

**JOURNEY TO FOSTERING CULTURAL IDENTITY: ARE THERE ANY ROADS  
LEADING TO THE BLACK CHURCH?  
A CASE STUDY OF THREE CHURCHES IN NOVA SCOTIA**

**by**

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I dedicate this thesis to my mother – Agnes Mopelola – who  
relinquished her dream of getting an education to resurrect my  
dream of becoming educated.

*Ìyá ni wúrà* (Mother is Gold).

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS.....</b>	<b>vi</b>
<b>ABSTRACT.....</b>	<b>vii</b>
 <b>CHAPTER ONE – INTRODUCTION</b>	
An Overview: Meaning Making and the Black Church .....	1
Purpose of the Study and Thesis Statement.....	2
Rationale for Study.....	4
Understanding the Black Experience.....	7
The Black Church: A definition.....	8
The Black Church in the Nova Scotia Context.....	9
The African United Baptist Association .....	10
The African Orthodox Church.....	12
The African Initiated Church.....	14
Context of the Study.....	17
African Religion and Spirituality.....	22
The Black Church: A “Cultural Womb”.....	25
Chapter Summary.....	27
 <b>CHAPTER TWO – LITERATURE REVIEW</b>	
An Overview: The Diverse Views of the Black Church.....	28
A Case for the Black Church.....	28
Immigration and the foundation of the Black Church.....	36
Culture, Identity and the Black Church.....	40
Education: A dimension of the Black Church.....	46
Racism and the formation of Otherness.....	55
Chapter Summary.....	59
 <b>CHAPTER THREE –THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK</b>	
An Overview: Understanding Worldview.....	61
Africentricity: Theory and Philosophy.....	62
Core Principles of Africentricity.....	65
Critical Race Theory.....	68
Postcolonialism.....	71
Chapter Summary.....	77
 <b>CHAPTER FOUR – METHODOLOGY</b>	
An Overview: An Africentric Informed Methodology.....	78
Study Sites.....	81
Emmanuel Baptist Church (EBC).....	81
St. Phillip’s African Orthodox Church (SPAOC).....	82
The Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG).....	84
Rationale for the Churches.....	85
Participants Recruitment.....	86

Data Collection.....	87
A Case Study Approach.....	89
Participant Observation.....	89
Semi-Structured Interviews.....	91
Data Analysis.....	94
Chapter Summary.....	99
 <b>CHAPTER FIVE – RESEARCH FINDINGS</b>	
An Overview: Capturing the themes.....	101
Revisiting Research Participants.....	102
Research Themes.....	104
Shared Cultural Experience.....	104
Relevant Learning.....	112
Social Engagement.....	119
A Sense of Community.....	124
Chapter Summary.....	133
 <b>CHAPTER SIX– ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSIONS</b>	
An Overview: Making Sense of Theories.....	135
Theoretical Framework Analysis.....	135
Africentricity.....	135
Critical Race Theory.....	150
Postcolonialism.....	157
Discussions.....	164
Chapter Summary.....	167
 <b>CHAPTER SEVEN– CONCLUSIONS AND REFLECTIONS</b>	
An Overview: A Closure.....	168
A Summary of Chapters.....	168
Conclusions.....	170
Points of Convergence: Identity and African Cultural System.....	170
Points of Divergence: The dilemma of the Black church .....	172
Multiculturalism and the Black Church.....	174
The Black Church as a Lifelong Learning site.....	177
Relevance of the Study.....	178
Recommendations and Future Studies.....	179
Personal Reflections.....	180
 <b>REFERENCES</b> .....	 183
<b>APPENDIX A</b> .....	197
<b>APPENDIX B</b> .....	198
<b>APPENDICES E, F, G</b> .....	199

## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

AIC	African Initiated Church
ACS	African Cultural System
AIQM	Africentric Informed Qualitative Methodology
AOC	African Orthodox Church
AUBA	African United Baptist Association
CABC	Convention of the Atlantic Baptist Churches
CRT	Critical Race Theory
EBC	Emmanuel Baptist Church
IEC	Independent Episcopal Church
NAM	Non-Aligned Movement
PRC	Pew Research Centre
RCCG	The Redeemed Christian Church of God
RWG	Racism Working Group
SOS	Save Our Sons, Save Our Sisters
SPAOC	St Phillip's African Orthodox Church
UNIAC	United Negro Improvement Association
UUC	Montreal's Union United Church

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**ABSTRACT**

The Black church, which I define as a church with a Black clergy, a predominately (at least 70%) Black congregants and an orientation towards African cultural values, is often considered an important institution within the Black community, yet it has received minimal attention from scholars in the field of lifelong learning/adult education. Using a qualitative method of inquiry supported by a theoretical framework that includes Africentricity, critical race theory, and post colonialism, this thesis examines the role of the Black church in reproducing and affirming an African cultural identity among the congregants of African ancestry. The study centres the voices of 17 congregants from three churches in Nova Scotia: Emmanuel Baptist Church, the Redeemed Christian Church of God, and St. Phillip's African Orthodox Church. By using both inductive and deductive thematic analysis, emerging themes suggest that these religious organizations provide valuable learning activities and promote community involvement that enhance intrinsic values such as, the feeling of home, a sense of belonging, empowerment, cultural grounding, heritage, traditions, identity, and spiritual grounding. These values align with the broader themes found in the data: shared cultural experiences, culturally relevant learning, social engagement, and a sense of community. By exploring how these churches effect change among congregants and the community at large, it is clear that these churches are agencies of significance for the Black congregants, particularly within a racially diverse multicultural society.

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

*It is my centre. It's what has kept me grounded, and I've gone off the rails several times, but there's always that drawback. You know, I've gone off the rails where I just felt dead. I just didn't want to attend church and I would think that I was running, I call it running from myself, but there was always that little voice, whether it was my grandmother's voice, or remembering something that Father Francis said, or just feeling like I have to have God in my life. This was planted very deep within me, a very deep seed, and it has kept me on track and has often brought me back whenever I was off track.*

-Gina, SPAOC, September 28, 2013

#### **An Overview: Meaning Making and the Black Church**

Religion, from a philosophical stance, provides an insight into the ways of being. It functions as a window and creates a vantage point from which we can better understand “the question of existence” (Mbiti, 1970, p. 15). Sociologically, religion offers a lens through which an observer can get a glimpse into the nuances of belief systems and the accompanying human interactions (Lincoln and Mamiya, 1990, p. ix).

Religion involves making choices and promoting worldviews that convey reality (Van den Heever, 2001, p. 4). For Berger and Luckmann (1966), religion is a vehicle that drives meaning; and the creation of meaning out of religious experience helps develop fundamental, sacred and inalienable realities. Likewise, the transcendent ability of religion to create meaning is responsible for fostering continuous relationship between humanity and divine (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990). Thus concepts such as destiny, purpose, beliefs, values, practices, and the questions about the meaning of life are intrinsically connected to the ability of religious experience to create “meaning” (Howard and Howard, 1997; Mattis, 2002; Mattis et al., 2000). Therefore, I agree with Mbiti (1970) that religion provides a context within which the totality of an individual can be defined, refined and understood.



This thesis rests on the notion that religion connects an individual with the divine to produce meaning which cannot exist outside of the cultural identity of the individual. I also argue that human interactions with the divine and the formation of meaning cannot exist outside of cultural and historical experiences. Furthermore, to understand the viability and relevance of religion, particularly in the context of a religious entity such as the Black church, it must begin with the unravelling of some underpinning, intrinsic and complex cultural elements.

In *Back to the Future: Reappropriating Religious Education—A Case Study Using the Black Church*, Mary Hinton (2009) argues that the ability of the Black church to create meaning is not just a religious experience but it is also a cultural one. She suggests that as a meaning making institution, the Black church creates an understanding of a “shared cultural experience” (p. 22) which is rooted in the rituals and communal interpretation of the scriptures and a collective community response to external and internal influences. The Black church provides a space for learning by helping individuals to find relevant answers to the question of life in this world while looking forward to the hereafter. In addition, it gives hope and encouragement to Black folks who have historically endured hostility from the larger society. Accordingly, the Black church operates as a principal agency that builds and nourishes the Black community by providing a “moral perspective” (p. 22) from which to foster a cohesive community.

### **Purpose of the Study and Thesis Statement**

In this thesis, I investigate how the Black church shapes the individual and collective identities of African people<sup>1</sup>. By highlighting the historical and contemporary roles of the Black church, I explore the role of the Black church as a curator of a unique cultural orientation within a multicultural society. My inquisition looks into the significance of the Black church as a space

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<sup>1</sup> I use Africans and Blacks interchangeably to describe all individuals of African ancestry.

where Black people can freely promote and embrace an understanding of Christianity as Africans and from an African perspective (Paris, 1989).

As part of my investigation, I explore the role of the Black church as an important entity in the creation, reproduction and affirmation of an African cultural identity. I propose that as an important institution in the lives of many Black people, the Black church offers respite from the burden of prevailing racism, discrimination and other forms of oppression (Mensah, 2008). I equally contend that because of this aforementioned role, the Black church carves a unique identity for individuals of African ancestry within its sphere of influence. Consequently, through this investigation, I examine

- (i) how the Black church, as a pivotal institution in many Black communities, nurtures the individual and the collective identities of its congregants and the Black community at large
- (ii) and the significance of these roles within the context of a multi-cultural society.

My thesis contributes a new chapter to the discourse of the Black church by exploring three churches that are representative of the African diaspora. The thesis underscores the role of cultural identity in religion. More importantly, the thesis becomes relevant to lifelong learning scholarship by highlighting how the Black church provides valuable learning activities and promotes community involvement that enhance intrinsic values among Black congregants.

In order to come up with a proper definition for the Black church, it is important to first understand the impetus for this study and its interconnectivity to the Black experience. I discuss these factors in the next two sections.

