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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Religious Movements to the Rescue in Transit? Exploring the role of the Church of Pentecost in the lives of Ghanaian Immigrants in Istanbul

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ABSTRACT: This exploratory article uses qualitative data to critically document how social networks developed around the Church of Pentecost (CoP) Istanbul, and how the ensuing social capital accumulation has somewhat played significant roles in the lives of Ghanaian immigrants in a transit environment, Istanbul (Turkey). The paper argues that with immigrants caught within webs of unreceptive and strict legal environments, socio-economic, moral, psychological, identity, and spiritual struggles in the host country, these Churches, such as the CoP Istanbul, have somewhat become crucial resource pools that immigrants, be they irregular, regular or so-called 'transit migrants' and asylum-seekers, draw on to provide solutions to these quotidian existential problems. The findings documented herein enrich the African Diaspora and religious movements' literature, illuminating how these movements shape immigrants' lives in transit destinations like Turkey.

KEYWORDS: Ghanaian immigrants, Istanbul, religious movements, social networks, transit

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1. Introduction

Since the 1980s Turkey has increasingly witnessed a new wave of migration from ethnically and religiously diverse sources, both close to Turkey and as far afield as Africa and Asia (İçduygu, 2004; cf. De Clerck 2013) — coming to or passing through (in transit) — thus leading to a new field of study regarding immigration to Turkey (Tolay 2012). One can easily recognise the visibility of foreigners in places like Istanbul, Antalya and the like, coming from Western and Eastern Europe, Middle East, Asia and Africa (Düvell 2014). Spurred by economic growth and relative political stability over the years (Ibid.), geographical location and implementation of liberalisation policies (İçduygu and Biehl 2009), Turkey, a mass emigrant country since the 1960s, has become both a sending, receiving and transit country for the so-called ‘economic’ migrants, asylum-seekers and refugees over the last three-and-a-half decades (Brewer and Yüksek 2006; Düvell 2014; İçduygu and Biehl 2009; İçduygu 2003).

Since the mid-1990s Turkey has witnessed a marked increase in the number of sub-Saharan African (SSA) immigrants¹ arriving in the country as irregular, regular or transit migrants and asylum-seekers (Brewer and Yüksek 2006; Yüksek and Brewer 2011). However, SSA immigrants’ presence in Turkey is under-explored and/or has escaped the attention of researchers and policymakers over the years as scholars have tended to focus on migrants from Turkey’s neighbours such as Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, Greece, the former Soviet Union (De Clerck 2013). As such, there is a paucity of in-depth immigration scholarship on the daily experiences, living conditions and concrete livelihood strategies of SSA immigrants in Turkey. In particular, there is a dearth of research on the role of religion in migrant lives. This is especially true for Christian religions, including the Pentecostal churches the focus of this research. Stringent and continual changes in migration laws and policies in Turkey preclude asylum-seekers, irregular and transit migrants from full and easy access to economic opportunities and public services (Brewer and Yüksek 2006). Faced with the unreceptive nature of the host country, coupled with socio-economic, moral, psychological and spiritual problems, religious movements fill these gaps in the lives of the immigrants. Given that Churches (such as Istanbul Interparish Migrants’ Programme, Greek Orthodox Church, Dutch Union Church, Catholic Church, migrants’ Churches, among others), together with (international) non-governmental organisations (NGOs), are the main providers of social services for immigrants in Turkey (Brewer and Yüksek 2006; Leman 2007; Ozcurumez and Senses 2015; Suter 2012),² research analysing their role in immigrants’ daily-lived experiences is needed. This exploratory article thus seeks to contribute to the recent growing scholarly works on religious movements (religion) and migrants’ social networks dynamics in Turkey, focusing on its role as a transit nation (see, e.g., Akcapar 2007, 2009; Leman 2007; Wissink and Mazzucato 2017; Suter 2012).

This article is exploratory, focusing on the formation of the Church of Pentecost (CoP) Istanbul and the accompanying formation of social networks. Accordingly, the analysis evaluates the role of social capital accumulated through association with the CoP focusing on its use by migrants in transit. Following this introduction, section 2 provides an overview of Ghanaians, SSA immigrants and religious context in Istanbul, Turkey. Section 3 briefly situates this work within migration and African Christian Diaspora literature; it then looks at the concept of social networks for this analysis. Section 4 details the research methodology. Section 5 contains the research findings and discussions, while the concluding remarks appear in the final section.

¹ This paper does not seek to categorise people on the move across space into any rigid framework and refer to all these categories as ‘immigrants’ because these groupings are highly fluid and mutable throughout the migration process (see Düvell 2012; Fait 2013).

² These services are often limited and overstretched as the organisations lack the necessary financial and human resources to absorb the ever-increasing needs of the migrants (Ozcurumez and Senses 2015).

2. Setting the Context: Ghanaians, sub-Saharan African Immigrants and religious make-up in Istanbul, Turkey

Turkey is witnessing an increasing influx of immigrants from a diverse range of nations. The latest data from the Turkish Directorate General of Migration Management shows that there are more than 4.7 million foreign nationals present in Turkey, 3.6 million of whom are international protection seekers. The majority of these asylum-seekers are Syrians (3,576,344 individuals), who are granted the temporary protection status with somewhat minimum access to basic services (IOM 2020).

Migrants are located across the country, in diverse regions and particular urban constituencies (for details on migration flows to and from Turkey, see Düvell 2014). And for the past three decades, many Africans have come to or passed through Turkey either (ir)regularly, as asylum-seekers and transit migrants, with the majority residing in Istanbul (Brewer and Yüксеker 2006; Şaul 2014).

The current influx of SSA migrants into Turkey could be explored through several lenses: recent shift in the metropolises-colonies migration pattern which saw unparalleled surge in African migration to the so-called new (non-traditional) areas (Adogame 2013; De Clerck 2015); Turkey's current foreign policy measures — e.g., the so-called 'Opening up to Africa Policy' adopted in 1998 (Fait 2013; Şaul 2014); recent economic growth spurts in SSA regions, which Turkey sees as ripe for economic, diplomatic and strategic engagement (Şaul 2014); and the geographical location of the country which makes it a central node for the flows of millions of immigrants coming to and passing through its territories (Brewer and Yüксеker 2006; İçduygu and Biehl 2009). Given the vast and mountainous territories bordering Iran and Iraq, it is difficult and sometimes impossible to control the inflows of irregular migrants into the country for either permanent stay and/or as a transit for onward migration to Western Europe (Fait 2013).

