shock and for

making mistakes, the majority of which can be overcome, being a careful observer and a good listener, and being open to the unexpected in what is learned.” The researcher interviewed some pastors and congregants in the AFMIMUK to learn about the cultural challenges faced by the church. The voices of the participants will be presented specifically in the section that outlines the cultural challenges facing the church. Literary analysis will be used on cultural challenges related to migration in addition to the participation method.

The History of the Apostolic Faith Mission in the UK

AFMIMUK can be classified as a migrant church as its roots are traced to the AFMZ, which was influenced by the AFMSA. According to Sande and Samushonga (2020, 17), “some members of the AFMZ who had migrated to the UK came together and established the AFMIMUK in 1998.” Sande (2019a, 73) explains, “As a result of migration and transnationalism, former members of the AFMZ got together and founded the AFMIMUK.” These individuals did not come to the UK to establish a church but came because of socioeconomic reasons to either look for work or further their studies (Sande 2019b). The church was officially established in Southeast London, and many of the branches of the AFMIMUK are established in the same area (Samushonga and Sande 2020). The AFMIMUK was formally registered five years after its inception in 2003. Contrary to other names by sister churches, AFMSA and AFMZ, the AFMIMUK added the word “International” to appeal to an international community instead of remaining local. The foundation of the church is not linked to one single individual, as both AFMZ and AFMIMUK do not believe in the notion of having one single founding father (Sande 2019b). However, it can be said without a doubt, according to Sande (2019b, 277), that “The first leader of the AFMIMUK was pastor Trust Ndlovu (a graduate from Living Waters Bible College Zimbabwe).”

AFMIMUK is a vibrant, growing Pentecostal movement registered in England and Scotland with a membership of about 2,500. Similar to their sister churches, AFMSA and AFMZ, the AFMIMUK has a leadership structure, regulations, and organs. They are led by the National Apostolic Committee, reporting to the National Workers Council, National Office Bearers, and the National Board of Trustees. One of the proper structures of the AFM is a regional one, and the AFMIMUK has grown in various parts of the UK to date with four regions. One of the pastors spoke to me about the composition of the regions, namely, the Northern Region (with nine assemblies), the Midlands region (with eleven assemblies), the central region (with eight assemblies), and the southern region (with eight assemblies). This is remarkable growth, and the AFMIMUK has the potential to grow even to greater heights. At the 2018 missional conference of the southern region, there were about 10 pastors present, and the daily attendance of the conference was about 300 people. Most of the assemblies are also doing well financially with some being able to have full-time pastors. This also depends on the church’s ability to adhere to British laws on the recruitment of pastors in terms of policies governing charities in Britain.

The Nature of the Growth in the Apostolic Faith Mission in the UK

The history of the AFMIMUK shows that the church is growing; however, a participation observation method on the growth of the AFMIMUK reveals certain truths. It shows that the church is growing through the gathering of African immigrants in Europe. According to Sande (2019b), two things contribute to the growth of the AFMIMUK—first, the church grew through biological as well as ethnic relationships, and second, many Zimbabweans without legal status in the UK found work in companies and organizations owned by Zimbabweans (Sande 2019b). Therefore, the AFMIMUK local assemblies' members are mainly comprised of immigrants from Africa. In some instances, the church gathers those without legal status in the UK and provides them with a sense of community/belonging (home). Most of the AFM members from South Africa and Zimbabwe are members who remain faithful to the AFM when relocating to the UK. The loyalty of the AFM members is beneficial at times, but it is disadvantageous in terms of expansion in the sense of cultural crossover or reaching out to local members. The point is that immigrants have become the main target of the membership of the AFM. This makes AFMIMUK a center at which immigrants from the Global South converge together into one group. The church plays an important role for those seeking new opportunities in a different culture and keeping immigrant communities together, providing them with a social network, and not letting them alone in times of personal crisis. It is in this context that some migrant churches do not see a need of reaching out to local people as they do not have similar problems.

Cultural Challenges

Individualism

Most Africans are used to a communal life known as *Botho* in *Northern Sotho*. *Botho*, which means humanity, has connotations in southern Africa, which means that a person is a person because of others. The implication is that the existence of one person is dependent on others. Hence, many Africans embrace each other such that amid poverty and other economic challenges in Africa, they can triumph. It is because an African person cannot afford to see their fellow Africans suffer or go through hunger while they are watching; there is something inherent to the nature of Africans that propels them to help the next person. Therefore, according to van Dijk (2002, 49), “people originating from a communal culture meet hardships about the individualized ways of life in the West.” Somehow, the communal life within an African worldview has been translated into the life of the church. The same *Botho* that is practiced in African communities is practiced inside the churches in Africa. Thus, similarly, African churches struggle with an individualized way of doing church in a Western context. Kim (2011, 64) concurs, “The new immigrant congregations are more attuned to religious plurality than their Western counterparts.”