## **Rationale for Study**

There is an assumption in Christianity that once you become a Christian, you have been adopted into the family of believers. You are now one with other devotees. With this belief, all Christians are under one lordship since there is only “one fold, and one shepherd” (John 10:16, King James Version). However, congregational divergence within Christianity counteracts this message of oneness. With copious ecclesiology and diversity of adherents, Christianity is far from being a professed united front. In spite of this reality of Christian diversity, most Christians are quick to decry the notion of promoting a church ethno culturally. Some may ask, “Do we really need a Black church”? Most will argue, “Our church is a church for all nations”. In casual conversations with fellow Christians about the objective of my thesis, many frowned at the idea of a Black church, an African Nova Scotian church, an African church or other labels connecting race, ethnicity and culture to the church.

I argue in this thesis that the notion of Christianity as “counter-cultural” and “colour-blind” is problematic since culture and colour both have racial connotations. Most preachers advocate colour blindness and make statements such as “there is no Black or White in the kingdom of God”. I submit that such utterances are reckless even when they are naïvely made under the guise of promoting a unified and non-racialized church. Not only are statements like theses culturally insensitive, they also undermine the cultural diversity<sup>2</sup> within Christianity (Hearn, 2009). Whether it is affirmed or denied, Christianity cannot divorce itself from the issue of race, nationality, colour, class, and creed (Pinn, 2008; Ross, 2012; Vora and Vora, 2002). Consequently, my religious affiliation to Christianity, my identity as a Black person with

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<sup>2</sup>Perhaps, the Bible text “There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus (Galatians 3:28) is the basis for the colour blind theology. However, this text also explicitly underscores the diversity – Jew, gentiles, slave, free, man, woman – existing within the Church.

membership in a predominately White church, and the realities of racial and cultural diversities within Christianity are compelling motivating factors for pursuing this thesis.

I am a currently a member of one of the largest non-denominational, charismatic churches in Nova Scotia (herein referred to as “*My church*”). *My church* is predominantly “White” with less than 10% minority membership. Prior to my membership at *My church*, I had attended a similarly structured church (to be henceforth referred to as “*My previous church*”) however with about 35% visible minority membership. Prior to attending either of these aforementioned churches, my earliest experience of Church membership had been in a predominately Black church (in Nigeria and Toronto). I have also, occasionally, attended other predominately Black Churches since moving to Nova Scotia. Coming from experiencing membership in predominately – and sometimes exclusively – Black churches to becoming a visible minority congregant in *My church*, I cannot help the urge to draw experiential comparison between these two settings.

In *Radical Pedagogy: Identity, Generativity, And Social Transformation*, Mark Bracher (2006) views the “need for recognition, the need to have one’s being appreciated and validated, or at least acknowledged” (p. 7) as the key foundation for identity needs. One thing that I observed during my time at *My previous church* was the glaring solidarity that existed among the Black congregants and other visible minorities. It appeared that visible minorities came to *My previous church* because of the connection to other visible minorities: friends, family members or co-workers who also attended *My previous church*. I wonder if perhaps the desire to be among “their own” was a contributing factor for the very high number of visible minority attendee at *My previous church*. On the other hand, I continue to imagine if the inability to identify with “their own” could account for the dismal representation of visible minorities at *My church*. One may

also wonder if the urge to be among “their own” has something to do with what I witness whenever I visit a predominately Black church. Is it something about the unmistakable, passionate and ritualistic prayers? Perhaps, the allure of rhythmic praise and worship is the reason? Maybe the familial congregational interaction is the draw? What about the oratorical sermon delivery, engaging singing and instrumentals, celebration of various cultural events, and other church activities that create a unique religious experience and highlight an inimitable form of Christianity? I can only wonder if these are reasons why African people are always in search of a Black church even when there is a mainstream church nearby. Conceivably, I am always enthralled to relive this experience of “doing church” every time I visit a Black church, regardless of location or congregational affiliation. Conversely, it is also uniquely discerning that these experiential and conspicuous attributes are noticeably absent in the majority of non-Black churches that I have attended including *My church*.

In the ground breaking work, *Black Church in the Sixties*, Nelsen and Nelsen (1975) propose an “ethnic community”<sup>3</sup>, (p. 12) model as an organizational structure for the Black church. The “ethnic community” model upholds the Black church “as a base for building a sense of ethnic identity and a community of interest among its members” (p. 11). From an ethnic community stance, a major pitfall of expounding a theology devoid of ethnicity and race, as seen in most mainstream non-Black congregations, is that it continues to disenfranchise individuals who are already battling the realities of everyday racism and prejudice:

A fear concerning the implicit message in today’s Evangelical theology is to make “God’s culture” the norm without really analyzing the implications on this theology. It either “etherises” persons of colour (which contains seeds of racism), or it simply swallows persons of colour up in a White melting pot by neutralizing colour and acting as if it does not exist. (Hearn, 2009, p. 283)

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<sup>3</sup> I elaborate on Nelsen and Nelsen Black church models, Assimilation-Isolation, Compensatory and Ethnic Community, in chapter two.

## Understanding the Black experience

The Canadian Black population is often misrepresented as one homogenous group even in the face of diverse expectations among the different groups of Blacks represented in Canada. In fact, some within the academia are equally guilty of this parochial generalization (Harding, 1996). In *Race and Well-Being: The lives, Hopes, and Activism of African Canadians*, James et al. (2010) critically examine the historical and socio-economic experiences of the three main African Canadian groups – the multi-generational Blacks, Caribbean Blacks, and African Blacks – using the “Canadian context of place, generation and time” (p. 3) to analyze the diversity of African Canadians. Similar to Harding, James et al. (2010) decries the practice of generalization in studies involving African Canadians and argue that the African Canadian community “represents a vast number of ethnic and cultural groups, [which] speak numerous dialects and languages, and practice variety of religions” (p. 36).

Nevertheless, in spite of the diversity of Blacks in Canada, there is a commonality of a “Black experience” propelled by anti-Black racism<sup>4</sup> (James et al., 2010). This conclusion aligns with Walker’s (1985) assertion that regardless of the diversity of Blacks in Canada, the underlining similarities within this group are driven by the experience of racism and intolerance. Moreover, this experience is pervasive and it transcends generations (James et al., 2010). Therefore, individuals of African ancestry, regardless of the length of residence in Canada, continue to grapple with the issues of discrimination just as earlier Black settlers did (Walker, 1985).

Marshall (2009), in *Talking Cheddo: Liberating PanAfrikanism* similarly suggests an intrinsic connection between the Black experience and African ancestry. He affirms that the Black experience is encoded within African ancestry and argues that this experience is

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<sup>4</sup>James et al. (2010) describes anti-Black racism as the particularisation of racism towards Black people (p. 26)

inalienable, conveys African cultural realities, and transcends time and space. According to Marshall (2009), African ancestry creates a better understanding of the Black experience by functioning as the “genetic material” that preserves the realities of “invasion, displacement, replacement, dilution of culture with erasure in mind, forced exile or labour and genocide as well as the generalized denial of the impact of those histories” (p. 79) of the African people.

Since the Black experience transcends time and space; it is an innate experience. This experience is immutable and exists as a continuum within the cosmos of all Black people. It is, above all things, an important element of the African identity. The Black experience fosters resilience, provides hope and builds the African spirit (Asante, 2003) which is the key to the survival of Black people in spite of the history of hostility and oppression. In the words of Asante, the African spirit is “not just indicative of the past but [it is] the essence of [African] adaptive behaviour towards the West” (Asante, 2003, p. 84). The African spirit, Asante argues, is the building block of the African diaspora experience.

### **The Black Church: A definition**

The Black church, in the context of this study, refers to several autonomous churches where the congregants are predominantly Black (Harding, 1996; Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990). It is an encompassing sociological term that recognizes the existence of several independent Black churches where the “Black experience” thrives. Harding (1986) envisions the Black church as “a heuristic device to discuss those congregations that maintain predominately Black memberships” (Harding, 1996, p. 23) and argues that in its functions, the Black church symbolises a collective space for “re-imaging and making history” (Harding, 1996, p. 23). Furthermore, in terms of composition, Lincoln and Mamiya (1990) suggests a membership of about 80% Black attendees (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990) for the Black church.

A Pew Research Centre (PRC) ethnographic study, “Ethnic Church” in *Changing Faith: Latino and the Transformation of American Religion* (1997), provides the criteria for identifying a “non-traditional” church<sup>5</sup>. Members across various Hispanic churches are asked about the leadership of their churches, the format of church services and the racial demography of their congregations. 80% of respondents confirms the existence of Hispanic leadership, 87% reveals that services are conducted in Spanish and 74% attends predominately Hispanic churches (PRC, 1997).

The PRC study provides a model for describing the Black church. While clergy’s ethnicity and the demography of the churches are the most relevant in the context of the Black church, the question of language is metaphorically relevant if one considers Winks’ cynical stance that “Negros did appear to prefer churches of their own...they appreciated rather different types of services [and] they wanted preachers who spoke to them in a language and perhaps with an accent they might readily understand” (Winks, 1997, p. 339). Similarly, the concept of language in the Black church is relevant by Asante’s (2003) assertion that language is a necessary tool for establishing what is important for people of African ancestry. In addition, it is through language that “objectivism, born of the history, culture, and materials of [Black people’s] existence” can prevail (p. 42). The definition of Black church can therefore be sufficiently linked to the presence of Black clergy, the orientation towards African cultural values, the presence of a predominately Black congregant and the use of languages, either metaphorically or linguistically, that are understood by African people.

### **The Black Church in the Nova Scotia Context**

One cannot adequately understand the significance of the Black church without first delving into the conditions that led to its formation. Paris (1989) speaks of the emergence of the

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<sup>5</sup>The study refers to “ethnic church” to describe the Hispanic churches in the study.



early Black church as a response to the intolerable societal conditions of the time. In light of this hostile condition, the Black church provided an avenue through which the concept of God, faith and belief systems became meaningful to African people. The formation of the Black church undermined the subservient theology perpetuated by the White Christianity society and provided a viable “alternative understanding of Christianity” (p. 2).