Thus, Turkey has become a transit country, hosting thousands of transit migrants (Düvell 2012; Fait 2013). With the closure of the Maghreb routes in recent years and securitisation of Europe (the so-called creation of "Fortress Europe" [Düvell 2012, 418; Akcapar 2009]) coupled with stringent and changing migration policies, many people on the move across space are now using Turkey as a transit or a destination country (see İçduygu and Aksel 2012). European states have responded to continual irregular immigration in the Mediterranean by intensifying border policing of those borders since the 1990s (Lutterbeck 2006), and with the current securitisation and externalisation of EU migration control (Yüксеker and Brewer 2011). In this framework, with the externalisation of EU migration control (Şaul 2014) to countries like Turkey to curb the inflows of irregular migrants to Europe means that those people who wanted to use Turkey as a stepping-stone have no other option but to stay put.

The conditions in the host nation also contribute to the invention of the transit migration discourse. With an exception to the current Syrian refugee crisis, the strict legal context concerning migration and the asylum process in Turkey prevents the legal permanency of migrants as the country only grants refugee status to asylum-seekers from Europe due to the Turkish migration, settlement and citizenship regime and because Turkey still maintains the 1951 Geneva Convention's geographic limitation relating to the status of refugees. Therefore, individuals from nations other than Europe who apply for asylum in Turkey are only considered for temporary asylum, and thus can reside in Turkey only until being resettled to a third country (Brewer and Yüксеker 2006; 2014; İçduygu 2003). Notably, it is the migration policies in the 'perceived' destination countries that contribute to the emergence and construction of transit migration discourse (Düvell 2012,422). Transit migration is thus a fuzzy and often highly politicised notion. Perceptions and aspirations change during the migration process as shown by recent research on SSA immigrants in Istanbul (De Clerck 2015; Fait 2015; Schapendonk 2013).

There are no official figures anywhere — in the literature, migration or demographic database, policy documents — on the number of African immigrants, particularly SSA immigrants in Istanbul (Schapendonk 2013; Şaul 2014). Şaul (as quoted in Ghosh 2013) estimated that at least 50,000 Africans were living in Turkey, mostly in Istanbul; of these, one-third came from SSA and the rest from North Africa. Şaul (2014,149) documented that migrants from West and Central African Anglophone and Francophone countries amounted to about 35, 000 living in Istanbul in 2012. Of these, about 25, 000 came from Senegal and 5, 000 from Nigeria. About 1,000 immigrants are from Cameroon and the Democratic Republic of Congo, with the Gambia, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire, Togo, Burkina Faso, Mauritania, and Central African Republic also registering smaller but noticeable number of immigrants.

Though the presence of SSA immigrants is visible and pronounced (Saul as quoted in Ghosh 2013), they are often considered by some policymakers and academe as transit migrants, not permanent migrants that warrant policy attention (cf. De Clerck 2013). In part as a result, SSA immigrants live in deplorable conditions: in poor environments and houses, they struggle with getting employment, face backlash, discrimination and prejudice from the host society, and have difficulties in accessing healthcare and education (Brewer and Yüксеker 2006), with many chasing few jobs, mostly in the 'shadow economy.' However, there are few SSA immigrants with Turkish citizenship and regular permit of stay. These immigrants own shops and businesses, engage in export-import services, offer language translation services, among others, thus contributing meaningfully to the development of the Turkish economy (see, e.g., Brewer and Yüксеker 2006; De Clerck 2015; Fait 2015; Schapendonk 2013; Şaul as quoted in Ghosh 2013).

While immigrants from West Africa like Nigeria and Ghana have stronger social networks in Istanbul and their home country to draw on than other SSA immigrants (Brewer and Yüксеker, 2006; Fait, 2013), the majority of SSA immigrants in general lack the necessary social networks and social capital established migrant communities possess in Istanbul. In particular, one of the areas around which these networks revolve in the host community is the (migrants') Church (Brewer and Yüксеker 2006; Suter 2012).

Turkey, particularly Istanbul, is a religiously plural country with a somewhat high degree of tolerance among the various religions. It has a total population of 80,274,604 million in mid-2016: about 99% is officially Muslim, with Sunnis constituting the majority. The government officially recognises only three minority religious communities: Greek Orthodox Christians, Armenian Orthodox Christians and Jews. However, this is not the complete picture of the religious configuration of the country as there are many other Muslim and Christian minority religious communities. Istanbul and other large cities host several other religious groups with thousands of members like the Baha'is, Syrian Orthodox (Syriac) Christians, Roman Catholics, Protestants, among others (UDS 2004). Although the country's constitution allows for freedom of religious worship, the government continues to use laws to regulate religious building zoning, gatherings and meetings of minority religious groups like the Protestants, Baha'is, Jehovah's Witnesses, and closing down illegal churches (for details, see UDS 2004). Straddling Europe and Asia across the Bosphorus Strait, Istanbul is a multi-religious city dotted with many Churches and mosques with a relatively high degree of tolerance among the various religions throughout the city.

