

Chapter Twelve

Zionists, Aladura and Roho: African Instituted Churches

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INTRODUCTION

The indigenous religious creativity crystallizing in the acronym, African Instituted Churches (AICs) represents one of the most profound developments in the transmission and transformation of both African Christianity and Christianity in Africa. Coming on the heels of mission Christianity and the earliest traces of indigenous appropriations in the form of Ethiopian churches and revival movements, AICs started to emerge in the African religious centre-stage from the 1920s and 1930s. The AICs now constitute a significant filament of African Christian demography. In an evidently contemporaneous feat, this religious manifestation came to limelight ostensibly under similar but also remarkably distinct historical, religious, cultural, socio-economic and political circumstances particularly in the western, southern and eastern fringes of the continent. Their unprecedented upsurge particularly in a colonial, pre-independent milieu evoked wide-ranging reactions and pretensions of a political and socio-religious nature, circumstances that undercut their bumpy rides into prominence both in public and private spheres. The AIC phenomenon in Africa has received considerable scholarly attention since the fourth decade of the last century. Available literature reveals the conspicuous dominance of theological, missiological, sociological perspectives and provides ample information regarding this complex but dynamic religious development. While the earliest historical developments, theologies and hierarchical structures of these churches have been largely documented; the contemporary religious vitality and growth process of most of these groups has been left largely under-investigated.

This chapter undertakes a comparative reconstruction of the AIC historical trajectory, situating it within the wider socio-cultural and religious milieu within which the movements were born and nurtured. One must refrain from assuming that all AICs are virtually identical. This tendency is rife in extant literature on the AICs, whereby the phenomenon is treated in such a way as if the wide, complex variety can simply be pigeonholed as a single whole. The uniqueness of this religious genre should be seen in terms of the affinity and differences that characterize their worldviews, ritual and organizational structures. They share many features in common—the reason for their common typology—yet it will be oversimplifying this comparison without highlighting the fact that each of the AICs has its own religious dynamic. While there are abounding affinities, they also reveal a significant, complex variety in terms of their foundation histories, the charismatic personality of the founders and leaders, their belief patterns and ritual structures, their organizational policies and geographical distribution. Three examples that will engage our comparative focus here are the Zionists in South Africa, the Aladura in West Africa and the Roho in East Africa. The rationale for isolating these case examples is no less evident in a very vast continent with cultural, linguistic variety as well as diverse historical experiences. Any claim to an exhaustive treatment of such a huge, expansive religious phenomenon, within this space limitation, is pretentious and bound to entail one's brushing in broad strokes. Although the religious geographies of these churches can no longer be confined to the respective local boundaries, yet these geo-cultural contexts have undoubtedly produced and experienced the most remarkable vitality of this religious phenomenon in a way that has attracted more scholarly attention than anywhere else on the shores of Africa. Therefore, a sufficient basis for analysis may already exist. One advantage of such a comparative endeavor is that it not only avails us of a succinct picture of what three particular African religious worlds look like, but also serves to illuminate our understanding of their religious systems. It allows us test the validity of some generalizations about the AICs, prevalent in extant literature, in the light of their overarching affinities and peculiarities.

I. TERMINOLOGY OF THE AICs:

THE PROBLEM OF DEFINITION AND THE DEFINITION OF A PROBLEM

Bengt Sundkler was one of the pioneer scholars who engaged systematic exploration of what later partly became popularized as AICs. His pivotal study ended in a monograph, *Bantu Prophets in South Africa*,

published in 1948. Sundkler took a terminological leap over a decade later by opting for Bantu Independent Churches as against the jaundiced official appellation of Native Separatist Churches.⁴⁵⁹ Sundkler was ostensibly caught up in the web of ideological and political nuances from which he attempted to draw a distinction. The labels Native, Separatist and his own appropriation of Bantu were considered offensive and incongruous baggage, and thus they attracted a critical uppercut in the very tensile racial, political atmosphere that characterized apartheid South Africa. One of the less-polemical categories adopted to aggregate a large genre of independent churches in South Africa was Zionist.⁴⁶⁰ Sundkler popularized his broad distinction between two types of South African Independent churches, which he described as Ethiopian and Zionist.⁴⁶¹ The latter gained some weight and credibility, not only because this indigenous religious creativity was seen to be heavily concentrated among the Zulu and Swazi peoples, but also as a result of the spiritual liberation and renaissance which the “Zion” biblical concept represents for its members in a highly segregated context.

With the limitations of “Bantu” as more of a linguistic rather than a racial category, “African” came and appeared as a suitable, more-embracing replacement that took cognizance not only of the partly racial sense it embraced but also of simultaneous religious manifestations elsewhere within the continent. The categorization of these indigenous

⁴⁵⁹ See introduction to the second edition of B.G.M. SUNDKLER, *Bantu Prophets in South Africa* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961), 18.

⁴⁶⁰ See B.G.M. SUNDKLER, *Zulu Zion and some Swazi Zionists* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976). AICs in South Africa have received significant scholarly attention and the existing literature is quite extensive. These includes G.C. OOSTHUIZEN, *The Theology of a South African Messiah: An analysis of the hymnal of The Church of the Nazarites* (Leiden: Brill, 1967); M. WEST, *Bishops and Prophets in a Black City: African Independent Churches in Soweto, Johannesburg* (Cape Town: David Philip, 1975); M.L. DANEEL, *Quest for Belonging: Introduction to a study of African Independent Churches* (Gweru: Mambo Press, 1987); G.C. OOSTHUIZEN & I. HEXHAM (eds), *Empirical Studies of African Independent / Indigenous Churches* (Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1992); J.P. KIERNAN, *The Production and Management of Therapeutic Power in Zionist Churches within a Zulu City* (Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1990); and G.C. OOSTHUIZEN, *The Healer-Prophet in Afro-Christian Churches* (Leiden: Brill, 1992), to mention a few.