The voice of history is deafening. From the unquestionable tragedy of enslavement to decades of sanctioned segregation and to the current realities of institutionalized racism, African people have been able to draw strength from the Church (Oliver, 1985). The limitations imposed by an intolerant society have hampered the full participation of people of African ancestry in the affairs of the larger society. Nevertheless, these oppositional societal realities have strengthened the Black church in its role as a central institution in the Black community (Lincoln and Mamiya, 1990). Accordingly, the emergence of the Black church has revolutionized how Black people see themselves in the context of history: active participants and from their own perspective, rather than as distant subjects of a distorted, second hand account of the dominant culture (Pinn, 2008). In chapter two, I elaborate on the historical and social factors that led to the emergence of the Black church. In the remaining portion of this chapter, I discuss the three important organizational structures of Black Christianity explored in this study. I discuss the African United Baptist Church (AUBA), The African Orthodox Church (AOC) and the African Initiated Church (AIC) as essential elements in the discourse of this thesis.

#### *The African United Baptist Association (AUBA)*

The history of Black Baptists in Nova Scotia, perhaps in Canada, is closely connected with the arrival of David George, a free Black preacher who arrived in Nova Scotia with thousands of other free Africans – later to be known as the Black loyalists – at the height of the

American Revolution in 1783 (Hamilton, 2000; Oliver, 1953). George, the first ordained Black Baptist minister in North America (Hamilton, 2000), established his ministry in the Shelburne area. Although he was able to successfully minister to both Blacks and Whites, the discriminatory condition of the time, and his Baptist orientation created a stumbling block for the advancement of his ministry. In 1792, due to the unsettling situation, David George, together with about 1,196<sup>6</sup> free Africans, left Nova Scotia on a ship destined for Sierra Leone where he lived out the rest of his life (Paris, 1989). This mass exodus left a big leadership vacuum in the religious organization of Black people in Nova Scotia until the arrival of a White Baptist minister, John Burton (Oliver, 1953; Paris, 1989; Hamilton, 2000) in 1793.

Burton was an Episcopal minister (Hamilton, 2000), who subsequently aligned himself with the Baptist doctrine (Oliver, 1953). His church was one of the few open to Blacks, and soon, the majority of attendees were Blacks. This trend, according to Oliver soon developed into resentment by the White community. The arrival of the Refugees from the War of 1812 will further increase the population of Blacks in Burton's church. Burton became an advocate for the Refugees and worked with the government to ensure proper settlement and integration of these new immigrants<sup>7</sup> (p. 22). One of Burton's congregant was a young Black man named Richard Preston. Preston was among the newly arrived Refugees. With time, Preston became a protégé of Burton and was sent to England for pastoral training to prepare him for ordination. In the spring of 1832, while Preston was still in England, the Black Baptists in Halifax formally organized the first African Baptist Church (now known as Cornwallis Street Baptist Church)<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup>In *A Brief History of the Coloured Baptists of Nova Scotia, 1782-1953* (1953), Oliver suggests that in 1794, another 600 free Africans (mostly Maroons) also left for Sierra Leone.

<sup>7</sup>"The government appointed [Burton] agent for the distribution of relief supplies and other assistance to the increasing hundreds of refugees being brought by ships and vessels to Nova Scotia" (Oliver, 1994, p. 16)

<sup>8</sup>Cornwallis Street Baptist Church located on the corner of Gottingen Street and Cornwallis Street in Halifax is often referred as the "Mother Church". The honour of a mother Church was conferred during the inaugural meeting of the Association of the Association of African Baptists organized in 1854 by Richard Preston (Oliver, 1953)

Upon Preston's return, he immediately embarked on various organizational endeavours. He oversaw the construction of the African Baptist Church building at its current location on Cornwallis Street in Halifax. Preston spearheaded the creation of branches of the African Baptist Church in Preston, Dartmouth, Beech Hill<sup>9</sup> and Hammonds Plains<sup>10</sup>. In addition to these churches, Preston also led the establishment of other African Baptist Churches across the province. In 1854, Preston subsequently brought the original African Baptist Churches together and organized them under them under the umbrella of the African Baptists Association<sup>11</sup> of Nova Scotia (Oliver, 1953, AUBA Website, Clayton, 1984).

With 19 African Baptist Churches in its purview, the AUBA became one of the oldest Black organizations in Nova Scotia and probably in Canada with influence extending beyond the realm of religion. It is a common knowledge within the Black community that prior to the arrival of other organizations that cater to the needs of African people, the AUBA was "the most significant organization within the African Nova Scotian community" (Benton, Boyd, Clyke and Johnson, 2011, p. 4). Today, the AUBA remains relevant by continuing to create an enabling environment for spiritual growth, education, social advocacy and the building of a viable and cohesive Black community (AUBA website, 2013).

#### *The African Orthodox Church (AOC)*

The birth of the African Orthodox Church can be traced to the ordination of George McGuire as a Bishop in Chicago, Illinois in 1921 (Mead, 1995). Born on the Caribbean Island of

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<sup>9</sup>Beech Hill United Baptist Church now referred to as Beechville United Baptist Church.

<sup>10</sup>During my conversation with Rev. Lennett Anderson, the Senior Pastor of the AUBA Hammonds Plains Church (now Emmanuel Baptist Church), he affirmed that the "AUBA is longstanding; it is our mother organization... our local identity here in the province. We are a sister church, we're a daughter of the Association" – (Rev. Lennett Anderson, EBC Interview, October 17, 2013).

<sup>11</sup>The inclusion of the word "United" in the newly formed association was part of Preston's vision of seeing the creation of a unifying organization (Benton, Boyd, Clyke and Johnson, 2011)

Antigua, McGuire had his religious upbringing in the Moravian<sup>12</sup> church. He studied at a seminary and served the Moravian church before his arrival in the United States in 1893 (White, 1969; Rushing, 1972). Upon his arrival, McGuire became a member of the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) church and left the AME in 1895 for the American Episcopal Church (AEC) where he became ordained (Harding, 1998) and quickly established himself as a well know preacher (Rushing, 1972).

During a brief return to Antigua where he presided over a local church as a Rector, McGuire was caught in the middle of a revolt by the local sugar cane workers who were demanding better working conditions. The local officials had solicited the help of local clergy to help mitigate the uprising. However, McGuire refused and instead supported the striking workers by urging the government to yield to their demands (Rushing, 1972). This experience would become the catalyst for McGuire's religious orientation once he returned to the United States. After McGuire's return to the United States in 1918, he joined the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA)<sup>13</sup>, an organization founded by Marcus Garvey in 1917. As a member, of the UNIA McGuire embraced the philosophy of Marcus Garvey and was appointed the Chaplain-General for the UNIA.

As a result of his evolving African consciousness, McGuire soon realized that the AEC was incapable of dealing with racial segregation issues that was becoming the norm within the organization. There were instances of White bishops who did not see the possibility of having

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<sup>12</sup>Although, the Moravian church traces its origin to the late 14<sup>th</sup> century protestant movement (Rican, 1992), it was formally organized in Saxony, present day Germany with the assistance of Nikolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf. The Moravian church is mission oriented and has such established roots in various parts of the world such as the Caribbean, Africa, and in the Inuit communities of Northern Labrador (Cross, 1974, cited in Harding, 1998, p. 47)

<sup>13</sup> UNIA was an organization dedicated to the socio-economic advancement and empowerment of people of African ancestry and at the time generally perceived by the White society as a militant movement ([http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/garvey/peoplevents/e\\_unia.html](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/garvey/peoplevents/e_unia.html)). Perhaps, this explains why some scholars, such as Winks and Simpson, conclude that the African Orthodox Church was a militant organization (Winks, 1997; Simpson, 1978).

Blacks and Whites worshipping together. There were even some who equated the mixing of races to Blacks claiming equality with Whites (Harding, 1998). With the AEC not willing to address this matter, McGuire decided it was time for a separate, independent Black congregation where Blacks can have a sense of belonging. He intended to use his position as the Chaplain-General within the UNIA to promote the idea of a global independent Black Church. Thus in 1920, McGuire founded the Independent Episcopal Church (IEC) which eventually became the African Orthodox Church (AOC) upon his consecration as a Bishop in 1921. Although Garvey and others within the UNIA embraced the idea of a unique Black religious experience, they were however uncomfortable with having the UNIA perceived as a religious organization through its affiliation with McGuire instead, the UNIA wanted to appeal to all Black people regardless of their religious affiliation. This discontentment within the organization led to McGuire's resignation<sup>14</sup> from his position as the Chaplain-General of the UNIA. Following his resignation, McGuire focused on building and leading the newly formed AOC (Harding, 1998; Rushing, 1972). The formation of the AOC came out of McGuire's experience of racism within the AEC. This unpleasant experience prompted McGuire to pursue a viable alternative in the form of an independent Black Church and this quest eventually led to the formation of the African Orthodox Church (Harding, 1998).

#### *The African Initiated Churches<sup>15</sup> (AIC)*

There are several opinions regarding the African Initiated Churches (AICs). However, one resonating viewpoint rests on the fact that Africans have succeeded in appropriating Christianity. Meyer (2004) sees the AIC as an "African agency in processes of conversion in the

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<sup>14</sup>Harding (1998, p. 56), citing Newman (1977) suggests that McGuire was forced to resign his position

<sup>15</sup>Various referred to as African Independent Churches, African Indigenous Churches or African Instituted Churches. This must not be confused with Independent African Churches which were European missions left behind for post-colonial Africans e.g. African Presbyterian, African Lutheran, African Methodist (Myers 2004, p. 451)

context of mission churches” (p. 454). Ogunleye (2013), makes a case for the inevitability of the AIC and suggests that prior to the rise of the AICs, Africans had to settle for “a highly Eurocentric” (p. 183) form of Christianity which lacked the “African heritage of religious emotionalism” (p. 183). This assertion follows Kalu’s (2005) characterization of African Christianity as an authentic, dynamic response which reflects the innate African spirituality. Machoko’s (2013) description of the AICs provides an insight into the main objective of the AICs and by this account, the AICs evolved out of the creativity of African Christians to rid their organizations of “foreign missionary agendas” (p. 1). In Oduro (2006) elaborate definition, the AICs are further described as

congregations and or denominations planted, led, administered, supported, propagated, motivated, and funded by Africans for the purpose of proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ and worshipping the Triune<sup>16</sup> God in the context and worldview of Africa and Africans (p. 2).