Apart from established Churches, many registered and unregistered Pentecostal, neo-Pentecostal or Evangelical Churches have mushroomed in Istanbul in recent years — contributing to a religiously diverse city — with some of these Churches having either a transient or prolonged period of existence. These movements were either established among the diasporas, and then spread to the migrants' home regions, they came from Africa and established branches in the diasporas, or they were established in the diaspora and then established links with their parent Churches in the sending country (cf. van Dijk 1997). On the one hand, Turkish or other foreign nationals establish some of these Churches in Istanbul and then attract Turks, SSA immigrants, and other nationals. On the other hand, sub-Saharan Africans establish them and then attract clientele from both

Africans and non-Africans and at times SSA immigrants or particular nationals dominate the socio-cultural composition of these Churches. This paper is, however, concerned chiefly with one of the newly founded classical Pentecostal Churches in Istanbul, the CoP Istanbul.³

3. Churches, Migration and African Diaspora

There is a growing literature on how religious movements shape African diasporas (Adogame 2004, 2013; Daswani 2010; Sabar 2004; van Dijk 1997), which was hitherto neglected in migration studies and other social science disciplines. As Adogame (2013, viii) rightly observes: “While religion has remained a constant identity variable in African diaspora communities, the historiography of new African diaspora and migration has often largely neglected this religious ferment.” African immigrants have carried with them traits of their religious and cultural identities to the new destination. Since the 1990s African Christian Communities have grown, especially in the European and North American diaspora. They play a noted role in the lives of immigrants in these new geo-cultural settings (Adogame 2013). As Adogame further documents:

African-led churches have come to represent a very significant factor in the contemporary life of the new African diaspora in Europe and the United States. Beginning in the 1920s, when they first appeared in Great Britain, they have increasingly made their presence known and felt in European and American religious landscapes. The Nigerian and Ghanaian Christian initiatives represent two of the largest, most widespread [...] (2013,62).

The Aladura movement that emerged in the 1920s-1930s in Western Nigeria blazed the trail for contemporary religious movements and African diasporas’ dynamics. Aladura, which derives from Yoruba, ‘al adua’ meaning ‘the praying people’ or ‘owners of prayers,’ made its debut in London in 1964 and then spread to other areas in the UK, Europe and the United States (Adogame 2004, 2013, 493, 67 ff.), spatially dominating the African religious configuration in Europe for decades. However, the 1980s and 1990s, for example, saw the upsurge of (African) Pentecostal movements and consequent domination of the ‘African religious geography’ in Europe (Adogame 2004,500; Daswani 2010; cf. Gifford 1994; van Dijk 2004). One of the probable rationales behind this occurrence lies in what Adogame (2004,500) posits as the ‘novel repackaging of their religious messages and the aggressive preoccupation with such issues as prosperity, employment and financial breakthrough.’ The anxieties of the immigrants for economic success, particularly amongst the youth, easily draw them to these movements.

Religion and its institutions play significant roles in the daily-lived experiences of migrants (see Hagan and Ebaugh 2003; Hirschman 2004). Religious institutions often play key roles in all stages of migrants’ journey and settlement in the new society. Hagan and Ebaugh (2003,1145) work, for example, explores the Pentecostal Maya community in Guatemala and Texas, showing the role of religion in six stages of the migration process: “1) decisionmaking; 2) preparing for the trip; 3) the journey; 4) the arrival; 5) the role of the ethnic church in immigrant settlement; and 6) the development of transnational linkages.”

Churches (religious institutions) play a substantial role in the lives of immigrants in the receiving country (Adogame 2013; Suter 2012), such as helping in the formation of identity and sense of belonging, providing moral and spiritual support, performing socio-economic and political functions and facilitating migration process and receiving migrants into their personalistic networks, both at home and abroad (see Adedoyin et al.

³ Focusing on Pentecostalism does not imply that mainstream churches or Islamic movements are not salient, but rather due to the current proliferation of these movements and their influence on migration discourse.

216; Adogame 2004; Mazzucato 2007; Sabar 2004; van Dijk 1997, 2004). Yet, these movements have also been criticised on the grounds of acting as a barrier to assimilation and integration of immigrants into the host community, of engaging in unlawful activities, using proselytisation and material gifts for migrants' conversion, and extortion against members (Adogame 2004; Brewer and Yüксеker 2006; Suter 2012; van Dijk 2004).

Changing immigration laws, policies and strategies that depend chiefly on current socio-political problems, national-security issues and economic situations in the host countries largely help in understanding and situating the resilience of these movements and how they shape immigrants' lives in the African communities in the receiving country (Adogame 2013). Here, given Turkey's dynamic and hostile socio-political environment, social networks and social capital are important for immigrants' survival (Akcapar 2009).

3.1 Migrants' social network and social capital in a transit destination

Network research has received considerable attention across the physical and social sciences fields of study since the last decade (Borgatti et al. 2009). One of the most influential ideas in the social sciences about social network theory is the 'notion that individuals are embedded in thick webs of social relations and interactions' (Ibid. 892; see also Wasserman and Faust 1994,3; Granovetter 1990,15). In essence, the social network theory has become an invaluable reservoir for many social scientists to draw on to provide explanations for a myriad of social phenomena in many social science disciplines (Borgatti et al. 2009). In the field of migration studies, notwithstanding its recent burgeoning interest and popularity, social network is not new in international migration research as analysts studied "the process of chain migration and the role played by kin and friends in providing information and facilitating migration" in the 1960s and 1970s (Boyd 1989,639).

Researchers have, over the years, underscored the importance of migrant networks, the social structures that connect migrants, be they through kin, friendship, association, religious movements or community ties, in international migration flows (see MacDonald and MacDonald 1964). However, it is only recently that international migration discourse incorporated concepts such as social networks and social capital (Koser 1997), with Douglas Massey and his colleagues being the first to make connection between migrants' social networks and social capital in their seminal work on Mexicans and American migration dynamics (Massey et al. 1987). This work, like other scholarship on this subject, highlighted exclusively the positive attributes of social capital in supporting the migration process (Pathirage and Collyer 2011; cf. Portes 1998). Yet, there have been critical views of the concept's functioning and importance. Portes (1998,15), for example, identified four negative consequences of social capital: "exclusion of outsiders, excess claims on group members, restrictions on individual freedoms, and downward leveling norms." Social capital is considered here as "the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition" (Bourdieu 1985,248). Bourdieu's treatment of the concept, as Portes documents, is instrumental in that it focuses

on the benefits accruing to individuals by virtue of participation in groups and on the deliberate construction of sociability for the purpose of creating this resource.' [...] Thus, 'social networks are not a natural given and must be constructed through investment strategies oriented to the institutionalization of group relations, usable as a reliable source of other benefits (Portes 1998,3-4)

Recent migration literature focuses on the significance of social networks in the sending and receiving country (Boyd 1989; Poros 2011), although there is still a dearth of scholarship on the role of social networks and social capital in the lives of migrants in transit destinations (Akcapar 2009). Notably, transit countries vary

from sending-receiving contexts in which migrants' social networks are often studied due to their uncertain and often volatile institutional and socio-political environments in question (for details, see Düvell 2012; Wissink and Mazzucato 2017). Turkey (Istanbul), for legal and social reasons, has been hostile to migrants who have largely treated the nation as a transit country (see Wissink and Mazzucato 2017). This has made settlement and forming community difficult. One bright spot where social networks revolve and social capital accumulates in the host community has been the (migrants') Church (Akcapar 2009; Brewer and Yüксеker 2006; Poros 2011; Suter 2012).