⁴⁶¹ See SUNDKLER, *Bantu Prophets*, p. 53, where he describes Ethiopian churches as AICs that broke from Protestant churches on political grounds, but have remained closely patterned on them. The Zionists, on the other hand, are “non-secession churches with a Pentecostal, healing emphasis,” churches which also stress the presence and influence of the Holy Spirit in the church as well as in the life of the believer.

religious initiatives as “independent”, “separatist”, “syncretistic”, “protest”, “nativistic”, “tribal”, “neo-pagan”, “spiritist”, “sectarian”, “nationalist”, “hebraic”, “cultic”, “messianic”, “post-Christian”, at different levels of their developmental histories amply reveal the ideological, political, religious orientations and climate which pervade scholarship as well as the public sphere at the time.⁴⁶² These perceptions cannot be claimed to have totally run under in the post-independence era, some scholars still continue to appropriate these loaded terms or their variations. In spite of the critical bashing it received, “African Independent Churches” received a fair nod and more popular acclamation as a working definition, as a provisional terminology that was perceived to be far less-nuanced and less-pejorative. In West Africa, Christian Baeta first captured this spiritual wave and dealt extensively with this phenomenon to be later popularized in Ghana as “Spirit” or “Spiritist” churches.⁴⁶³ Harold Turner and John Peel both championed the course of popularizing African Independent Churches with their seminal works on the Aladura phenomenon in western Nigeria.⁴⁶⁴ The scenario in pre-independent Kenya was not any different as Welbourn and Ogot undertook a study of independent churches in western Kenya.⁴⁶⁵ Some early and latter significant works that dealt on the AICs in Kenya, in part or in whole, includes those of Jomo Kenyatta, Jocelyn Murray, David Sandgren, Francis Githieya and Cynthia Hoehler-Fatton.⁴⁶⁶

⁴⁶² Cf. some early AIC typologies in SUNDKLER, *Bantu Prophets*; G.C. OOSTHUIZEN, *Post-Christianity in Africa: A Theological and Anthropological Study* (London: C. Hurst, 1968); D. BARRETT, *Schism and Renewal in Africa: An Analysis of Six Thousand Contemporary Religious Movements* (Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1968); and H.W. TURNER, *Religious Innovation in Africa: Collected Essays on New Religious Movements* (Boston: G.K. Hall & Co., 1979).

⁴⁶³ C.G. BAETA, *Prophetism in Ghana* (London: SCM, 1962).

⁴⁶⁴ See H.W. TURNER, *African Independent Church, Vol. 1 - The Church of the Lord - Aladura; Vol. 2 - The Life and Faith of the Church of the Lord - Aladura* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967); and J.D.Y. PEEL, *Aladura: A Religious Movement among the Yoruba* (London: Oxford University Press, 1968). For more recent works on the Aladura churches, see J.A. OMOYAJOWO, *Cherubim and Seraphim: The History of an African Independent Church* (New York: Nok Publishers, 1982); and A. ADOGAME, *Celestial Church of Christ: The Politics of Cultural Identity in a West African Prophetic-Charismatic Movement* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1999).

⁴⁶⁵ See F.B. WELBOURN, *East African Rebels: A Study of some Independent Churches* (London: SCM, 1961); F.B. WELBOURN & B.A. OGOT, *A Place to feel at Home: A Study of Independent Churches in Western Kenya* (London: Oxford University Press, 1966).

⁴⁶⁶ See J. KENYATTA, *Facing Mount Kenya* (London: Vintage, 1962 [1938]); J. MURRAY, “The Kikuyu Spirit churches”, in *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 5, 3, (1974),

In order to bring definitional clarity to the expanding phenomenon, Turner adduced a provisional definition of AICs in the late 1960s as “churches founded in Africa, by Africans and for Africans.” While this definition may appear to hold water especially when located within the specific milieu within which Turner first wrote, contemporary demographic profiles and the expanding religious geographies of these churches now renders his definitional gaze suspect, myopic and short-sighted. One backlash of the postcolonial reconstruction of African church historiography was the revisiting of the use of “Independent”. Hitherto, these churches were largely mirrored as political protest groups, “pseudo-religious fanatics” and harbingers of nationalism, groups destined to sing their own obituaries in the aftermath of independence across Africa. The resilience and dynamism that characterized these churches in post-independent Africa, coupled with their rapid proliferation and splinter formations, reified the politics and inherent polemics that galvanize such a terminological construct. This opened the floodgate to a whole gamut of new, alternative terminologies such as “African Initiated Churches”, “African Indigenous Churches”, “African Instituted Churches”, “African International Churches”. There is as yet no scholarly consensus as to which of these phrases is most appropriate and concise to delineate the phenomenon. The revolving abbreviation, “AIC”, in all of them may lend credence to the fact that the designations do not necessarily suggest sharp, varied connotations beyond their semantic variations. However, they do convey powerful meanings of a critical nature, thus betraying other intellectual and ideological leanings, agendas and orientations. A revisiting of the dominant AIC typologies is expedient in order to reconstruct a new embracing typology in the light of overarching religious, political and socio-economic realities that characterize their histories. However, the existing classification in its narrowest sense refers to the movements which emerged from the dawn of the twentieth century either within or outside the institutional frameworks of the mission and mission-orientated churches such as the Ethiopian-type churches in South Africa, the African churches in West Africa, and the mainline churches in East Africa.

198-234; D.P. SANDGREN, *Christianity and the Kikuyu: Religious Divisions and Social Conflict* (New York: Peter Lang, 1989); C. HOEHLER-FATTON, *Women of Fire and Spirit: Faith and Gender in Roho Religion in Western Kenya* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996); and F.K. GITHIEYA, *The Freedom of the Spirit: African Indigenous Churches in Kenya* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997).