The idea of autonomous, indigenous African Church ownership has been a subject of debate among scholars. Meyer (2004), for instance, is concerned about how to reconcile complete African ownership in the shadow of the colonial past of Christianity and the reality of a continuous relationship with the colonizer. The apprehension of Engelke (2010) concerning the doctrine of “breaking with the past” (p. 179), which is a fundamental doctrine of some AICs is one that has equally been raised by scholars. The message of “breaking with the past” encourages an individual, upon becoming a Christian, to renounce ties with African traditional past (Engelke, 2010; Garrad, 2009). Others have also raised objections to the practise of syncretism within some AICs (Ezenweke & Kanu, 2012; Pato, 1990). However, Meyer (cited in Odeyemi, 2014, p.12) and Pato (1990) condemn the accusation of syncretism as a discriminatory propaganda against the authenticity AICs and their celebratory accomplishments of infusing

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<sup>16</sup>A Christian reference to the Trinity used as an expression of a “three in one God” – father, son and the holy spirit.

African rituals and cultural traditions into Christianity. There are also those who view the emerging African Charismatic<sup>17</sup> Churches as a separate entity from the classic AICs. In Gifford's (2004) opinion, this distinction is glaring in the Charismatic AICs' introduction of "prayer centres, all-night services, conventions, crusades, bible schools" and in the "modernization" of every aspect of the church (p. 170).

Ayegboyin (nd) offers a conciliatory framework for understanding these divergent views by categorizing the AICs into three main groups: (i) "Older African Churches"<sup>18</sup> (ii) "the African Indigenous" (of which, the Nigerian *Aladura*<sup>19</sup> church is prevalent. This is the group that is often accused of practicing syncretism) and the "Pentecostal Movement" (also referred to as charismatic, new generation churches) (pp. 1-2). This categorization underscores the diversity of the AICs and also affirms that regardless of congregational practices, the AICs are unique for practising "mission in an African way" (Oduro *et al.* cited in Ayegboyin, nd, p. 1)

Outside of Africa, Canada inclusive, the proliferation of the AICs is unprecedented and is gradually attracting the interests of scholars (Burgess, 2009; Egan, 2012; Hunt and Lightly, 2001; Kalu, 2008; Mensah, 2008). In Canada for instance, the rapid growth of the AICs can be attributed to the immigration reforms of the 1960s. Prior to these reforms, immigration was based on nationality and country of origin thus hindering prospective Black immigrants from legally immigrating to Canada (Li, 2000; Brown, 2011). Since the implementation of these

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<sup>17</sup> Similar in doctrine to the Pentecostal movement, however they renounce certain aspect of Pentecostalism that are considered dogma and legalism (such as the pre-eminence giving of speaking in tongues) <http://www.theopedia.com/Charismatic>, retrieved May 19, 2014

<sup>18</sup> The period prior to the arrival of European missionaries in Africa, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church was established in the 4th Century. Incidentally this church is considered to be one of the first churches in the world (Marcus, 1994, p. 6-7)

<sup>19</sup> *Aladura*, a Yoruba phrase literally translates "the owner of prayer". *Aladura* is form AIC that in its diverse manifestations have embraced elements of African traditional prophetic healing, ritualistic prayers and African ceremonial worship process.

reforms, African and Caribbean immigrants are now legally part of the influx<sup>20</sup> of new immigrants into Canada. As they arrive, these immigrants also bring with them their cultures and religions. Consequently, since international migration has greatly influenced the diversity of religious practices in Canada and around the world (Chitando, 2004; Mensah, 2008), some scholars such as Burgees and Mensah have questioned why religion, unlike economic and social factors, is not viewed as an important immigration factor. For Burgess religious centred conversations provide an avenue to better understand why, despite the decline of Christianity in the West, the AICs continue to thrive in the same environment where the established mainline churches are failing. Moreover, many of these scholars believe that society can benefit from the knowledge of how the AICs are gradually becoming a “social and religious” (Burgess, 2009, p. 256) stronghold for immigrants, and how these roles are equally creating “places of welcome and community” (Hunt and Lightly, 2001, p. 115) for immigrants.

### **Context of the Study**

Since in the footsteps of this thesis I am guided by an Africentric<sup>21</sup> ideology, it is imperative to reconcile some critical viewpoints regarding Africentricity and Christianity, African culture and Christianity, and religious inculturation and appropriation. Ama Mazama (2002) argues that Africentricity needs to go beyond theoretical analysis and become an intrinsic, yet inseparable living experience of African people. Thus an individual cannot “be Afrocentric some times and then something else at other times” (p. 218). To this end, Mazama denounces

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<sup>20</sup> Statistics Canada Census Year 2006 report shows that foreign born Canadians account for about 20% of Canadian population, the highest increase since 1931 (Chui, Tran, and Maheux, 2007)

<sup>21</sup> Also written as Afrocentric. Africentricity as a philosophical stance promotes what is important to African people – their “interests, values and perspectives” (Asante, 2003, p. 2). Functioning as a theoretical perspective, it situates African people at the core of any analysis involving them (Merriweather Hunn, 2004). Molefi Asante, a professor of African American Studies at Temple University and a major proponent of Africentricity explains in *Afrocentricity: The Theory of Social Change* that the ultimate goal Africentricity is to confront the global epidemic of Eurocentric hegemony (Asante, 2003, p. 2). Africentricity, therefore, is employed in this thesis both as a philosophical ideology and a theoretical approach. I elaborate on Africentric worldview in Chapter 4



Christianity pronouncing it an aberration and proposing the need for Africans to embrace an Africentric ontology rooted in African spirituality. By invoking the works of scholars such as Mbiti (1990), Thompson (1984), Zahan (1979), Plumey (1975), Ndaw (1997), and Elungu (1987), Mazama asserts that embracing this ontological creed is critical if Africans were to move from “discovery” to “recovery” (Asante, 2003, p. 4), and “not stand alone in this world, lost” (Mazama, 2002, p. 222). She argues that to embrace Christianity is to desecrate the memory of the ancestors and undermine the unwavering tasks of the gods as the protectors and the diviners of African spirituality (Mazama, 2002)<sup>22</sup>.

Standing on the work of Woods (1990) as a springboard, Mazama launches at three critical antagonistic ontological viewpoints between Christianity and Africentricity. She sees the promulgation of “strict monotheism”<sup>23</sup> in Christianity as problematic to the spiritual health of African people since monotheism endorses the “vilification of other religions’ gods” (Mazama, 2002, p. 226) and their worshippers. Similarly, the pronouncement of Jesus Christ as the only way to God and the proclamation of “a chosen people” (Mazama, 2002, p. 226), the Christians, makes Christianity untenable from an African perspective. In the same tone, Mazama condemns evangelical conversion calling it a vehicle for bringing African people under European imperialism. She argues that the predisposition of Christianity to treating cultural difference as “deficiency [which] could only be remedied through conversion” (Mazama, 2002, p. 230) undermines African spirituality and stands in opposition to African ontological worldview. Furthermore, the unsettling role of Christianity in the history of enslavement of Africans, the

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<sup>22</sup>In spite of Mazama’s strong contention, the prevailing reality is that the cultural centre of Christianity has now shifted, and Africa (which is the spiritual core of Africentricity), now plays a significant and pioneering role in the global propagation of Christianity (Mail and Guardian, 2012; Asamoah-Gyadu, 2010, Asamoah-Gyadu, 2013)

<sup>23</sup> Perhaps Mazama’s usage of “strict monotheism” instead of monotheism is in line with Marshall’s (2009) commentary that monotheism is not a strange concept within African belief systems since evidence abounds in the writings of ancient Kemet (modern Egypt and Sudan).

connection of European missionaries to the proliferation of colonialism and the desecration of African cultures and belief systems through the propagation of Christianity have placed Christianity on a collision course with Africentricity (Mazama, 2002, pp. 226-232).

A step away from Mazama's stance, Asante (2003) sees the Black church as an integral agency within the Black community and affirms its potential as a conduit for promoting African ancestral past (p. 91). Nevertheless, he is quick to draw attention to the contentious role of the church in hampering the collective struggle of Black people due to the lack of a united and effectual Black church, particularly in promoting practical political and social influence (Asante, 2003). Asante argues that this deficiency is connected to the inability of the leadership in the Black church to embrace "new realities" (Asante, 2003, p. 93) and move in the direction of change. This refusal to embrace change has hindered Africentricity from thriving as an ideology within the Black church.

Accordingly, Asante (2003) advocates an inward revolution within the Black church as a catalyst for appropriating Christianity for the collective struggle and liberation of Black people. Sighting the examples of other groups whose cultures have been acculturated into Christianity, Asante believes that the Black church can become a fertile haven for "cultural and historical training" (p. 94). He asserts that evidence of the Black church as a place for promoting African spirituality abounds and can be seen in the rituals of the church such in the form of call response, "hand clapping, foot-stomping, head-shaking, body-moving rhythm" (p. 96) which are innate African ways of worship that have been passed down by the ancestors. Consequently, the Black church has the potential to be as an ally in the promotion of African consciousness however, for this to happen Asante cautions that

God must speak out of the subject of Black liberation, and the preachers must interpret God's answers for the church members. This interpretation must not be merely a re-

painting of Jesus to look Black; it must be a theology that reflects our history. And as the most authentic repository of our African heritage, the church will meet its most urgent mission. The declaration of new Afrocentric theology, a doctrine, promulgated by revolutionary preachers who will help alter the church's political and moral stance will create economic, social and political programs to address the present and future needs of [people of African descent]. (Asante, 2003, p. 99)

The cultural relevance of Christianity espoused by Asante is equally echoed by Nwadiakor (2011) who defines culture as “an aggregate concept fundamentally characterized by the distinctive spirit, way of life, device for living and attainments of a people” (p. 93). This understanding of culture necessitates a cultural response by Africans to Christianity. Nwadiakor identifies two complementary forces of culture – spiritual and physical – that drive the orientation of Christianity towards African culture. The physical force is adaptable and vulnerable to “vagaries of circumstances of time and space, place and personalities, events and movements” (p. 93). The spiritual force, on the other hand, is innate. It is an indestructible element residing at the core of African cultural identity. The spiritual element builds resilience and it is essential for understanding why, in spite of the incursion of Eurocentric hegemonic ideals, African culture continues to thrive even within conventional Christian traditions.