The AFMIMUK members face a challenge as they try to reach British people in the UK. The challenge according to many participants is where they will find such people who are more individualized and introverted in their lifestyle and character. In the Global North, it

seems that everybody is minding their business, and they are too busy to even attend a church service. The AFMIMUK faces a challenge in trying to convince such people to join them in a communal form of life and foster togetherness within an African context. They face a challenge to even initiate a proper conversation, let alone lead them to conversion. Even when or if they try to win them, the reality is that they might struggle to create fellowship with such people because fellowship in an African context means eating together, sharing, and to some higher level such as even trying to help one another. The point here is should the British people join the AFMIMUK, they are more likely to feel isolated in this communal life and way of doing things. Thus, the challenge is for the AFMIMUK to assimilate into the lifestyle of the UK to make more members or to convert people to values as per their mission. It seems that the AFMIMUK has a lot to give up in winning as many people as possible.

Reserved Western Liturgy

According to Kim (2011, 148), “The new Christian immigrants and their descendants come from the center of vibrant Christian growth and embody a brand of Christianity that is strongly evangelistic or conversions.” African Pentecostal worship is not done to follow a certain rigid program, but it is done to help people connect with their God and receive their blessings in the form of healing, prosperity, and others. When Africans sing, they do not do so because the song is in a program; rather, they do so in order to access and attract the presence of the Holy Spirit to have a meaningful relationship with God (Kgatle 2019). Thus, AFMIMUK faces a challenge to maintain the fervency and vibrancy of African spirituality while simultaneously reaching locals. The reason for this assertion is that music in AFMIMUK does not represent various cultures in the UK but is derived from songs that are normally sung in the Global South. In similar ways, the style of preaching, although preached in English, somehow represents an African style of preaching. The services are long, but, to represent the lifestyle in the UK, they must be shorter. However, many participants are skeptical about changing their style of worship. For instance, many feel closer to their delightful songs than English hymns, which they may consider “cold” due to different emotional expressions. Some members might consider a hymn cold because it does not express emotions the way African cultures do. Also, a foreign language may be cold as the speakers do not identify themselves with the emotional charge of a foreign language. The hymns sung at AFMIMUK services might be considered delightful or cheerful as a contrast. Their question is, how can they reach the British when their gospel message is good but their Shona songs are all “Greek” to English speakers? Thus, they insist on singing in Shona which the old generation of Shona men and women in the AFMIMUK appreciate (Samushonga and Sande 2020). Therefore, according to Okyerefo (2014, 115), “immigrants’ insistence on practicing their African spirituality on British soil remains a great challenge indeed.”

Monoculturalism

In the past twenty years of its existence, the AFMIMUK has remained Zimbabwean in terms of the culture expressed in the church. The reason is that the church was not a planned mission to the UK but an emergency plan by the AFMZ members who wanted to retain their culture and identity in the UK. Furthermore, the leadership of the church consists of Zimbabweans, which means that the thinking and decisions taken are influenced by the Zimbabwean culture. A recent study conducted by Sande and Samushonga (2020, 23) in AFMIMUK found that “Maintaining and exercising of Zimbabwean culture in the church is a barrier to attracting non-Zimbabweans.” This according to one participant is because when people of other cultures join the services, they do not feel they are welcome but rather feel like they are in Zimbabwe. Thus, maintaining a monoculture for the AFMIMUK is working to their disadvantage as it is alienating other cultures. The church should carefully revisit its position on the issue of culture as it might as well alienate even the very same Zimbabweans who have grown into the multiculturalism of the UK. This means that the church stands a risk of losing the current members who feel that they have grown beyond their own culture. Besides, not every Zimbabwean is Shona; there are Sotho and Ndebele Zimbabweans who equally might feel like outcasts within the monoculture of many AFMIMUK assemblies. Two dimensions are highlighted here: Zimbabwean versus other African members and African versus local members. First, the church needs to find a strategy to open to other African cultures; second, the church needs to find a strategy to open to the local culture.