II. PATTERNS OF HISTORICAL EMERGENCE

The 1920s and 1930s marked the nascence of the Roho, Zionist, and Aladura churches. Two similar but distinctive patterns characterize their histories of emergence. They represent groups that started under the initiative of African leadership both within and outside the immediate purview of mission and mission-orientated churches. The first strand concerns groups that emerged from within already existing mainline churches. The nucleus of such movements had been mainly “prayer bands”, “societies” or “bible study classes” prior to their expulsion, voluntary withdrawal, or separation from the parent body. Such separation may either have been occasioned by differences in understanding and interpretation of particular doctrines, accusations of practicing unorthodox or “strange” rituals, a revelation or vision claims to establish a new group, a result of personality clashes and leadership tussle. The second discernible pattern of emergence revolves around groups that neither existed within the mainline churches nor experienced any institutional friction and disengagement at their take-off stages. Explanations proffered by scholars for their emergence vary from religious to cultural, political to economic, ethnic to racial discrimination, and from social to psychological.

Scholars of AICs and African religions need to exercise caution in the terminologies appropriated, but also be conscious of the fact that such ideologically loaded categories may still be highly charged and misleading. In her typologization of AICs, Jules Rosette carries over a useful distinction between groups that have broken off from established churches (Separatist) and bodies “which have been started under the initiative of African leaders outside the immediate context of missions or historic religions (Indigenous).⁴⁶⁷ Hoehler-Fatton aptly questions the usefulness of the dominant conceptual model of schism in understanding the emergence of independent churches in western Kenya. As she argues, “the schism model, as typically deployed in histories of East African independent churches, portrays mission churches as the repositories of normative Christianity. European missions are assumed to have set the standard, from which rebellions, innovative, African-led groups broke away.”⁴⁶⁸ For instance, Mango never made a declaration of secession himself. It was the Church Missionary Society (CMS) Archdeacon, Walter Edwin Owen who announced that Mango had seceded and who subsequently urged people to

⁴⁶⁷ See JULES-ROSETTE, “African Religions: Modern Movements”, in Mircea ELIADE (ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, 1, 82-89, New York: Macmillan, 1987.

⁴⁶⁸ HOEHLER-FATTON, *Women of Fire and Spirit*, p. 206.

leave his congregations.⁴⁶⁹ Many of Mango and Lawi's followers continued to consider themselves part of the CMS for several more years. Rather than invoking a metaphor of abrupt, clear-cut rifts and splits (schisms) in a unified institutional setting, she opines, it is more appropriate to conceive of Christianity in Nyanza from 1900 through the 1940s as very fluid, with few firm links to institutional hierarchies of any kind, missionaries or otherwise.⁴⁷⁰ This remark is very apt in considering both strands within which AICs emerged in other African socio-cultural settings. It is important to treat the peculiarities of each history of emergence in its own right rather than get caught in making blanket generalizations.

During the late 1920s and early 1930s, Luo and Kikuyu lands (Kenya) in East Africa witnessed a high proliferation of AICs. Welbourn and Ogot both recognize that the several independent churches that emerged in pre-independent Kenya provided Kenyans with "a place to feel at home", a sense of belonging that was absent in mission churches.⁴⁷¹ The independent churches that came into their purview falls under the two strands highlighted earlier. Examples of churches within the first strand are the Nomiya Luo Mission, which severed from the Anglican Church in 1914. There were other important Luo "schisms", such as the Church of Christ in Africa, which began as an Anglican revival movement called Johera or "People of Love" in 1952, though separated in 1957; and Mario Legio of Africa, a remarkable split from Roman Catholicism.

The emergence of the Roho movements among the Luo in western Kenya is traced to 1912, the year in which Roho (the Holy Spirit) was believed to have made its initial appearance in Ruwe sub location. The Roho or "Holy Spirit" churches emerged during the colonial era, a crucial time in Kenyan socio-political history characterized by scenes of serious conflicts over land, education and the controversy over clitoridectomy. One of the earliest charismatic figures was Ibrahim Osodo, who attracted and organized a small group of followers until his coercive conscription into colonial military service.⁴⁷² With their respective headquarters in Nyanza province, the Musanda Holy Ghost Church of East Africa, the Cross Church of East Africa, and the Ruwe Holy Ghost Church of East Africa share common historical traits. They view themselves as "custodians of the Spirit", tracing their origin to the ecstatic Roho movement. The latter, the Ruwe Church, crystallized under the leadership of Alfayo Odongo Mango

⁴⁶⁹ HOEHLER-FATTON, *Women of Fire and Spirit*, p. 68.

⁴⁷⁰ HOEHLER-FATTON, *Women of Fire and Spirit*, p. 77.

⁴⁷¹ See WELBOURN & OGOT, *A Place to feel at Home*.

⁴⁷² HOEHLER-FATTON, *Women of Fire and Spirit*, p. 12.

of Masanda in the 1930s. The Wakorino is a collective name representing several other Kikuyu AICs, tracing their origin to the same period. A major indigenous movement that emerged in central Kenya during the religious and political upheavals of the 1920s was the Agikuyu spirit churches or the Arathi (prophets or seers). They were also variously dubbed Watu wa Mungu (People of God), Aroti (dreamers) or Akurinu (roaring prophets) because of their spiritual quest for possession of the Holy Spirit. The Arathi resulted from prophetic figures, such as Joseph Ng`ang`a and Musa Thuo, who claimed divine healing to their prophetic ministry.⁴⁷³

The earliest amaZioni (Zionist churches) surfaced in southern Africa during the first decade of the twentieth century. Among Zulu and Swazi, the name “Zion” invokes two different connotations. In a more specific sense, it refers to churches that lay claim to genealogical relationship to Zion City III, and to John Alexander Dowie, First Apostle, and founder of the Christian Catholic Apostolic Church on the city of Zion, Illinois, near Chicago. The wider and more all-embracing strand of the AIC historiography concerns churches which emphasize the guidance of uMoya, the Spirit, and healing as central concerns. Daniel Nkonyane and Elias Mahlangu, both hailing from the Afrikaner missionary Le Roux’s Zion Apostolic Church group at Wakkerstroom, led different amaZioni. The earliest definite separation from Le Roux took place in 1917 when Mahlangu founded the Zion Apostolic Church of South Africa. Between 1912 and 1920, Nkonyane founded the Christian Catholic Apostolic Church in Zion.