Marshall (2009) attributes the manifestation of the spiritual force described by Nwadiakor to the “bruising experience of cultural imperialism” (p. 55). According to Marshall, the spiritual force propels Africans to seek redress by keeping the legacy of African spirituality alive even within the confines of Christianity. The celebration of African culture, and the infusion of the ways of the ancestors into Christianity are ways of building resilience and keeping the ancestral past relevant for Africans. In Marshall's words, imperialism and dominance hegemonies have failed to “sever our connection to our spiritual past” (p. 56). Thus by appropriating Christianity, Africans have successfully created a space for reconnecting with the ancestral past.

Using Nigeria as a point of reference, Nwadior cites how Western education, although a brainchild of Christian missionaries, is now being used by formally educated Nigerians to revive “the cultural heritage of the Nigerian peoples” (p. 99). Additionally, Nwadior views the rise of African Initiated Churches in Nigeria as the “first concrete manifestation of cultural nationalism” (p. 100) as demonstrated by the renunciation of European influence in the sacraments of the church such as the practice of using indigenous languages in the liturgy of the church. The impact of the infusion of African cultural heritage with Christianity as seen in the AICs is revolutionary and is a bold repudiation of mainstream European Christianity introduced by early missionaries:

The rediscovery of the values of our traditional cultural heritage led some Nigerian early Christian converts and indeed African theologians into a movement that was called [an] inculturation movement. It was a movement that is aimed at bringing into the service of Christ those qualities of characters that had made Africa great and had ensured stability and moral sanctity in African societies before the advent of Christianity. For many Nigerian Christians all these led to a conclusion that our rich cultural heritage and present situation could no longer simply be dismissed as “Pagan”, but needed to be taken seriously and somehow related to the truths of the Christian faith. (Nwadior, 2011, p. 98)

Undeniably, proponents of Africentricity and those advocating African centredness vehemently denounce every form of oppression (Asante, 2003) particularly those emanating out of Eurocentric hegemony. Additionally, one of the key tenets of Africentricity is the need to uphold and celebrate African ideals in every endeavour involving African people. With the history of Black people intertwined with Christianity whether by enslavement or colonization, Africans Christians have successfully infused African identity into their religious expressions and they have done so in an enthusiastic way as seen in the AICs.

## **African Religion and Spirituality**

A grievous error that earlier on crept into the understanding of African spirituality purported that Africans were not spiritually enlightened prior to Christianity. This misconception promoted the notion that the concept of God was all together absent before the arrival of White Christian missionaries in Africa. Insidiously, some non-African scholars have also gone as far as trivializing whatever concept of God Africans had prior to making contact with the White world. According to these scholars, God in the African context is nothing more than a “glorified chief or ancestor” (Parrinder, 1976, p. 31). Such mindsets have propagated the notion that African ways of knowing and religious beliefs are non-empirical and as such cannot be taken seriously. The act of constructing the veracity of religion and spirituality around rationality and logic (by Western standard) has been responsible for the affront against African traditional belief systems and its relegation to “mere superstitions” (Sindima, 1990, p. 205). This mindset is responsible for stirring the urgent need by early missionaries to bring religion to the African “gentiles” (Sindima, 1990, p. 205).

Kamara (2000) argues that although rituals and other forms of religious expression among Africans may be different from that of Europeans or non-African cultures, they are however not indicative of irreligiosity. Kamara shares the experience of growing up and seeing his grandmother, who never got indoctrinated into Christianity nor had any understanding of the Christian holy books and liturgy, undergo various religious and spiritual rituals that were meaningful expressions of her belief systems. He concludes, based on this experience, that religion and the belief in God have always been a part of African society. This firsthand experience prompts him to define traditional African religion as:

The observance of rules of conduct in the way the individual conducts his or her daily life, the practice of rituals, and the recognition of the ever presence of the living-dead

(ancestors) to allow the person coexist in harmony with other members of the community and nature in order to please [God]. (Kamara, 2000, p. 503)

Although African religions have been significantly influenced by European incursion, the belief systems are nonetheless original and have thrived independently of the influence of European and other non-African religious systems. In the African belief systems the “seen” cannot be separated from the “unseen”. There is an interwoven continuum between the physical and the spiritual, and for this reason, religious beliefs among Africans is not just an act or something you slip into, it is a way of life. Africans, by virtue of existence and from everyday experience, demonstrate spirituality and express religiosity. The ability to see the interconnectedness of the physical and spiritual world permeates “social, political and economic” lives thus making African people inherently religious (Delafosse, 1967, p. 5). For Mbiti (1967), the understanding of religion among Africans is essentially an understanding of the “people themselves in all [of] the complexities of both traditional and modern life” (p. 1). For an African, the sacred and the secular are interwoven and religious manifestations are evident, even in the mundane activities of life. Thus from an African perspective, “to be without religion amounts to a self-excommunication from the entire life of society” (p. 2).

Although, many Africans are today adherents of Christianity and Islam, it will be preposterous to assume that Africans did not have religions prior to their encounter with the first Christian or Muslim. For example, the Yorùbá<sup>24</sup> people of Nigeria have a long established religious system that predate the arrival of Christianity and Islam in Africa (Ogunleye, 2013). In the Yoruba ontology, religion envelopes every aspect of life. The “Social, political, commercial and economic” (Ogunleye, 2014, p. 182) aspects of life are intrinsically embedded within the Yorùbá religions. The existence of a Supreme Being, *Olódùmarè*, among the Yorùbá people and

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<sup>24</sup>The Yoruba people, over 30 million in number, occupy the region of south western Nigeria. They are also represented across West Africa in Benin, Togo, Sierra Leone.

multitudes of Deities, *Òrìshà*, who function as intermediary between the people and *Olódùmarè* is also well documented (Comstock, 1979; Omojola, 2010; Ogunleye, 2013). Therefore, it makes no sense and perhaps it is insulting to speak about Africans as not having a religious system prior to Christianity or Islam.

Taiwo (1998) traces the origin of this unfavourable view of African belief systems to Georg Hegel<sup>25</sup>. Taiwo lambasts Hegel and holds his views and suggested geographical partitioning of Africa in the *Philosophy of History* responsible for promoting the notion of the unknown Africa “south of Sahara desert”. According to Taiwo, Hegel describes the area south of Sahara desert as “Black Africa” and designates the area north of the Sahara desert “European Africa” and equally recommend the annexation of “European Africa” by Europe. By reinventing the area north of the Sahara, Hegel is now able to focus on “Africa proper”. Having sealed the fate of Africa, Hegel writes: “the peculiarly African character is difficult to comprehend, for the very reason that in reference to it, we must give up the principle which naturally accompanies all our ideas – the category of universality” (Hegel, Cited in Taiwo, 1998, p. 8). In view of Africa’s lack of universality as prescribed by Hegel, Taiwo submits:

‘The Negro’, Hegel wrote, ‘exhibits the natural man in his completely wild and untamed state’. As such, the African is shorn of the idea of a self that is separate from his needs and, simultaneously, has no knowledge of “an absolute Being, another and a Higher than his individual self”. Under this conception, central to religion is the idea of transcendence, the idea that there is some reality that is beyond us, beyond our understanding, before which we must submit ourselves in supplication; in short a *Mysterium*...For Hegel, Negroes are mired in sorcery, worship of graven images that are easily perishable, and worship of the dead. They do not possess a *mysterium*; they lack transcendence, and are without a Theos whose Logos they might have constituted a philosophy to reveal. (Taiwo, 1998, p. 9)

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<sup>25</sup>Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel was a German philosopher whose work, *The Philosophy of History*, Taiwo (1998), argues lays the foundation for the universality of Western Philosophy and in the process denouncing the veracity of other ways of knowing, in particular African belief systems.

This Hegelian view of Africa has been cast into a template upon which the continuous denial of African religion and philosophy is built. Although, it has been more than a century since Hegel, his ghost continues to haunt Africa. You don't have to look too far before you notice that for Africa, it is "Ancestor worship" and the rest of the world "religion"; for Africa it is "tribalism" and the rest of the world "nationalism"; for Africa it is "modes of thought" and the rest of the world "philosophy"; for Africa it is "simple societies", and the rest of the world "complex societies"; for Africa it is "lineage division" and the rest of the world "class division"; for Africa it is "order of custom"; and the rest of the world "rule of law" (Taiwo, 1998, pp. 11-13).

### **The Black church: a "Cultural Womb"**

The Black church promotes a human-divine relationship and this relationship cannot be separated from the "cultural and historical" context in which it occurs (Lincoln and Mamiya, 1990, pp. 2-3). In fact, Cone (1970) presents the image of a sympathetic God who is one and the same with Black people and fully understand their plights. The idea of a God who is in tune with the conditions of Black people is described by Lincoln and Mamiya (1990) as the "Black sacred cosmos" and it represents the religious worldview of African people. The ability of African people to construct their own realities differently from that of an imposed culture can be attributed to this innate "Black sacred cosmos". Similar to Hinton (2009), Lincoln and Mamiya (1990) also views the Black church as a central institution within the Black community. The Black church provides a fertile ground from which other important community agencies have emerged. The Black church also functions in a "dialectical" role by addressing and managing arising oppositional tensions within the Black community. Lincoln and Mamiya (1990) identifies six ways through which the Black church balances these oppositional tensions:



- (i) caring for the spiritual needs versus addressing the political and social needs
- (ii) focusing on the hereafter or dealing with the present reality of daily existence
- (iii) delivering the Christian good news to all people regardless of race versus addressing the issue of oppression that is historically connected to Black people
- (iv) dealing with the overall needs of the larger congregation versus tackling the needs of individual congregant
- (v) mobilizing a free spirited congregation or organizing a “bureaucratic” congregation
- (vi) participating in the larger society to ensure integration versus retreating from the larger society to affirm the Black identity

These dialectical contentions underscore the web of complexities for the Black church as a principal agency within the Black community. The oppositional conflicts also show that the Black church is not just “heaven” focused, it is also “earthly” oriented. Not only does the Black church build a human-divine relationship, it is also wrestles with intricate human-to-human interactions. The ability to address these complexities allows the Black church to exert its influence on the overall (social, physical, mental, economic etc.) well-being of Black people (Lincoln and Mamiya, 1990; Este and Bernard, 2006; Paris, 1989, Hodge and Williams, 2002; Mattis, 2002; Isaac, 2005; Wells, 2006). As much as the Black church provides spiritual nourishments to its congregants, it also cultivates “personal growth, interpersonal support and fellowship, and societal improvement and change” (Elias, 1993, p. 177). The history of involvement in the affairs of the Black community is a legacy that makes the Black church an endearing institution within the Black community (Walker, 1995) and a “cultural womb of the Black community” (Lincoln and Mamiya, 1990, p. 8).