As indicated earlier, this paper uses a case study of Ghanaians in Istanbul to critically discuss the role of social networks, which revolve around the CoP Istanbul and the ensuing social capital accumulation among immigrants. These networks are key for immigrants in finding a job and housing, moving to a particular destination, accessing health services, information and documents in the host community. Yet, it is important to document here that social capital is often an active, dynamic and fragile thing that is not always guaranteed (Pathirage and Collyer 2011); and not the typical representation of it as a static phenomenon (Pathirage and Collyer 2011; Schapendonk 2014). More importantly, in a transit and dynamic environment like Turkey, social capital is a process and social networks do not always produce desired positive consequences (cf. Akcapar 2009; Pathirage and Collyer 2011): due to 'critical events' that consequently affect networks (Wissink and Mazzucato 2017), scarce resources and difficulties in enforcing trust (Akcapar 2009; Suter 2012).

The church played an important role in expanding the composition of social networks; unfortunately, this had adverse effects for some immigrants. The networks around the Church are shaped by the socio-cultural composition of their members, that is whether they are composed of only migrants from the same home country or different countries, including natives. Therefore, the more diverse the socio-cultural and financial configuration of these Churches, the larger or denser the network and social capital for migrants to tap into (Suter 2012). Within this framework, before the formation of CoP Istanbul, the initial stages of social networks formation among Ghanaian Christians, as shown later, revolved around individual initiatives, limited group connections which are usually based on ethnic and religious lines, and frequenting existing Churches. The establishment of CoP Istanbul however resulted in the formation of diversified social ties within and outside the Church as the movement welcomes new members regardless of their nationality, thus creating social ties beyond race, ethnicity, gender and religious denominations. However, as the Church grew, some of the members started to feel alienated from the group, especially in leadership positions; thus somewhat mirroring Portes (1998,15) view that "the same strong ties that bring benefits to members of a group commonly enable it to bar others from access."

As illustrated earlier, though some of the Church members are beginning to get settled in Istanbul, membership is somewhat unstable, making the development of strong ties and trust building quite difficult. The homogenous nature of the movement has robbed it of denser networks and quality resources. Thus, as Suter's (2012) work reveals, Churches with multicultural configurations offer members higher chances of finding employment opportunities and/or Turkish or other marriage partners since marrying to a Turk, for example, helps you have access to Turkish institutions and social services (Brewer and Yüксеker 2006,58). In line with this is the lifespan of these Churches and members; the longer the lifespan of both actors, particularly the former, the more reliable, enforcement of trust and durable the network and vice versa (cf. Suter 2012). As shown later in the article, unlike one-man Churches, the international character of established movements like the CoP Istanbul embodies trust; it allows immigrants to tap into their transnational networks like the parent Church back home and other sister Churches in the diaspora for recognition and support. Hence, one of the most distinctive features of migrants' social networks is that they span two or more countries — transnational

networks within which they operate and the fluidity of information and support across these networks (Ado-game 2004; Boyd 1989; Poros 2011; van Dijk 1997). However, this study focuses on how this network, which has developed around the CoP Istanbul, shapes the lives of Ghanaian immigrants in the host community.

4. Methodology

The author conducted this research within the Learning for Female African Migrants (LeFamSol) project while he was a research intern at the Migration Research Centre, Istanbul from September – November 2015. LeFamSol was a curriculum development project for Female African Migrants to create a pool of human resources that can operate gender/ethnically delineated ‘Self-Help Desks.’ Hence, the findings presented herein are based on qualitative research, using conversation, semi-structured interviews, and participant observation methods to collect data.

As indicated earlier, no official data exists on the exact number of SSA immigrants in Istanbul or Turkey (Schapendonk 2013; Şaul 2014); therefore, there are no official records for the exact number of Ghanaians residing in Istanbul. It was, however, estimated that there were less than 1000 Ghanaian immigrants in Istanbul in 2014 (Şaul 2014). The majority of the Church members and therefore the research informants were young Ghanaian immigrants, with an insignificant number of other nationals. They presented a youthful demographic (legal and illegal) and leadership (cf. van Dijk 1997, 139): from mid-20s to late 40s living in precarious conditions, moving around with much ease and with aspirations of onward movement in search of better lives, thus accounting for a fluctuating membership during the year. However, many of them were trying to establish themselves in the country after several unsuccessful attempts to move on to Western Europe.

The majority of interviewees were irregular migrants. Only one of the Church members had Turkish citizenship and this member was very important to both the Church and the Ghana Community Association (GCA) because all legal issues revolve around him. Two members have student visa while three have residence permits (came with tourist visas but overstayed and then managed to follow the necessary procedures to re-enter legality). Three had applied for political asylum, and the rest came with valid visas but slipped into irregularity as they overstayed their visas.

The Ghanaian immigrants in Istanbul are, on the whole, quite educated and most are employed. All had completed junior and senior high school. They work in jobs such as factory workers, cleaners in hotels, self-employed, import-export services, housewives, amateur and professional footballers, and English tutors. Despite their income, they live in deprived neighbourhoods of high immigrant concentration and poor natives like Kumkapı, Tarlabası, Kurtuluş, Feriköy or Aksaray. Most of the new migrants who arrived in Istanbul live with the international connections that brought them there, friends already living in the city or pre-paid hotel reservations.