It was Nkonyane, who as a leader in the Christian Catholic Apostolic Church in Zion, had introduced certain elements in worship which have remained visible hallmarks of Zionism till the contemporary era. Such features include white robes, bare feet, holy sticks and Old Testament symbolism. In 1922, he changed its name to Christian Catholic Apostolic Holy Spirit Church in Zion. A remarkable number of older and more contemporary amaZioni have emerged to populate the South African religious landscape. Some of the largest groups include the Zion Christian Church, the Nazirite Baptist Church. Most of the amaZioni share a common denominator and ethos. The various titles, which the AICs variously adopt, indicate their ecclesiology and pedigree.

The 1918 influenza or bubonic plague is the backdrop of the earliest AICs in West Africa, particularly in Nigeria. The social despondency that characterizes this colonial era effaces a scenario where the local peoples

⁴⁷³ GITHIEYA, *The Freedom of the Spirit*, p. 123.

came out in droves to embrace prayer as a proven alternative to the failure and impotence of western medicine. They derived their name due to their penchant and proclivity for prayer, healing, prophecy, vision and dreams. Aladura churches began to emerge among the Yoruba of western Nigeria from the mid-1920s onwards. The earliest group was the Cherubim and Seraphim (C&S) which for several years existed as an interdenominational society “preaching faith in prayers and a renunciation of the devil and all his works—including the worship of idols, the use of juju and charms and the fear of the power of the witches.”⁴⁷⁴ The formalization of the society as a church in 1925 was to a large extent a consequence of the intolerance of the mission churches. The Christ Apostolic Church (CAC) can be seen as a direct product of the fusion between the Precious Stone Society (PSS) or Diamond Society (prayer groups within the Anglican Church), the Nigerian Faith Tabernacle (NFT) and the Great Revival event of 1930 that served as an impetus towards unification. The nucleus church that became established under the triumvirate of Joseph Babalola, Isaac Akinyele and David Odubanjo commenced “unofficially” as a prayer group within the Anglican Church. Owing to a myriad of factors such as doctrinal conflicts—the question of faith or divine healing, infant baptism, personality clashes, administrative problems, persecution from the mainline churches, the movement metamorphosed through different names until 1943 when it was formally registered (No. 147) as the “Christ Apostolic Church” under the Lands Perpetual Succession Ordinance of 1924. The Church of the Lord-Aladura (CLA) also emerged from within the mission church tradition. Josiah Ositelu founded it in 1930 following his suspension from the Anglican Church—where he served as a catechist, primarily on doctrinal questions. The Celestial Church of Christ represents the second strand of Aladura emergence. It did not sever from any existing mainline church nor face any form of ejection but emerged rather independently through the visionary experience and charismatic initiative of Samuel Bilehou Oschoffa, a carpenter turned prophet, in 1947.⁴⁷⁵

One feature that characterizes the nascent histories of the earlier AICs is their encounter with colonial and mission authorities. Following their pragmatic approach to existential questions of life, their emphasis on visionary reinterpretations of the Bible and the backing of charismatic figures, the AICs quickly acquired local appeal, popular acclamation and drew clientele largely from the existing mission churches. This sudden popularity coupled with religious, political and socio-economic

⁴⁷⁴ See, OMOYAJOWO, *Cherubim and Seraphim*, p. 9.

⁴⁷⁵ See ADOGAME, *Celestial Church of Christ*, p. 24.

considerations put them on collision course with the respective colonial governments, and mission-church authorities often serving as collaborators in the politics of repression and demonization. At the inception of the Aladura churches in western Nigeria, a sudden drift of membership was witnessed from the mission churches. Peel has shown through his survey of the Aladura churches in the 1960s that 63 percent and 66 percent of converts into the CAC and C&S branches in Ibadan were from the Anglican Church alone.⁴⁷⁶ It is therefore within these contexts that the apprehension by mission church authorities becomes understandable.

A process of mutual diabolization ensued with the Aladura churches accusing the mission churches of practising ambivalent Christianity, idolatry and a faith too dressed in foreign (western) garb in their polity and liturgical content, and the mission churches on the other hand, criticizing the Aladura of overshoot rapport with Yoruba cultural matrix, syncretism, and of what they perceived as an indiscriminate use of charismatic gifts. With the religious, political and socio-cultural circumstances surrounding the emergence of the C&S in 1925, CLA and CAC in 1930 from within the Anglican mainstream, it is clear that the relationship between the Anglican Church and the severing groups in the pre-independence era was both genial and antipathetic. The colonial situation further made the relationship between the Aladura, during their formative years, and the mission churches far from being cordial. The somewhat intimate relationship between the colonial government and missionaries was in a way detrimental to the corporate existence of the emerging indigenous churches. The colonial administration often displayed a cold and spiteful posture on the Aladura churches. Omoyajowo highlighted the impression of a colonial officer—Captain Ross, the Resident at Oyo—about the indigenous churches when he wrote in 1930, “they are not recognized Christian missions and they should be regarded as enemies.”⁴⁷⁷ The colonial governments were also apprehensive of the danger that such groups may pose to constituted authority if they became “well established” and “strong”. Babalola (CAC) and Oschoffa (CCC) were humiliated through incarceration on flimsy excuses.