Unilingualism

While the AFMIMUK knows the gospel, the challenge is the style of presenting such a gospel in terms of language (Adogame, Gerloff, and Hock 2008). Even if English has been adopted as the official language in the AFMIMUK, the composition of the membership of assemblies, which are mostly Shona, dictates that repeatedly presenters tap into some Shona. Therefore, the AFMIMUK demonstrates some level of unilingualism, according to Samushonga and Sande (2020, 28):

There is a predominance of the Shona language and culture in the Zimbabwean population in general. This ethnic segmentation explains why the Shona language has dominated and shaped the practices and expressions of the AFMIMUK. Although many Zimbabweans are proficient in the English language and spend most of their time immersed in the British systems, the study demonstrates that it is not easy to change one’s language and reach the same depth (i.e., from Shona to English) when it comes to spiritual practices.

Therefore, many Zimbabweans in the UK, even if they are very proficient in English, they prefer to express themselves in Shona, especially during prayer, the signing of songs, and preaching. Even if the services are conducted in English at times, there would still be a dominance of Shona language in terms of songs. Thus, the challenge of language mirrors the same problems described earlier.

Dealing with the Cultural Challenges

To deal with the challenges of individualism within the European culture requires developing, as Jongeneel (2003, 29) suggests, “a broad knowledge of European culture and a deep intuition of European life-experience...from the non-Western point of view [and] a committed understanding of the missionary zeal to reach out to non-Christians.” The ability to understand the local European culture will allow the AFMIMUK to also understand the power dynamics within the same culture. This will allow the church to be able to have exchanges between their culture and other cultures in a European context (Jackson 2011). Therefore, the AFMIMUK according to Burgess (2011, 429) needs “to be open to learning from those they encounter, not least the existing British churches.” Burgess (2011) continues to say that there is no way a pastor can minister alongside the people that God have called them to if they do not know them. To know them, one must de-robe themselves of their own culture by not necessarily losing it, but to de-robe themselves of worldview, beliefs, and values. To begin to learn about them, eat their food, learn about their pain, learn about their joy, and learn what stimulates them. Learn their history, and how they came to where they are. Learn the reasons for their beliefs. Only when one has learned that over a period of engaging and relating with them can the true gospel become authentic.

The challenge of the reserved liturgy can be addressed by singing in the language that everybody understands but with the fervency and vibrancy of African spirituality and by adopting open-mindedness and becoming flexible in terms of running the services of the church. The AFMIMUK should be able to operate in a multitude of contexts to know when to be loud and when to be reserved during the service. This should be done while the church services remain vibrant and well organized so that the old members are not left frustrated and confused during the phase of adaptability (Van Dijk 2002). The open-endedness requires more than just preaching during weekly services by the presiding pastors. There is a need for local pastors to train their leaders and workers on the approach of being open to others to win them. This does not mean that the church will compromise its mission but will be doing all it can to adjust its functions to accommodate the cultural values of local people. The pastor can do their best to reach out to others working with them. If others do not grasp their vision of being open-minded, it becomes a futile exercise. Therefore, training should begin with the main ministries like intercession, music, ushering, and decorations to train leaders in terms of the approach of the church toward reaching others. When the key leaders understand the vision of the main leader, others will follow and, ultimately, the whole AFMIMUK will understand the vision of being open to others.

There is a need for integration. Bedford-Strohm (2008, 1) defines integration as an “invitation to engage in those rules that nurture a culture of mutual recognition in society and thus make a social life shaped by empathy and justice possible in a population characterized by diversity.” Integration is whereby people from different backgrounds can come together and work with situations and people they are not familiar with. This requires people to come out of their comfort zones to enter unfamiliar territories. The challenge of

integration is the cultural differences that exist among communities. To deal with cultural differences, the integration uses tools like “unity in diversity” to unite people of different backgrounds to come together in life (Rubinstein, Keller, and Scherger 2008) In other words, the culture of the UK is not monoculture but there are many cultures within the UK. Thus, it will be mischievous to have a church in the UK that only follows one culture. It does not matter if it is an African culture or English, but the fact of the matter is either will not work because in the UK exist various cultures from Africa, Asia, Australia, Europe, North America, and so on. Therefore, being a minister of the gospel in the UK requires learning as many cultures as possible. Such a ministry according to Adogame (2010, 56) should be characterized by “networks, activities, and life patterns that entangle both their ‘old home’ and ‘new home’ societies, as well as with other host contexts.” Sande (2019a, 80) adds, “The AFMIMUK should establish centers to teach young men and women about the intersections between local culture, the diaspora context, and Christian faith narratives.” When this is done, the AFMIMUK will be at the forefront of helping the rest of the Zimbabwean community that is equally struggling to assimilate into the host culture.