The research revolved around everyday ‘conversation’ with the Ghanaian immigrants (see Dotsey and Lumley-Sapanski [forthcoming]). Apart from the CoP Istanbul, which was the primary focus of this research, the researcher also visited other gateways way like the Catholic Church, one charismatic Church, local migrant health centre and attended GCA meetings. The researcher spent a great deal of time conversing and socialising with Church members, elders and leaders, chatting with them after Church services and at popular spots.

Having established informal relationships and familiarity with the Church members, the researcher moved on to semi-structured interviews towards the end of the research period. Twenty-five interviews were conducted: twenty-two (9 women and 13 male) with the members of the Church and three (all male) with the Church’s leaders. The interview questions were directed towards the participants’ background, motives and

experiences both in Istanbul and with the Church.⁴ In addition, I had the chance to converse with many more members of the Church whose comments and views have shaped this study as well.

Linked to the above methods is participant observation, which helped in achieving the balance between the issues of the researcher's presence there and experience afar (Geertz 1976). Involvement in some of the daily activities of the immigrants such as Sunday Church services, bible studies, prayer sessions and healing/deliverance services gave the insights necessary to access nuances, record details of complex discourses and corroborated some noticeably dominant themes.

Here, content analysis was used to present qualitative results. This helped the researcher in grouping, comparing and examining the findings of the study.

5. The Empirical Case Study

5.1 Churches and the search for survival in Istanbul: a brief overview of The CoP Istanbul

As illustrated earlier, Istanbul is a multi-religious city dotted with many mosques and Churches. Before proceeding to the research findings and analysis, let us take a brief historical overview of the CoP Istanbul.

As of 2017, the CoP has branches in 90 countries around the globe viz.: Africa, America, South America, Europe, Asia and Australia with a global membership of approximately 3 million. As of May 19, 2017, the spread of the Church to the diaspora is briefly documented on the CoP official webpage as

[...] propelled partially by, the national economic crisis of 1983 which forced several Ghanaians, including members of the Church to seek means of subsistence abroad. Members of the Church in the Diaspora carried with them the gospel and, in due course, pioneered branches of the Church wherever they settled [...] (thecophq.org; for an initial pattern of Ghana's emigration history, see [Adogame 2013, 38-42]).

With migrants' destination no longer determined by historical and linguistic trails (Adogame 2013; De Clerck 2015), Ghanaian immigrants, like many SSA immigrants, have moved to the so-called 'non-traditional' destinations like Turkey. And to feel at home in a hostile environment, Pentecostal migrants pioneered initiatives in the host country to create a particular niche for themselves and then made contact with the parent Church in Ghana for support and recognition. Against this backdrop, this paper now turns to a brief exploration of the historical development of the CoP Istanbul.

The CoP Istanbul was founded in 2013 and then registered on May 14, 2015 as a philanthropic organisation since the laws of Turkey do not allow registration of new religious movements. Before its foundation, people started gathering in 'cell groups' scattered across the city. Under the aegis of the CoP foreign residents present in Istanbul at that time, the initial group comprised different Christian denominations, including classical Pentecostals, neo-Pentecostals and mainstream Churches.

It was during one of these 'cell groups' sessions that they received a call that apostle Gyamfi, then in Greece's Church of Pentecost, was in Tarlabaşı claiming to be directed by God and the national executives in Ghana to preach the gospel and open a new mission in Turkey. Here, the 'cell groups' started making contact with the CoP headquarters in Ghana prior to the arrival of the apostle: the headquarters in Ghana often has provided them with advice and guidance, financial, prayer, and leadership support. Before its foundation, some

⁴ For reasons of confidentiality, the names of the research participants have been anonymised.

of its members attended mainstream Churches and other existing charismatic and Pentecostal Churches founded by Turks or Nigerians. The apostle arrived at the shores of Turkey on March 11, 2014 and then lodged in Tarlabası. The first Sunday service was held at pastor Damah's premises, a Nigerian with a small congregation, in Mecidiyeköy. There were fourteen congregants, including five ordained officers from Ghana who were living in Turkey at the time. The second Sunday service was held in Taksim, with membership increasing to twenty-four.

The first presbytery meeting was held in Kurtluş in a coffee shop on March 29, 2014. Some elders and deacons living in Istanbul at that time were appointed to the leadership positions of presiding elder, general secretary, financial secretary, the treasurer and two co-opted members. It is important to note here that if an officer is ordained in Ghana, s/he carries this title with her/him to the new location. Through the help of the apostle, the newly-founded Church received donations from other sister Churches for renting the place of worship in late March and early April 2014: Cop Israel donated \$1000, Cop Italy gave €1000, and Cop UK contributed €1000. The apostle spent four weeks in Istanbul and then left for Greece on April 8, 2014. The Church started worshipping at Mecidiyeköy on June 8, 2014 until they moved to a new and spacious place near Taksim in October 2016. The movement's membership increased to 58 in September 2015, and then to about 200 regular congregants as of December 2018, with an average monthly attendance in early 2019 of 110 congregants. In its recent organisational restructuring and development, the Church seeks to provide chaplaincy services to Ghanaians in the local language (Twi); welcoming atmosphere and chaplaincy service for all nationals to worship (Pentecost International Worship Centre) in English; and local service for the Turks in the Turkish language. Apart from the chaplaincy services, the Church aims to provide spiritual fulfilment, counselling and emotional support, sense of belonging for Ghanaians who find themselves in Istanbul, and help provide physical needs to the congregants and Ghanaian community. However, the Church has faced several challenges upfront: language barrier; harsh socio-economic and legal contexts have pushed many immigrants to move on to Europe for better opportunities or live in temporal permanency; the country's laws have restricted the operations of Churches, particularly newly established ones.⁵

5.2 Research Findings and Discussions

Identity formation

Migration scholars have sought to find out how religion shapes the process of migrants' identity formation (see, e.g., van Dijk 1997). Religious movements have been instrumental in identity formation for the African diasporas. And migrant churches, for the most part, have "ethnic" features (see Ambrosini, Bonizzoni and Molli 2018). From the research, it became clear that the Church has become, apart from its religious purposes, a crucial place of formal and informal gatherings after Church services and/or prayer meetings (cf. Suter 2012). It is a place where one can meet, feel at home and chat in a relaxed manner after a 10-12 hour day of back-breaking work in the shadow economy, for five-to-six days per week. As some of my participants' document, the following views are shared by many of the Ghanaian immigrants who participated in the research:

⁵ This brief historical account of the CoP Istanbul is based on in-depth interviews with the leaders and some members of the Church in 2015 and follow-up Skype calls and emails exchange in 2016, 2017, 2018, and early 2019. These follow-ups gave me the opportunity to confirm some of the recurrent themes and notice changing trends.