## **Chapter Summary**

This chapter is foundational. It lays out the thesis questions and explains the context and purpose of the study. In the opening segment of the chapter, I discuss the concept of religion, its “meaning making” ability and how this is key to the role of the Black church.

I outline the rationale for this study by discussing my membership experience in a predominately White church. I also discuss how my identity as a Black person and my experience as a Christian have been the catalysts for this study. I present the context of the study from an Africentric perspective and define the Black church as a church with predominately Black congregants where a Black clergy also presides. The chapter introduces the organizational structures of the AUBA, AOC and AIC. This is also section dedicated to the relevance of African religion and spirituality where I probe the misconception of an irreligious Africa prior to Africans making contact with the White society.

The chapter also outlines the three fundamental roles of the Black church proposed by Lincoln and Mamiya (1990) and concludes by discussing how human and divine interaction affirm the African concept of interconnectivity.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

*We had no choice. This is the thing that we used to do within the Black community. All the kids, seeing them in church Sunday morning. We had to go to church. It was either the 11 o'clock service or the 7 o'clock service. We had no choice.*

-Craig, EBC, December 11, 2013

#### **Overview: The Diverse views of the Black Church**

Defining the Black church is not an easy task. By Reddie's (2008) account, the Black church is a subjective concept which often "finds expression in myriad of discourses" (p. 1). The definition is diverse, context specific and finds relevant meaning within theology, history, sociology, philosophy, education, politics and other areas of human endeavour (Nelsen & Nelsen, 1975; Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990; Reddie, 2008; Center for Urban Studies, 2001).

By drawing upon the works of scholars from various disciplines, I explore a collection of diverse views of the Black church. I discuss the motivating factors for the emergence of the Black church and how it came to occupy a unique position within the Black community. In addition, the relevance of culture, identity, race and racism to the understanding of the Black church are also discussed.

#### **A Case for the Black Church**

The notion of a "Black church", "Black religion", "Black theology" or an "African Church" is often a source of contention among Christians regardless of racial or denominational affiliation. In addition, scholars of sociology, and in particular religious studies, hold divergent views regarding the Black church (Savage, 2010; Washington, 1974; Haar, 2008). There are two prevailing oppositional viewpoints regarding the discourse of the Black church, particularly in

the Canadian context (Este, 2004, p. 4). One side of the argument sees the emergence of the Black church as furthering segregation and preventing full integration into the larger society.

Robin Winks is notorious for his criticism of the Black church in Canada. Winks (1997) chastises the Black church for impeding the progress of Black people within the larger society. While he acknowledges the role of the Black church in providing refuge from a repressive society, he nevertheless condemns it for furthering the isolation of Black people from the mainstream through its non-traditional theology. Winks observes that although the Black church is a source of strength to the Black community; with its brand of theology filled with “emotion and faith” but lacking “theological conviction”, it is counterproductive in breaking down the pressing social barriers. Winks sees a missed opportunity for the Black church which he attributes to the passivism of the church characterised by a theology that “reinforce[s] the stereotypes beloved by white Christians – that of the noble Black ready to bear suffering for the Lord because, in the end, the Lord has the whole wide world in his hands” (p. 337).

Similar to Wink, In *Nova Scotian Blacks: An Historic and Structural Overview*, Clairmont and Magill (1970) point to the evidence of another missed opportunity for the Black church. In this extensive monograph of the Black community, these scholars observe that the Black church was in the position to lay the foundation for a “genuine Black Nova Scotian subculture” (p. 18) however due to geographical dispersion and the isolation of the Black population, it was daunting to rally the Black population on a united front. Furthermore, Clairmont and Magill note that in comparison to the Black population in the United States, Black Churches in Nova Scotia did not play an observable role<sup>26</sup> in the cultural enrichment of Black

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<sup>26</sup>With the exception of Seaview Baptist Church in Africville which was believed, based on conversation with congregants, to have demonstrated similarity with the Black Baptist Churches in the United States by ministering to the “soul” of the Black congregant (Clairmont and Magill, 1970, p. 117)

people and conclude that there had been a romanticising of the significance and roles of the Black church.

Agreeing with Clairmont and Magill's, Frances Henry, (1973) believes that Black Nova Scotian sub-culture was an insignificant concept as Blacks in Nova Scotia (in comparison to their counterpart in the United States, who have successfully develop a unique Black cultural system) have, to a large extent adopted<sup>27</sup> a "white" culture and have thus failed to develop any "specific cultural systems" (p. 3) worth mentioning. By Henry's account, this lack of unique cultural systems also affected the organization of a culturally relevant religious system as evident in how "standard English Baptism rather than fundamentalism is the characteristic form of religious experience in Nova Scotia" (p. 119). Henry comments that

It is the music of the Black church – whether soulful, mournful hymns or quick-paced rhythmic and syncophonic spirituals, in which the essence and philosophy of life is uncovered. The richness of the music tradition in Black areas of the U.S., Caribbean, and Latin America can be traced to the importance of the church in the lives of the people and subsequently accounts for the major role of music and songs in the church service (pp. 120-121).

He further concludes that the development of the Black church in Nova Scotia has been a departure from this objective as the tradition of music which has been instrumental in the development of Black religion was never maintained in Nova Scotia<sup>28</sup>. (p. 121)

Henry's assertions are benign compared to American sociologist, Joseph Washington (1974) who sums up the Black church as a "folk religion. He suggests that the Black church is merely a reactionary establishment to the unwelcoming environment in the White majority church and as such cannot be considered a "genuine religion" (as cited in Cone, 1984, p. 9).

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<sup>27</sup> Henry asserts that the dilemma with Blacks in Nova Scotia is that they aspire to be like the general population in terms of their need for education and economic freedom. However, due to societal structure which denied them the resources to achieve these goals, they have perpetually remained marginalized (Henry, 1973, pp. 2-3)

<sup>28</sup> Henry affirms that the flavour – that of "experiencing God" – that once characterized the 19<sup>th</sup> century Black church no longer exists (Henry, 1973, p. 121)

Washington's dismissal of the culture of the Black church is also evident in his contempt for the role of music and songs which Henry sees as important and unique to the identity of the Black church:

Gospel music is the creation of a disengaged people. Shorn from the roots of the folk religion, gospel music has turned the freedom theme in Negro spirituals into licentiousness. Ministers who urge their people to seek their amusement in gospel music and the hoards of singers who profit from it lead the masses down the road of religious frenzy and escapism. (Washington, 1964, p. 52)

Departing from the foregoing assertions, Walker (1995) brings a positive view to the discourse and attributes the emergence of the Black church to an inevitable response to a racist and prejudicial society, which denied Blacks the much needed environment to commune with their creator and fellowship with one another. From this viewpoint, the ability to provide a viable alternative for Black people is the hallmark of the Black church. By providing this alternative to Black people, the Black church is able to promote a positive identity which ensures cultural pride, fosters the ability to embrace self-worth, encourages community engagement to confront issues of racism and provides a platform from which to address other communal matters.

The propensity of the Black church as a safe haven is similarly underscored by Este's (2004) in his appraisal of the pioneering role of the Montreal Union United Church (UUC) as a religious social welfare institution. Este explains that between 1907 and 1940, the UUC was the cornerstone of the Black community in the Montreal area. The church was a voice for the oppressed and functioned as an agent of change within the Black community. UUC advocated, educated, and provided support and encouragement to Montreal's Black population and encouraged them to become active and contributing members of the community. According to Este, the UUC served as a base for moral, social and economic support, and created a space for individual and communal self-reliance. As a religious organization within the Black community,

UUC realized its objectives by safeguarding the Black culture and fostering a unique identity among the Black population. Equally, the church also became an advocate in the issues of racial injustice and inequalities experienced by Blacks in Montreal (p. 21).

Paris (1989), in *The Moral, Political and Religious Significance of the Black Churches in Nova Scotia*, lays the foundation of the Black church on the need for people of African ancestry to experience Christianity differently and in an environment devoid of a pervasive “hostility of a racist social order” (p. 3). Paris recognizes the need for socio-political reformation, the moral quest for the affirmation of the individual, the drive for an avowed “socio-cultural” identity, and the desire to better understand the purpose of human existence in spite of “suffering” and “oppression” (pp. 3-4) as four imperatives that led to the emergence of the Black church. These underpinning catalysts in the evolution of the Black church are foundational to “survival theology” (p. 20) which Paris describes as the precursor to freedom from oppression. The message of survival theology is about living to fight another day. Survival theology keeps the oppressed alive in the “wilderness” in order to behold the “promise land” (p. 20). This quest for survival is evident in the:

many expressions of faith in sermons, prayers, testimonies, songs and music – expressions of gratitude for the actual experience of God’s providence and hope for the restoration of God’s blessings in providence and hope for the restoration of God’s blessings in the near future. These many expressions of faith enable the people to cope with the storms of life and not despair. (p. 27)

Following in the footsteps of Paris, Este and Bernard (2006) connect the historical foundation of the Black church to societal and institutionalized marginalization of earlier Black settlers. Thus, in response to this climate of discrimination, the Black community carved a distinctive “Black culture” in the pursuit of human dignity and to survive the unwelcoming environment of the time. It was out of this response that the Black church emerged as an agency

in the building of culturally based spirituality and in providing a sanctuary of healing for the oppressed.