The radicalization of the Arathi and Roho churches took place at their early historical phases. From as early as 1930, both groups had started facing increasing criticism from both the mission churches and the colonial government. Both groups laid emphasis on millennial deliverance and vehemently opposed the colonialists’ occupation of lands. They preached

⁴⁷⁶ PEEL, *Aladura*, p. 205.

⁴⁷⁷ OMOYAJOWO, *Cherubim and Seraphim*, p. 97.

and prayed that the interlopers would vacate the land, thus leaving the country to its rightful owners. They also opposed the missions denunciation of polygyny and clitoridectomy. They rejected western money, amenities, clothing, food; and spoke against certain western and local beliefs and practices which they perceived were against the true tenets of the Christian faith.

The Arathi gave up western clothes and took to wearing *Kanzu* (a long white gown) and a white turban. Colonial government officials in collaboration with missionary authorities considered Mango and his Roho movement subversive and troubling, and thus carefully watched. His political activities heightened when he joined forces with other Kager in Buholo and Ugenya to campaign for the recovery of “lost lands”. Due to his open opposition of the British colonial authorities and their partisanship in the land disputes, his involvement was perceived as politically motivated, and the Roho was seen as a last attempt to rally support through the vehicle of religious organizations. Owing to land disputes, Mango and others were arraigned before the Wanga Tribunal. They were fined for contempt of court and later exiled from their homes. They were granted pardon and returned to their homes in 1933. His further involvement in land disputes led to the Musanda massacres and his murder in 1934. Hoehler-Fatton aptly argues, “Roho religion should be understood as a matrix out of which Mango’s political struggles arose, rather than depict the Roho church as a by-product of these disputes.”⁴⁷⁸ Ng’ang’a and his compatriots, like Mango, also suffered incarceration with hard labor under the colonial administration. Ng’ang’a was consequently assassinated in 1934, together with John Mungara and Samuel Muinami. Although, most of the AICs were often faced with harsh repression on two fronts, virtually all of them survived this subversion and gradually acquired legitimacy in the post-independence era.

III. PERSONALITY AND MYTHS OF FOUNDER

Virtually all the AICs trace their emergence to a charismatic, prophetic figure usually with claims of a traumatic religious experience. Such “turning point” visionary experiences are encounters from which special powers are vouchsafed. The centrality of the founding story is a feature that pervades the AICs’ spiritual and moral orientation. The re-enactment of these “sacred narratives” by members becomes a common feature during and after the demise of the charismatic figure. Isaiah Shembe (c. 1870-

⁴⁷⁸ HOEHLER-FATTON, *Women of Fire and Spirit*, p. 8.

1935), the Zulu prophet who founded the amaNazaretha Church in South Africa, was variously known as a prophet, divine healer, as a messianic figure, a liberator and a messenger of God. Shembe hailed from a humble family background. He encountered a vision and dream experience in which he claimed to have been instructed by a voice to climb a mountain as well as go into a cave. This fundamental spiritual experience on the mountain led to a turn-around of his “immoral” life. This encounter story was vividly re-enacted by him and his later followers. Following this visionary experience, he started to preach, pray for the sick and engage in iconoclastic activities around the Orange Free State and later to environs. The Celestial Church of Christ emerged in Dahomey (Porto Novo) through the charismatic personality of Oschoffa, a “carpenter-turned-prophet”, following a visionary experience that occurred while marooned in the forest in search for timber. He claimed to have received a divine injunction to establish a church, “the last ship of salvation” that will be charged with the task of “cleansing the world.” After this experience in the bush where he was stuck for several days, he returned to his immediate community and to the astonishment of many, he started to exhibit his newly acquired spiritual gifts through healing and performance of miracles.

The historiography of the Joroho (People of the Spirit) is centered on the charismatic figure, Alfayo Odongo Mango. Mango was described as a strong-willed individual who emerged as a key religious and political personality in the Luo region. He was involved with the Anglican Church and was even appointed Deacon of a large, predominantly Luo area in 1927. Mango first had a vision in 1916 while he was visiting a congregation in Alego Nyadhi in his capacity as an authorized Anglican evangelist. He kept this unusual experience to himself and thought of the message he received while he and his small party left Alego. The journey back to Musanda took them through Uriya forest, where the Spirit suddenly knocked them down. Following this traumatic mystical experience in Alago, he began to preach to his people. Imbued with the Holy Spirit, he was able to heal people, foresee the future, and assert the need for an African-led church in the face of foreign domination. Roho members portray Mango today as both a temporal and spiritual liberator who introduced the first truly African church. Members claim that his death atoned for the sins of the Black people, giving them entry into heaven. He is not remembered by contemporary Roho Christians as a Luo nationalist, but as a charismatic religious figure. Mango’s life and death became of central significance to Roho members and he is frequently mentioned during ritual services as they recount episodes in Roho ecclesial history.

The account of his struggle against the colonialists has taken on a life of its own on a symbolic and theological level.

Even upon the demise of the charismatic leaders, founders of the AICs have continued to be venerated in annual celebrations of remembrance. At the Sikukuu, which marks the anniversary of Mango's death, surviving members perform a dramatization of the fire in which he died, and sing hymns about the beginning of Roho religion. "Musanda (birthplace of Mango) constitutes the locus of an interlocking chain of ultimate consequences. On that sacred spot, the paradigmatic cycle of birth, death and renewal was enacted for Roho members by their own African prophet-savior."⁴⁷⁹ This cycle is continually recapitulated in the rituals of the church and in members' individual lives. For them, the locus of this central story is Musanda, and they honor its auspiciousness in their annual pilgrimage. Lawi Obonyo is another central figure in Roho history, acknowledged as a "miracle worker". He was widely portrayed as Mango's jakony (helper). As a carpenter, he resided in Musanda with Mango, his uncle. He laid claims to a dream encounter in which he was instructed to "spread the word of God". Ng`ang`a, who became one of the most famous Arathi charismatic figures, had a dramatic experience in 1926 after his involvement in a bout of drunkenness from which he became incapacitated for several days. During his illness, he claimed that God revealed himself in a dream calling him to a new and active spiritual life. After this initial call experience in 1926, Ng`ang`a engaged in a spiritual preparation, a retreat which took him into seclusion for a period of three years. While in seclusion, he abstained from normal life and devoted himself to prayer, meditation, fasting, and intensive bible study. Emerging from this spiritual retreat, he began preaching in the villages near his home.