There is a need to embrace Paul’s approach to mission in preaching Christ to the local people as found in the Pauline letters. Paul as an Apostle is the epitome of how to penetrate foreign cultures and languages given his experience in traveling from one country to another. He had an opportunity to minister to various people of different cultures and languages. The secret of Paul is that to the Jews he became like a Jew, to win the Jews. He was a devout Jew: “circumcised on the eighth day, a member of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the churches; as to righteousness under the law, blameless” (Phil. 3:5–6). To those under the law, he became like one under the law (though he was not under the law), to win those under the law. To those not having the law, he became like one not having the law (though he was not free from God’s law but under Christ’s law), to win those not having the law. To the weak he became weak, to win the weak. He has become all things to all people so that by all possible means he might save some (1 Cor 9:20–22). Doing church in a multicultural environment requires pastors of the AFMIMUK and other African churches in the diaspora to become like Paul in their approach to missions. Paul explained Christ’s teaching to local people by “translating” them into the language of the local culture.

Growing beyond Immigration

The AFMIMUK has the potential to grow beyond immigration, as it has already been established in the UK for more than two decades. As suggested earlier, the church can do so by acquiring a broad knowledge of European culture, open-mindedness in liturgy, integration, and embracing Paul’s theology on culture. Moreover, there is a generation of young people who were either born in the UK or grew up there. By now, this generation of young stars has already assimilated local worldviews, values, beliefs, and lifestyles. Therefore, as one participant suggested, part of the mission of the AFMIMUK is to use young people to win the British people. Interestingly, the young people who have grown up in the UK are making promising

inroads into the local population. Other than the youth, according to Samushonga and Sande (2020, 25), “Many members of the AFMIMUK predominantly spend much of their time immersed in the British systems, outside of church life, for example, in schools and other educational institutions, corporate and business sectors.” There is a belief that as the church empowers them more and more, they will do a better job of connecting with and reaching nonimmigrants, due to shared language and cultural relevance. Moreover, these young people are already connected to various areas of influence in a society like sports, arts, and culture. Some have established careers in law, engineering, academia, commerce, and others. Thus, young people can become a special group to reach various cultural groups in the UK. They can become cross-cultural in their evangelistic endeavors. For the aforementioned to happen, young people should be allowed to participate in the services. Similarly, the services should not only appeal to adults but also appeal to young people so that they can invite their friends.

Thus, the AFMIMUK is now ripe for growth beyond gathering African immigrants. In the early years, most immigrants’ focus was on survival as they battled to settle in their adoptive home legally and eke out a living in an unfamiliar and often hostile foreign environment, and the missional agenda thus took a back seat. The bulk of the teething problems of yesteryear have been largely overcome. Missional conversations, training, and networking are going on all over the length and breadth of the AFMIMUK now. Thus, there will be a guaranteed steady growth when the AFMIMUK makes genuine inroads into local communities. Another participant raised the issue of using the local pastors who have grown up in the UK and are familiar with the culture and lifestyle there. Pastors will not struggle even in terms of the language and accent spoken in the UK and will also be comfortable with the method of presentation. Therefore, instead of always sending pastors from, for example, Zimbabwe, to plant churches in Europe, the church can alternatively train the local people to become their pastors in the UK. Where necessary, the local pastors in the UK can train the immigrant pastors on how to become relevant to the host country’s culture.

Conclusion

The AFMIMUK as part of the AFMI is not growing in parallel to her sister churches in Africa, AFMSA, and the AFMZ. The AFMIMUK is facing peculiar challenges that are not experienced by other sister churches. Hence, the AFMIMUK shows some signs of growth, but when one observes this growth closely, it can be seen that it is based on gathering immigrants from the Global South. This type of growth in the AFMIMUK is caused by the cultural challenges that the church faces in the UK. The challenges identified in this article are individualism, reserved liturgy, monoculturalism, and, to some certain extent, unilingualism. To address these challenges, the article suggests that there is a need to adapt to the host country’s culture and way of doing things. A broader understanding of the culture of Europe, not just the UK, will help the pastors and members to quickly adjust. There is also a need to be open-minded when it comes to the liturgy of the church by all the team leaders of the church. The church should be able to integrate its culture into the various cultures that exist

in the UK, as the country is comprised of many cultures. Last, without giving up their own culture, it is pivotal to become part of the host culture for the sake of winning them as practiced by Paul. When the aforementioned is done, the AFM has the potential to grow beyond immigration membership, and this will attract sustainable and healthy growth.

Informed Consent

The author has obtained informed consent from all participants.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

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