The contention about the Black church is further echoed in the models of Black church proposed by Hart and Anne Nelsen (1975) in *Black Church in the Sixties*. The first of these models, “assimilation-isolation”, blames the Black church for socially isolating the Black community from the mainstream population. Within this model, the Black church is viewed from two perspectives: firstly, as a unique organization dedicated to meeting the needs of the Black population and secondly as an active organization serving the needs of the Black community within the mainstream society thus occupying a precarious position of balancing its devotion to the Black community and perceived obligation to the society at large. The assimilation component of the assimilation-isolation model rejects the idea of a Black church. It prescribes a renunciation of the Black church as the way forward for the Black community. From an assimilation perspective, progress is futile as long as the Black community continue to embrace the theology of isolation as taught by the Black church. Furthermore, the assimilation model, according to Nelsen and Nelsen, suggests that genuine integration can only be achieved if every pursuit of “racial identity or an escape from the lowly status of Negroes and the contempt for whites” (p. 8) are abandoned. Thus progress in the Black community is predicated on full integration into the larger society coupled with the relinquishing of sobriquets such as “Black” or “African” in the identity of the church. Accordingly, assimilation model effectively undermines the ability of the Black church to provide a viable alternative to conventional churches. It also advocates a movement towards the assumed “progressive” mainstream churches as the solution to the stagnation of African people.



Similarly, the isolation portion of the assimilation-isolation model scolds the Black church for furthering civic disengagement and hindering the full participation of Black people in “progressive” societal issues. Citing some scholarly opinions, Nelsen and Nelsen (1975) connect isolation with the propagation of “mass apathy” (p. 9) which has been historically used by some as a descriptive characteristic of the Black community. This characterization depicts the Black church as a “lower-class, otherworldly [organization] acting as an opiate for problems of a temporal nature” (p. 9)

The second model, compensatory, portrays the Black church as a bridge for Black people to cross into the mainstream. A key component this model, as outlined by Nelsen and Nelsen, is the envisioning of the Black church as a base for organizing members of the Black community to exercise their rights within the general population. However, this role is viewed by the detractors of the Black church as reactionary and as a result compensatory model asserts that the achievements of the Black church is an “inferior substitute for the types of organizational [ideals] of mainstream society” (p. 10). The compensatory model also sees the Black church as a place where individuals can ascribe to special recognition which they seldom receive within the mainstream society. The compensatory model equally confirms Gunnar Myrdal (1944) observation in *An American Dilemma*. In Myrdal’s assessment, the idea of a Black culture is an aberration in the context of the larger society and it merely compensates for what is lacking within the society at large. Consequently, the compensatory model minimizes the notion that the Black church is a key institution within the Black community and it also depicts its illustrious accomplishments as ephemeral (Nelsen & Nelson, 1975).

The third model, ethnic community, projects a positive view of the Black. In chapter one, I briefly presents the ethnic community model and connects it to the distinct position of the

Black church as the core of the Black community. As described by Nelsen and Nelsen, the ethnic community model represents a Black church that plays a prominent role in the attainment of socio-political emancipation and promotes solidarity within the community. This model also sees the Black church as an active agent in nurturing a distinctive Black identity among its adherents and within the Black community at large (Nelsen & Nelsen, 1975).

By ethnic community model the Black church is conferred the authority to address the “corrupt white Christian” (p. 11) society. A role described by Nelsen and Nelsen as prophetic. In this prophetic role, the Black church creates a space where Black people can seek solace, and obtain fortitude to combat societal injustices to which they have been historically subjected. Even detractors of the Black church, such as Joseph Washington<sup>29</sup> (1964), acknowledge this prophetic role by locating the Black church in the building of a cohesive Black society and in leading the march towards the Black liberation.

As an ethnic community establishment, the Black church champions the liberation of Black people: it fights oppressions, stands against injustices and combats the impediments that limit the ability of Black people to fully devote themselves to the service of God (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1997). Furthermore, Nelsen and Nelsen also contends that the ability of the Black church to maintain a liberated Black community, as evident in the ethnic community model, is an effective reminder for “[Christianity as a whole] of its revolutionary heritage from the Protestant Reformation and its neglected role of watchdog over secular culture” (Nelsen & Nelsen, 1975, p. 13).

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<sup>29</sup>Washington attributes the loss of vitality within the Black church to its inability to assimilate into the mainstream society (Washington, 1974)

## **Immigration and the foundation of the Black Church**

Canada has historically been referred to as “a land of immigrants” (CIC, 2011). Prior to the 1960s, immigrants from Great Britain and other parts of Western Europe were more desirable than immigrants from other parts of the world who, by law, were deemed inadmissible (Li, 2000). Prior to Canadian confederation in 1896, the majority of Canadian population was primarily of British and French origin. However, this trend changed between 1896 and the World War I when immigrants from other European countries gained easier access into Canada (Canadian Council of Refugees, 2000; James et al., 2010; Li, 2000; The Canadian Encyclopedia, 2012)

It was not until the late 1960s when Canada rescinded the usage of country of origin, racial and ethnic background as admissibility criteria for immigrants that the population of non-Europeans began to increase. More noticeably, since the adoption of the universal point system in 1967, there has been a significant rise in the population of the designated “visible minority” groups (Li, 2000). Overtime, with the implementation of other immigration reforms, and the adoption of a multicultural policy, Blacks, Chinese and South Asians now constitute the largest populations of visible minority groups in Canada (Milan & Tran, 2004).

In *The Freedom-Seekers: Blacks in Early Canada*, Hills (1992) traces the appearance of the first Black person in Canada to the arrival of Mathieu da Costa, a free African and an interpreter under Governor de Mont’s, in 1605 (p. 3). However, both Hills (1992)<sup>30</sup> and Gillard (1998) contend that a six years old Madagascan child described as the “property of David Kirke” (Hills, 1992, p. 3) was indeed the first “involuntary” Black permanent resident of Canada.

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<sup>30</sup> According to Hills (1992), the child would have been captured from the French colony of Madagascar by David Kirke (adventurer, colonizer and governor for the king of England) on one of his raids. The child was named Olivier LeJeune by Father Paul LeJeune, a Superior of the Jesuit Order’s Canadian Mission.

From the early 1600s until the passing of the Slavery Abolition Act within the British Empire in 1833, slavery was a part of Canadian society. Evident of slavery in Canada abounds even amongst the newly arrived Loyalists<sup>31</sup> (and the Black loyalists) between 1782 and 1785 (Boyd, 1975; Gillard, 1998; Hills, 1992; Pachai, 1997; Winks, 1998). From Boyd's account,

British ships carried free loyalist Blacks<sup>32</sup>, and with them were White loyalists along with their slaves or, as the White loyalist called them, "servants for life". Their number has been estimated as 3,550 men, women and children; this number includes loyalist Blacks and slaves or servants. (Boyd, 1975, p. xviii)

One of the passengers aboard these ships was David George, the founder of the first Black Baptist Church in North America<sup>33</sup>. Upon his arrival in Nova Scotia, David George became a renowned church planter across the Black communities in Nova Scotia. Unfortunately, he and about 1,200 other Black Loyalists left Nova Scotia in 1792 for Freetown, Sierra Leone in protest against the prevailing racism and hostility which culminated into the Shelburne race riots of 1784 (Paris, 1989).

In 1796, another group of Blacks, labelled the "Maroons"<sup>34</sup> landed on the shores of Halifax. This group of over 500 descendants of enslaved Africans in Jamaica were involuntarily relocated to Nova Scotia after war broke out between them and the British colonizers. Having been raised in an independent culture, the Maroons rejected the repressive conditions of Nova Scotia and thus became further isolated from the rest of the society. Overtime, many of the surviving Maroons, just as the Loyalists some years before, relocated to Sierra Leone in 1800 leaving just a few of the Maroon populations behind in Nova Scotia (James et. al, 2010; Pachai,

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<sup>31</sup> The loyalists (also known as the White Loyalists) were groups of colonist that remained loyal to the British Monarchy and the kingdom during the American revolutionary war.

<sup>32</sup>The loyalist Blacks or Black loyalists were people of African descent who joined British forces during the American Revolutionary War. Many of them were former slaves who were promised freedom, protection and the rights of citizenship within the British Empire (Paris, 1989)

<sup>33</sup>Together with other enslaved Africans, George founded the Silver Bluff Baptist Church in South Carolina in 1775 (Brooks, 1910)

<sup>34</sup>According to Walker (1984), the Maroon was a term used for enslaved Africans who escaped to form their own independent communities.

1997; Walker, 1984). Although the majority of the Maroons were only in Nova Scotia briefly, their stories come alive in reference to the Maroon Bastion in the fortification of the Citadel Hill in Halifax (Walker, 1984; Grant, 2002, p. 36), their independence is spoken about in their ability to practice and promote their religious and cultural practices while in Nova Scotia (Grant, 2002) and their endearing legacy of resilience and non-conformity remains ingrained in their descendants in Nova Scotia and across Canada.

The war of 1812 ushered in yet another group of Africans who became known as the Black Refugees<sup>35</sup>. The Black Refugees escaped enslavement in the United States and about two thousands of these Africans settled in Nova Scotia between 1813 and 1816 (Nova Scotia Archives; Paris, 1989). This group settled in the Preston area, Hammonds Plains, Beechville, the Annapolis Valley and around the outskirts of cities and towns across Nova Scotia. These new immigrants arrived in Canada with a strong religious belief. The Black Refugees

came with a strong faith in God, singing songs that kept them, songs that gave them a hope in an *Old Beulah Land* and *The Sweet By and By*, all of their songs of *When We All Get To Heaven*, *When the Saints Go Marchin' In*, were all futuristic of a better day, of a brighter day. (Personal Communication, Reverend Anderson, 2013)

Although it was not their intention to establish a church separate from the existing mainline churches, the inability to worship freely in the established White congregations, and the failure of the mainstream churches to welcome them with open arms became the catalysts for laying the foundation of independent Black churches across Nova Scotia (Walker, 1985, p. 6). Among this new arrivals was Richard Preston, who is revered as one of the most important figures within the African United Baptist Association in Nova Scotia.