IV. RELIGIOUS WORLDVIEW OF THE AICs

The AICs hold tenaciously to the Bible as the source of all their knowledge. The centrality of God, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit and a myriad of angels are upheld in their belief systems. Many AICs attribute immense significance to the role of innumerable angels in their church life and worship. Angels occupy a conspicuous place as mediators and intermediaries between the human and the supersensible world. However, the number and significance of angels vary from one group to another. AICs' beliefs are of immense significance to members as they lie behind the praxis, rituals, worship, membership and decisions of the church. Each

⁴⁷⁹ HOEHLER-FATTON, *Women of Fire and Spirit*, p. 19.

of them has a distinctive doctrinal trust, to them nothing is practiced which is not derived or cannot be located within Biblical locus.

The AICs demonstrate a pragmatic approach to Christian life through their prayer rituals. In fact, prayer forms the core of their spirituality. The AIC belief systems should also be understood in light of their respective socio-cultural contexts. Belief in spiritual agency remains a cornerstone of the AICs' worldview, a worldview that incorporates both this-worldly and other-worldly orientations. Special emphasis and attention is placed on spiritual healing, prophecy, visions and dreams, trance, exorcism. A feature germane to AIC worldview is in the acquisition, retention and manipulation of spiritual power to conquer the myriad of "evil" forces that populate the world around them. Members accept the traditional explanation for diseases, illnesses, and misfortunes but jettison the *modus operandi* of traditional healing. Through effectual prayers and elaborate ritual action, members attract the attention, power and action of the benevolent forces (God, Jesus Christ, Holy Spirit and the angelic forces) against the malicious, evil forces that parade the cosmos. This alternate methodology in dealing with existential problems explains why the AICs engaged in iconoclastic activities especially at their earlier stages of growth. The tenacity with which the Zionist, Aladura, Roho hold and engage these ritual activities, suggests why they are often accused of incorporating traditional Zulu, Yoruba and Kikuyu cosmological ideas into their Christian thought patterns.

The AICs draw from these cosmologies in such a way that they locate all features within the locus of the Bible and not as antithesis to it. In locating the Bible as the foundation of all their beliefs and mode of worship, the AICs vehemently refuse any connecting nexus with traditional religion. Their affinity and compatibility with indigenous ethereality is perhaps indicative of why they have remained very pervasive. Polygyny is tolerated but not encouraged by most AICs. Most founders and leaders have been known to marry more than one wife, and thus enjoin their followers as long as they have the material capability. Mango's marital history has it that he was married to four wives prior to his conversion experience. Consequently, Mango embraced the monogamous ideal, establishing a model that all subsequent Roho officials were expected to emulate. Dietary prescriptions and prohibitions are similar in most of the AICs. Pork meat, all kinds of alcoholic beverages, drugs, tobacco and cigarettes are strictly forbidden to its members.

V. RITUAL DIMENSION

The AICs offer a celebrative religion and engage a prodigious use of ritual symbols. Music, drumming, dancing characterize liturgical systems. The appropriation of spiritual songs, hymns and sacred language as a revelatory medium is central to the ethos and rhetoric of the AICs. Special esoteric and liturgical language is a feature common to the Roho, CCC, C&S, and CLA. For the Roho it is called Dhoroho (language of the Spirit). Spiritual hymns and songs are revealed to the church through the founder, prophets and prophetesses. While some of the AICs combine hymns from mission and other churches, the CCC, Roho and Zionist hymn repertoire is replete with revealed hymns. Although the C&S and CLA provide evidences of revealed songs, they have their hymn repertory developed directly within the structural guidelines and style of the western, mainline churches' hymnals.

All CCC hymns and songs contained in their hymnbook are believed to have been revealed to, or channeled through certain individuals such as the Pastor-Founder, prophets and prophetesses from a divine source, that is, under the influence of the "Holy Spirit". This represents the basic wellspring from which CCC hymn repertory developed. Such songs emerge especially when the prophets and prophetesses experience a state of vision or trance.

A feature prevalent in CCC hymnal repertory is the appropriation and rendering of words/phrases in esoteric "spiritual" language such as *Jerih mo ya mah; Yah rah Sarah Yah rah Samahtah; Yah rah man Hi Yah rah man; Yagol lolah Mariyanga rih yeh; Yah-Kirah-hihi-jah; Zevah Riyah, Zava Raye e.*⁴⁸⁰

The use of concrete objects occupies a very fundamental place in their cosmology and praxis. Some of the ritual objects which are prominent in the ritual life of the AICs include consecrated water, candles, perfumes, incense, palm fronds, hand bells, staffs, spears and consecrated oil. Others are girdles, crosses, sacred numerology, invocation of psalms, and the appropriation of esoteric language in prayer and hymns repertoire. The amaZioni refer to their staff literally as isiKhali (a weapon). Sikhali (spear or staff) made of brass and wood are common symbols of power used by the jopolo (white-robe members of the AICs such as the amaZioni, Roho and Arathi) to ward off demons and evil forces. In Aladura churches, Ida

⁴⁸⁰ See, *Orin Isipaya Mimo lati enu awon Woli Oluwa*, Yoruba and English Combined Edition (Ketu-Lagos: Celestial Church of Christ International Headquarters, n.d.).