‘This Church brings people from different ethnic groups in Ghana together to fellowship. We come here as one people, with no difference, to present our problems before God and thank Him for his protection. We’re all one before God. This place holds us together’ (Charles, interview, Sep. 2015).

As stated earlier, Ghanaians form the majority of the members belonging to this movement. Consequently, given that Ghanaians dominate the socio-ethnic composition of the CoP Istanbul with an insignificant number of other SSA immigrants and none white, it could be argued therefore that this movement in Istanbul has largely remained the focus of identity, community and sense of belonging in a particular context, in the main, for Ghanaian immigrants in the host community. This finding concurs with Adogame’s (2004) research on Aladura movements serving as a reference point of identity production for African migrants in the UK. Nevertheless, considering the fluidity of transnational networks of these Churches and migrants, it is difficult to fathom a specific identity formation (cf. Vertovec 2001). Ghanaian immigrants, like SSA immigrants, are complex and multifaceted individuals from different ethnic backgrounds and migration trajectories with a broad spectrum of diverse interests, who are likely to define their identity in the migration process through several identity markers. However, the Church, in this case, is just one of the markers of identity formation at a particular point in time and in a specific context.

Beyond material needs: spiritual, moral, and psychological support

Pentecostal and charismatic Churches are often noted for loud noise-making and thus often clash with locals and neighbours. Hence, they normally rent basements and (abandoned) factories for their activities. Churches that are not able to secure basements, like the CoP Istanbul, normally close all doors and windows during drumming and singing sessions to minimise the noise. The Sunday Church services usually last for four hours or more; it is the time for singing, dancing, songs ministrations, personal testimonies, preaching, healing, bible studies and teaching. The CoP Istanbul has provided spiritual, moral and psychological support to its members. The Church always prays for spiritual growth and the material success of the members. It also serves as a place for personal spiritual fortification, sign and staging post for onward migration (see Hagan and Ebaugh 2003). Members request individual special prayers during the services. Some of the participants narrated how coming to the Church helped them in their daily lives.

I benefited a lot from this Church [...], and the most important of all these is spiritual upliftment. Coming here to Church services and participate in prayer sessions with the Prayer Warriors is just wonderful and life-changing (Irene, interview, Sep. 2015).

Consistent with previous scholarships (see, e.g., Khawaja et al. 2008), the participants narrated how their beliefs in God animated through faith and prayers ease their sufferings and hope for the future (see Leman 2007). In this framework, spirituality, expressed through prayers, was used to cope with difficulties in a challenging socio-economic and political environment.

Also, the leaders always advise members to bring their problems before the Church, particularly the ‘Prayer Warriors Group,’ as illustrated below.

We can do greater things than pastors in Ghana. What's it that they can do that we can't do? Those people in Ghana who call themselves pastors, prophets, bishops, and apostles are just like us. Some of them will just squander your hard-earned money. Bring all your problems before the 'Prayer Warriors (James, Church announcement, Oct. 2015).

There is this common belief among some of the immigrants that pastors in Ghana are more powerful and/or better at a particular task than the ones in the diaspora. Hence, the leaders of the Church try as much as possible to dislodge this from the minds of the worshippers. This finding is consistent with Mazzucato's (2007) work on Ghanaian immigrants in the Netherlands in which she reveals that in times of crisis or when issues arise that warrant religious intervention and the invoking of exorcists, migrants seem to rely on the services of pastors, whom they consider powerful, to play a conciliatory role (see van Dijk 1997).

An immigrant's religion provides strong moral support to its members in the host society. It is a place for teaching and inculcating strong moral values, offering agency to its members in how to navigate the maze of Western society, which is both full of opportunities and equally can ruin one's life. As some of my informants narrate, views shared by many:

You know [...] I'm single and in my 30s. The Church kept me away from immoral acts. The teachings and preaching of the Church help me a lot in keeping my Christian faith and values (Kofi, interview, Sept. 2015).

The movement often preaches the value of upholding virtues and abhors vices; it encourages members to live good lives, for there are consequences for every action and inaction. In this context, 'good moral conduct is often likened to (economic) success' (Dotsey 2017). This scenario re-echoes one of the negative consequences of social capital documented earlier as noted by Portes' (1998): "restrictions on individual freedoms." The members' participation as a group has somewhat created demands for conformity, and thus seeks to exert some form of internal social control, preventing individual freedom. However, from field observations and conversations with the interlocutors, not all congregants adhere to the moral teachings of the Church.

Further, the Church provides psychological support to immigrants (see, e.g., Akcapar 2009; Hagan and Ebaugh 2003; Khawaja et al. 2008; Leman 2007). Hence, retreat programmes are frequently held to break curses, exorcise demons and overcome challenges in the host nation like securing a residence permit, having access to business and job opportunities. The Church gives the immigrants hope to believe that with time and patience they could have that singular honour of savouring every bit of material wealth, in that their condition is not permanent, but temporary.

As one of the pastors proclaims during one of the Sunday services, views often similarly echoed by the Church executives:

Don't worry about what you're going through now. Today you're suffering with lots of tears. But let me assure you that in the coming days you'll come here laughing. Success is yours. Receive it. I declare success into your finances, your jobs, your families and marriages. The God who brought you here will never abandon you. You'll come here tomorrow full of testimonies. In Jesus' name I prophesied. Amen! (Field note, Oct. 2015).