(palm fronds) symbolizes the spiritual sword. The belief in the use and efficacy of sanctified water is very rife in the ritual life of the AICs. Sanctified water is significant for therapeutic and prophylactic functions, and it assumes a potent force and symbol for purification and for chasing away benevolent spirits. Symbolism of color and numbers plays a crucial part and varies from one AIC to another.

Most AICs are easily distinguished from other churches by the spiritual regalia worn by members during church services or other rituals, although the color of spiritual garments vary from one group to another. The collective identity of the amaZioni is partly expressed by the symbolism of their white garments. The CCC recommends and uses white garments (soutane or cloth of the spirit) for its members and prohibits any apparel made of black and red except on professional grounds. The use of white soutane symbolizes the outward purity of members as a projection of the inner purity and sanctity. The relationship between white and purity is derived from the fact that “white” in most traditional African cultures represents goodness, purity and life. When the soutane or white uniform is worn, members are required to go barefooted, both within and outside the church precincts. The Arathi (Wakorino) in Kenya are also noted for the long white robes and white turbans worn by their members. However, the CLA and C&S use white garments in addition to colored garments and the requirement to go barefoot may only apply within the church but not outside. Other colors are, however, also worn by some of the amaZioni. Sundkler mentions green, yellow and buff or sackcloth as being worn by Zionists.⁴⁸¹ In Soweto, yellow and green are worn but not black.⁴⁸² Green, blue, yellow, and occasionally red are worn by Shona Zionists.⁴⁸³ There are also examples of newer Zionist churches that wear other colors than white. White is seldom worn as the main symbolic color by the emaJerikho (Church of Jericho) in Swaziland, also known as “red-dressed Zionists”.⁴⁸⁴ The red garment of the emaJerikho relates to their claim to possess a special power with which to fight malevolent forces. Red is however avoided by the older generation of Swazi Zionists. Color symbolism also applies to other concrete objects such as candles. The color and number of

⁴⁸¹ SUNDKLER, *Bantu Prophets*, p. 213.

⁴⁸² WEST, *Bishops and Prophets*, p. 177.

⁴⁸³ M.L. DANEEL, *Old and New in Southern Shona Independent Churches*, vol. I (The Hague: Mouton, 1974), 164

⁴⁸⁴ See A. FOGELQVIST, *The Red-Dressed Zionists: Symbols of Power in a Swazi Independent Church* (Uppsala: Uppsala Research Reports in Cultural Anthropology, 1986).

candles used for a specific ritual varies from one group to another. The CCC insists on white candles only while other colors of candles are used in the C&S, CLA and CAC. As ritual symbols help members to focalize prayer to and attention on the benevolent powers, they are frequently employed and given symbolic meanings in their ritual activities.

VI. CONSTRUCTION AND APPROPRIATION OF RITUAL SPACE

Sacred space among the AICs transcends the traditional church building of the mission churches. Mountains, rivers, and groves have been set aside and transformed into holy grounds where rituals are re-enacted. The phenomenon of a sacred city is a common feature of several AICs. Shembe established the Zion Centre on a holy mountain, the Ekuphakameni—near Durban, and another sacred village, the Inhlangakazi, both to which followers and non-adherents flock for festivals, healing and the rejuvenation of spiritual power. The earlier hosts the great July Festival, while the latter is where the January Feast of the Tabernacles usually takes place. Ogere, Oshitelu's hometown was the divine choice for the CLA. Ogere, which provides the heavenly charter of the holy city, has become the centre for the commemoration of the annual Mount Taborah Festival. Imeko, the hometown of Oschoffa hosts the "Celestial City" or "New Jerusalem" on earth. His mausoleum at the Celestial City has been set aside as "holy ground" and a place of annual pilgrimages by members and non-members alike. The burial ground of late AIC founders usually transforms into a "sacred arena". The Wakkerstroom (Rapid Stream) remains the "Jordan" of Zulu Zionism to date, and represents the "source of the living waters". As shown above, soon after Mango's demise, Roho adherents began honoring Musanda as hallowed ground. The Joroho converge annually on Ruwe and Masanda for the Sikunuu mar Raper (Celebration of Remembrance) to worship and celebrate the bravery of their martyrs in the 1934 mach. These sacred sites also become their "New Jerusalem" and "new home". Roho members embrace Musanda as a place of earthly power but also as a place of familiarity, love and comfort. Phrases such as Musanda dalawa (Musanda our home) and dala maler, dala mar Lera (holy home, home of love), which frequently pepper the hymns, prayers, and testimonies offered during this festival, carry a poignant multivocal resonance.⁴⁸⁵ The lyrics (songs) make plain the centrality of Musanda in Roho piety. The Joroho established rites that reinforce the sanctity of

⁴⁸⁵ HOEHLER-FATTON, *Women of Fire and Spirit*, p. 133.

Musanda and constructed permanent graves for Roho pioneers in the vicinity.

AICs typify rituals of passage—birth, baptism, marriage, anointing, death and burial—to create rigid and valid renewal in the life cycle. There are also rites associated with major festivals, seasonal changes, individual achievements, and sanctity in the case of women. The symbolism and re-enactment of these rituals resonates largely with respective traditional religious and cultural worldviews, although recourse is made to the Bible. Ritual space within the AICs is in flux and members have unlimited access as prophets/prophetesses are in attendance to diagnose and explain misfortunes, existential problems, while at the same time predicting, controlling and procuring spiritual remedies for members and other clients.

VII. ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

The AICs vary in their organizational systems depending on the extent of their local appeal and the demographic and cultural composition of their membership. The hierarchical structures are usually very complex with specific functions taken charge by prophets, prophetesses, visioners, dreamers, elders, teachers and other functionaries. CCC organization is structured around the centralized authority of the Pastor (Founder) or leader. As both the spiritual and administrative head of the church, the Pastor has unchallengeable authority on all matters, and legitimates this authority through his personal charisma. His position remains the constant reference point of the church as he occupies the apex of the church hierarchical structure. The titles “Reverend, Pastor, Prophet and Founder” were vested on the personality of Oschoffa from the incipience of the CCC, thus exhibiting the inter-mix of both charismatic authority and a bureaucratic priesthood. He exercised the dual rights of “chief priest” and “prophet” throughout his life.

The administrative and hierarchical structures, introduced during the lifetime of the Pastor-Founder, functioned side by side; though the Pastor-Founder is seen to have the ultimate and unchallengeable authority in all matters affecting the church. Most founders and leaders of the AICs, through their charisma, play these spiritual and administrative roles in addition to their father-figure status. As far as the Joroho are concerned, the sacrifices of the early Roho community at Musanda are salvific. In the person of Mango, “God fulfilled his promise to provide Africans with a saviour of their own”. The internal organization of the AICs also provides a complex hierarchical structure that varies from group to group and according to the respective ranking systems. The different ranks within the

hierarchy are clearly distinguished by their robes and regalia. The role of prophets, prophetesses, visioners, and dreamers is very central in AIC ritual systems as they “explain, predict and control” events. Their ability to prognosticate future events and provide a panacea for existential problems bears resonance to the functions of isangoma, ajuoke, babalawo (diviners and healers) in Zulu, Kikuyu and Yoruba cosmology. In both religious worldviews the prophet/prophetess/ healer and the traditional healer/diviner is a pivotal force for order and rapprochement between the human and the super sensible cosmos.

VIII. AICS IN GLOBAL CONTEXTS

The AICs emerged in specific geo-cultural milieus, with each context largely shaping its worldview. However, as each group started to witness vertical and horizontal growth, they also began to transcend the immediate geo-ethnic and cultural boundaries within which they were born and nurtured. The amaZioni spread beyond the Zulu to the Shona and the Swazi, as well as to other ethnic groups in southern Africa. The Roho and Arathi churches made footprints in Kikuyu and Luo regions and beyond to other parts of East Africa. The Aladura, which had its origin in western Nigeria, made inroads into other parts of Nigeria, the West and central African sub-regions. There has been a growing internationalization of some AICs as they use their strategies of evangelism to reach out beyond their local into global contexts. Since the 1960s, the Aladura churches have planted branches in Europe, America and other parts of the world. More than the Roho and Zionists, the membership structure of the Aladura churches is relatively mixed with the non-Yoruba membership forming a remarkable proportion.

The AICs have also been involved in local, regional, national and intercontinental ecumenical networks. The Aladura churches are affiliated to national ecumenical bodies such as the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), and the Christian Council of Nigeria (CCN) and have founded the Nigerian Association of Aladura Churches (NAAC). On a the continental level, most AICs including the Aladura, Zionist and Roho are members of the Organization of African Independent Churches (OAIC). Through association with worldwide ecumenical movements such as the World Council of Churches (WCC), several well-established AICs have attempted to become international in outlook. The CLA was admitted into the WCC in 1975. In 1957, the Zionists came under a national umbrella, the Zion Combination Churches in South Africa.

This cryptic account does little justice to what happened, but highlights how the youth posed a subversion to the mission churches within the era of decolonization. Around North-West Igboland alone, over fifty charismatic groups were formed between 1974 and 1989. These young people evangelized Africa with a home-grown spirituality which was beyond mere adaptation.

Their impact was to challenge the mission churches to either allow the young people more roles in the churches, permit charismatic activities or risk the exodus of young people and women to Pentecostal fellowships. Initially these young evangelists stayed in their churches and met to share fellowship but later, some founded churches specializing in evangelism or deliverance or intercession while a few remained as ecumenical fellowships. Most secondary schools and all universities have charismatic fellowships comprising of young people in various denominations.⁴⁸⁶

Finally, this is another example of the cycles of charismatic revivals that became a part of African Christianity, right from the days of Vita Kimpa. Each cycle moved the church forward in a new direction and stamped with a new character, betraying a certain sense of continuity with the traditional past, embedding African Christianity into the deep structure of all African traditional religions in spite of varieties of names and symbols. Charismatism has been the strongest instrument of church growth in Africa since the 1970s. Outside the case study area, youths were most prominent in creating this form of challenge in Zambia, Malawi, Ghana, Tanzania, Liberia, Kenya, Ivory Coast, Uganda and more. This cameo also provides us with a glimpse into the birth of born-again people who are holding the cutting edge and have been catalysts in transforming the face of Christianity in Africa.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the core argument in this chapter is that the prophetic movement, revivals and other forms of charismatic religiosity were

⁴⁸⁶ Okafor lives in Enugu and serves as a priest of the Anglican Church. Some of the entries in his diary can be found in a good account of the those heady days by a participant, Frances BOLTON, *And We Beheld His Glory: A Personal Account of the Revival in Eastern Nigeria in 1970-71*, London: Christ the King Publishers, 1992. This section relies much on i.) O.U. KALU, "Passive Revolution and Its Saboteurs: African Christian Initiative in the Era of Decolonization" (Currents in World Christianity, Faculty of Divinity, University of Cambridge, Position Paper no.134, 2000); ii) O.U. KALU, *Embattled Gods: Christianization of Igboland, 1841-1991* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2003).

appropriated by Africans to establish a charismatic spirituality that would define African response to the gospel: at once conservative, evangelical, with an emphasis on the centrality of the Bible, interpreted without Western intellectual gymnastics, but with simplicity and immediacy. It is a Christianity with a vibrant liturgy with songs, music and dance, and orality; under indigenous leadership; eschewing the philosophical aridity; addressing problems raised within the interior of the primal worldview; negative about indigenous religions yet emphasizing miracles, vision, dreams and healing.