As documented earlier, immigrants live in a hostile environment. Consequently, African Churches like the CoP come in to carve out a particular niche for the migrants; repackaging its religious messages, particularly the so-called "prosperity gospels", to suit the needs of the migrants and creating a kind of safety net from multiple threats of the host community (see, e.g., Adogame 2004; Daswani 2010; Hirschman 2004; Sabar 2004) —

places where immigrants can put their petitions and aspirations before a Catholic and non-racial God (Adogame 2004). In this context, immigrants often find comfort in Church services during difficult times in Istanbul. On Sundays, for example, you could see them enjoying themselves — dancing and singing — and forgetting about their legal and economic problems, and living in the moment for a couple of hours (see Dotsey 2017).

Successful immigrants in the Church discourage members from embracing the deadly onward journey and to concentrate on making a success in Istanbul, Turkey. The Church leaders also discourage members who want to move on to Western Europe, saying ‘for God knows why He brought them to Turkey’. They often compare the employment situation of some of the members who moved on to those living in Turkey. Though immigrants face human rights violations, lack of employment opportunities and racial abuses, they manage to eke out a living in the shadow economy as documented earlier; this is quite difficult for some SSA immigrants to do immediately they arrive in some parts of Western Europe. However, as discovered during the research, some of the members defied the Church’s call to stay put and moved on to Western Europe.

To push home this argument, the position of these leaders is, however, quite paradoxical as some of them had already moved on to Western Europe or have aspirations for onward journey as discovered during the research. As one of the leaders stated:

I’d like to move on in the future. This environment is challenging to live in. [So, who will take your place when you move on?] You know, the CoP is not a one-man church. It’s the same for some of the former executives who moved on, and the Church didn’t collapse thereafter (Ayokoi, interview, Nov. 2015).

Indeed, as shown earlier, the CoP Istanbul is not a one-man movement. As a result, if the leader decides to move on, it will not fold-up; it will find a replacement. During the research it was revealed that some of the initial leaders who were instrumental in establishing the Church have moved on to Western Europe, but it survived thereafter; thus making it possible for the people to somewhat build trust in the Church as an institution and not its individual members. This scenario is contrary to many one-man charismatic and Pentecostal Churches that have mushroomed across Istanbul in recent years. As Suter’s (2012) research revealed, here, when the leader moves on or disappears, the Church (the social network and social capital) also disappears in the process.

Provision of social services

As indicated earlier, one of the areas around which migrants build up social networks in Istanbul is the Church (Akcapar 2009). Charismatic/Pentecostal Churches serve as a safety net for migrants. For example, during the past European economic crisis in the UK with overstretched welfare systems, the Aladura religious movements have shown great agency by redefining their social significance and extra-religious role (see Adogame 2004; cf. Sabar 2004). These are in line with what the CoP has been doing in Istanbul, though in a limited fashion. The Church sustains itself financially through monthly tithe payments, membership dues, harvest contributions and generous individual donations. The transit nature of the migrants and hostile environment of the host community put much strain on the Church in generating sufficient revenue to maintain the Church and the welfare of its members as most of its members work in precarious situations in lowly-paid jobs (Brewer and Yüksekler 2006). Consequently, most of them find it difficult to pay their monthly dues and tithes. Also, members have limited opportunities to tap into this network, given the uniform socio-cultural make-up of the movement as indicated earlier (Suter 2012). Thus, these resources are often overstretched and run thin with

time. Notwithstanding all these difficulties, the Church remains a critical resource pool for migrants to draw on.

The Church, in collaboration with the GCA, has embarked on social support programmes in helping poor members and non-members (cf. Akcapar 2009). As one of the pastors of the Church narrated, an account supported by many research participants:

The Church, together with the Ghana Community, provides food and winter clothes to the needy members and other migrants. We provide temporary accommodation to people who don't have any place to go and pay medical bills for some of them or show them affordable facilities to go to without legal constraints. We try doing our best, but we know it isn't enough. Our resources are limited (Azuringa, interview, Nov. 2015).

The inability of the members to pay their monthly tithes and necessary dues makes it difficult for the Church to raise funds. Most of these funds go into the running of Church's day-to-day activities like paying for the mission house and the rent for Church premises. As the head pastor noted:

With the constant movement of people, it poses several problems [...]; it slows the progress and development of the Church. Because most are preparing to move to another country, they tend to spend most of their time working and aren't committed to weekly activities. Aside from this, they're saving money to pay for their onward travel so aren't faithful in their tithing (Aron, personal communications, Feb. 2019).

One interesting aspect here, as observed during the research, is that most of these leaders are also working in the shadow economy for a living; hence, they do not depend for survival entirely on the offers and tithes from the Church's members. It is notable here that financial and other social obligations put a lot of strain on some of the Church's members. As one of the Church's leaders narrated, a view shared by many of my participants:

Some of the members have money, but they don't want to give it to the Church, or to rent a better place and eat good food. They'll prefer to eat junk food and sleep in rooms without heaters and then fall sick. When this happens, given that I speak Turkish fluently and has a regular document, I've to take them to hospital, and sometimes foot their hospital and medical bills. They always call me if anything happens: illness, death or legal issues (Philip, interview, Sep. 2015).

The transit and dynamic nature of the environment inhibit trust building, and financial and social investments in the Church. Transit somewhat inhibits solidarity as the temporality of stay in Istanbul and the possibility of moving on prevents the Church members from putting all their resources — emotions, financial and/or energy — into developing strong social ties and investing in institutional development, with no assurance of any reciprocal benefits (Suter 2012). In this context, given that the Church is still in its incipient stage and did not meet the necessary preconditions, such as financial sustainability, to request for the transfer of a head pastor from the parent Church in Ghana, it continues to experiment with its available resource pool of members in Istanbul in forming its leadership. This has often created bickering and confusions among some of the congregants, leading to exclusion and inclusion of members (cf. Portes 1998). Some of the members — particularly pastors who came from different denominations in Ghana and diaspora — felt being excluded from the Church's leadership, despite having contributed a lot to the founding and growth of the movement. Indeed, most of these people were not CoP members back in Ghana before joining the group in Istanbul as documented earlier on (see section 5.1). Whereas the movement is open to everyone, the Church however feels the need to

follow strict rules in recruiting only qualified and true CoP members into the leadership fold to put the movement on a sustainable footing, thus considering members from other denominations as outsiders in this regard. Yet, two of the pastors from different denominations managed to join the Church's leadership ranks towards the end of my research. This was however to the displeasure of some of the hard-core members who felt that these people might be looking to use the CoP Istanbul as a stepping-stone to launch their own religious movements. All this reaffirms Bourdieu's notion that social capital requires work not only in its activation but also in its maintenance, too (cf. Pathirage and Collyer 2011).

From the research, it became clear that the Church has become, apart from its religious purposes, a crucial place of formal and informal social gatherings after Church services and/or prayer meetings (see Suter 2012; see also the view of Ambrosini, Bonizzoni and Molli 2019). As some of the interlocutors documented, the following views are shared by many of the Ghanaian immigrants who participated in the research:

It's one of the best things that have ever happened to us. Before the formation of this Church we don't often see each other; no recognised meeting places for us. And when you happen to meet someone from Ghana you don't spend much time together like we do now. This premises is now a meeting place for Christian faithful and also an assembly point for Ghana Community Association (Aheinkum, interview, Nov. 2015).

Consequently, the Church serves as a locus for announcing current affairs (information) in Istanbul such as news about accommodation and job opportunities in various immigrants' work environments (cf. Akcapar 2009). Members are encouraged to connect their members to their networks and give information about job vacancies. During the research period, many members came out to make announcements about various issues after Church service. The Church advises members to give and share things with each other.

I just give and help others within my capacity without asking for anything in return [...] erm [...] if you want to receive, you need to learn how to give first. That's it [...] (Tungu, interview, Nov. 2015).

Don't let a member move out from this Church to borrow from an unbeliever. Give something to support the needy and your members because it's God's will. Let's help each other (Field note, Sunday service, Oct. 2015).

There was evidence generated through conversation and testimonies during Church services of members helping each other in several ways. However, the amount and quality of resources generated within a particular social network are crucial (cf. Portes 1998). Consequently, given the small and homogenous nature of the group, it somewhat lacks quality resources and information on available opportunities, such as job placements. During the research, some of my interlocutors documented that they received information and support from other sources such as GCA. Hence, members try to take advantage of the established social networks around the Church and also seek to develop new ties (cf. Adedoyin et al. 2016; Pathirage and Collyer 2011).

The Church also provides a platform and friendly environment for settling disputes, sharing life experiences and educating members on lifestyle strategies, particularly about health, nutrition and housing, during teaching and bible study sessions.

I had a problem with my former boyfriend. Thanks to the Church and GCA leaders, I was able to settle the problem (Esther, interview, Nov. 2015).

As previously stated, the majority of Ghanaian immigrants, like many SSA immigrants, are living in Istanbul irregularly. In this context, ‘illegality’ automatically equates to African; resulting in the absence of fundamental human rights and little or no legal recourse. Therefore, the CoP, in collaboration with executives of the GCA, comes in to fill this gap in settling disputes among members and/or between a member and non-member(s). These problems range from money to relationship issues. At times, as observed during the research, members lodge complaints with the Church and GCA leaders such as armed robbery and harassments, which are often beyond their capacity or jurisdiction. Yet, some members were of the view that the Church could have done much better in the provision of social services. It is also noteworthy here that most members do not expect any material benefits from the Church, considering its financial standing.

6. Concluding Remarks

This study has engaged with the overarching puzzle of exploring the roles CoP Istanbul in the daily-lived experiences of Ghanaian immigrants in a transit setting. We have seen that, for legal and social reasons, Turkey embodied a hostile environment for immigrants with particularly strict legal constraints and a blind eye policy of the state towards SSA immigrants. Consequently, NGOs and religious institutions came in to fill these gaps in the lives of the immigrants. Interdisciplinary qualitative material and the social networks theory have been intertwined in the analysis.

Contrary to the earlier scholarship that portrayed social capital as exclusively positive for its members (see, e.g., Massey et al. 1987), this work has documented some of the negative consequences — struggles, interests and limits — of the concept (Portes 1998; Suter 2012). Commenting on Bourdieu’s definition of social capital, Portes (1998:4) posits that it makes explicit that social capital is analysable into two components: “first, the social relationship itself that allows individuals to claim access to resources possessed by their associates, and second, the amount and quality of those resources”. And this research, among other things, has shown that the social capital around CoP Istanbul is small and lacks quality. This is due to various reasons: homogenous socio-cultural composition of the movement, unstable membership, scarcity of resources, irregular status of members and lack of trust among members in a highly dynamic migration environment (see Akcapar 2009). It is shown here that transit inhibits solidarity and trust building among migrants to an extent, which consequently affects the development and sustainability of the network and social capital accumulation. In essence, the issue of time and principle of reciprocity seems to be pivotal for maintaining and diversifying social connections (Suter 2012). In this context, immigrants tend to somewhat invest and build trust in the established institution, CoP Istanbul, not the individual members.

Notwithstanding these constraints and critiques, evidence has been provided through interdisciplinary qualitative techniques that the CoP Istanbul has played a critical role in the lived experiences of Ghanaian immigrants in the host community in particular with regard to their socio-economics. First, the CoP plays a critical part in providing socio-economic support — especially in an environment where existing services are expensive and at times inaccessible — like health, housing, and job search; second, it provides moral and psychological support and spiritual nourishment to withstand daily adversities in a particularly difficult environment. These findings have, to a large extent, underscored the role of the African Christian Diaspora and religious movements’ dynamics, especially in a transit context. In sum, migrants’ social networks may be more multi-faceted than previous scholarship posited, and the need to unravel them within their specific contexts exists.

There is, however, the need for further research to better understand the institutionalisation of these Pentecostal movements in transit settings. Thus, the exploratory study offers three possible areas for future research: researching how these movements contribute to integration in the host country; examining the transnational

connections of these movements and how this shapes their development and activities; and conducting a cross-country and longitudinal study mapping these movements institutionalisation and their role in refugees daily-lived experiences in transit settings, and in the diaspora in general, would be highly welcome.

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