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<sup>35</sup>Black Refugees were invited by the British government to join the military or live as a free person in one of the colonies. Many of these refugees were disappointed as they were deserted upon arrival in Nova Scotia (Paris, 1989; Nova Scotia Archives, 2013, "Black Refugees, 1813-1834")

In the early 1900s, during the economic boom of Cape Breton Island, the demand for labour brought hundreds of migrant Black workers to this part of Nova Scotia (Ruck, 1990). The industrial prosperity, particularly the flourishing Dominion Iron and Steel Company (DISCO), attracted Black workers from other parts of Nova Scotia, the United States and the Caribbean, in particular Barbados (Reid, 2001). By the first quarter of the 1900s, the population of Black immigrants in Cape Breton, in particular those from the Caribbean has increased dramatically. Majority of these immigrants were religious and some even attended established White churches. Even with membership within the mainstream churches, many Black attendees in these churches they did not have “collective and affinitive relationship with any” (Reid, 1999, p. 89). The lack of commitment was primarily due to what many Blacks perceived as an unwelcoming church environment. Facing the realities of the time, the growing Black community became socially conscious and implemented several programs for the advancement of the Black community. The heightened awareness brought about the longing for a welcoming environment where the “structure of a people’s religious consciousness was afforded authentic expression” (Reid, 1999, p. 94). Ultimately, this desire was fulfilled with the establishment of St. Philip’s African Orthodox Church in 1928.

As previously mentioned, the removal of country of origin, as a criteria for accepting immigrants into Canada in the 1960s, paved the way for immigrants of non-European ancestry to become a part of the Canadian society (Reitz, 2012). While this immigration reform was economically motivated as a means to boost the Canadian skilled labour force, it nevertheless became a catalyst for a new face of Canada (Li, 2000; Reitz, 2012) and consequently resulted in a higher proportion of immigration by visible minorities particularly those of Asian and African ancestry (Li, 2000; Mensah, 2009). The increasing population of African and Caribbean

immigrants will pave the way for a corresponding increase in the number of African Initiated Churches and Caribbean inspired churches across Canada. Ironically, the unprecedented growth of these African Initiated Churches also corresponds with the continuous decline of the mainstream, “White Initiated churches” (Mensah, 2008; Burgess, 2009) in Canada and across many Western societies.

### **Culture, Identity and the Black Church**

In Chapter one I alluded to the “one fold, and one shepherd” (John 10:16, KJV) tenet of Christianity. As laudable as this tenet sounds, it does not take too long to see evidence of contrary manifestations to what is considered a fundamental precept of Christianity. Within Christianity, it is impossible to avoid the nuances of diverse ecclesiology. A multiplicity of doctrines pervades the landscape of Christianity thus resulting in diverse “shared values that find significant expression in various communal symbols, ideas, rituals, and pronouncements” (Paris, 1985) across the Christian world. Arguably, one is left to wonder if these shared values are emblematic of the identities of the different churches and their adherents (Paris, 1985).

The understanding of culture and cultural identity, particularly in the context of the Black church, cannot be undermined. The unique, oratorical (often allegorical, sometimes political and at other times historical) sermon delivery within the Black church is an important example of the unique “shared values” often cited as part of the cultural rites within the Black church (Isaac & Rowland, 2002). Equally, if Mensah’s (2008) assertion that the growing number of African Initiated Churches has brought a new perspective into the scenery of Christianity in Canada, as evident in their “several unfamiliar liturgy and cultural rituals” (p. 24) holds true, the need to further investigate the relevance of culture and ethnicity within Christianity becomes imperative.

Kessing (1974) raises an objection to the traditional view of culture and argues that culture cannot be limited to learned behaviours and inherited traditions of human beings and neither can it be simply reduced to the “heritage people in a particular society share” (p. 73). He proposes an inclusive definition of culture that reflects the complexity of human experience and the intricacies of their interplay. Furthermore, he draws on two groups of scholarly interpretations of culture: the “cultural adaptationists”<sup>36</sup> and the “cultural ideationists” (p. 75).

According to Kessing, the cultural adaptationists group envisions culture as

Systems (of socially transmitted behavior patterns) that serve to relate human communities to their ecological settings. These ways-of-life-of-communities include technologies and modes of economic organization, settlement patterns, modes of social grouping and political organization, religious beliefs and practices, and so on (p. 75)

Within the camp of the cultural ideationists, culture is viewed as a series of ideas which is referred to as “systems of knowledge” (p. 77). Kessing discusses cultural ideationism from three perspectives: “culture as cognitive system”, “culture as structural system” and culture as a symbolic system. Leaning on Goodenough (1957) who perceives culture as

Whatever it is one has to know or believe in order to operate in a manner acceptable to its members. Culture is not a material phenomenon; it does not consist of things, people, behavior, or emotions. It is rather an organization of these things. It is a form of things that people have in mind, their models for perceiving, relating, and otherwise interpreting them. (p. 167),

Kessing faults the cultural cognitive system as “unproductive and inadequate in the face of the staggering richness and complexity of human knowledge and experience” (p. 78). He also views the idea of culture as a structural system as a way for humans to imposing order in the vastness of nature and this, according to Kessing, is not limited by the differences in “language and custom that [often] divide different peoples” (p. 79).

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<sup>36</sup>By adaptation, culture is view form an evolutionary perspective (Kessing, 1974, p. 74) which views culture as “adaptive systems” (p. 75).



The last perspective of cultural ideationism, culture as symbolic system, envisions culture as a tangible entity. As a symbolic system, culture deviates from “mind interpretation” and relies more on “social doings”. Drawing on the works of Clifford Geertz (1965) and David Schneider (1968), Kessing explores culture as a symbolic system that draws meaning. From a symbolic perspective, culture reflects the “richness of real people in real life” (p. 79) and this permeates every aspect of human life – marriage, conflicts, sports, funeral, crime etc. – and produces “symbolic action” (p. 79). Kessing’s summation of Schneider’s view of “culture as a symbolic system” concludes that

[Culture] is a system of symbols and meanings. It comprises categories or “units,” and rules” about relationships and mode of behavior. The epistemological status of cultural units or “things” does not depend on their observability; both ghosts and dead are cultural categories. Nor are rules and categories to be inferred directly from behaviour; they exist, as it were, on a separate plane. (Kessing, 1974, p. 80)

For Yeh and Hwang (2000) culture and ethnic (cultural) identity<sup>37</sup> are not necessarily the same thing. Culture allows the continuity of cultural identity by creating an avenue for its manifestation. Yeh and Hwang argues that everyone is connected to some form of cultural identity which may not necessarily be unique to a particular culture. Cultural identity, on the other hand, offers the tool for validating membership within an ethnic group, and creates a path for navigating meanings to the complexities of life. Yeh and Hwang refer to cultural “consciousness” as one of the several manifestations of cultural identity. Through cultural consciousness, an individual is grounded in the norms and ideological traits of her/his cultural group. There is also cultural “adoption” which is the ability of an individual to embrace cultural elements, be able to demonstrate them and derive a “sense of belonging” from them (p. 241). Yeh and Hwang also discuss cultural “adhibition” which is the predisposition of an individual to

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<sup>37</sup>I use cultural identity and ethnic identity interchangeably in this section. Yeh and Hwang (2000) use ethnic identity to refer to cultural and ethnic identity as one and the same (p. 422).

conceal, in spite of “consciousness” and “adoption”, certain characteristics of their cultural identity depending on the context.

Similarly, Schwartz, Samboanga and Weisskirch (2008) explore the intersectionality of personal and cultural identities. Cultural identity is viewed through “cultural values and practices” (p. 636), the understanding of one’s cultural group, and the interconnectedness of an individual and the group. Borrowing Erikson’s identity development theory, Schwartz, Samboanga and Weisskirch conclude that personal identity is the foundation of each individual; it answers the question of “Who am I?” (p. 636). Cultural identity, however, sums up those cultural traits that an individual has successfully adopted and owned due to membership within a particular cultural group.

On a cautionary note, the manifestation of cultural identity is not always one dimensional. There are complexities of identity as evident in how an individual of African ancestry has to contend with the pervasive Eurocentric hegemony and ideologies. There are continuous, often convoluted and sometimes contentious tensions in reconciling their African cultural values with the learned (either consciously or unconsciously) European ideals (Richards, 1997; Yeh & Hwang, 2000).

As previously discussed, sermon is a unique example of “shared values” within the Black church. Isaac and Rowland (2002) contends that sermons in the Black church project interlacing biblical characters garnished with the invocation of “celebrated people of African descent” (p. 5). For most Black preachers, utilizing the collective experiences of Black congregants allows them to bring relevance to their sermons. Their sermons rely heavily on the usage of “self-ethnic metaphors” to create vivid imagination and bring life and meaning to messages. There are other Black preachers who will often utilize “Africentric affirmations”, which is tactical use of the

negative experiences of African people to generate strength and build a positive sense of identity (Isaac & Rowland, 2002, pp. 5-6). Sermons in the Black church is empowering, reassuring and reaffirming. The oratory of sermons counteracts negative stereotypes and allows the Black congregations to envision victory against all odds.

In addition to oratory sermons, it is also not uncommon to see African musical instruments such as *dundun*, *agogo*, *djembe*, *pangolo*, *shekere* which early Christian missionaries deemed paganism in use within the Black church, in particular the African Initiated Churches (Nwadiolor, 2011). Similarly, the usage of African indigenous languages such as *Yorùbá*, *Kiswahili*, *Twi*, *Igbo* and *Xhosa* in church services whether in the reading of biblical texts, in songs and sermons or in general conversations are all expressions of “shared values” that are essential to African cultural identity (Mensah, 2009; Nwadiolor, 2011). Furthermore, the atmosphere of dressing in your “Sunday best” is usually unique, colourful and elaborate within the Black church. In the Black church, interaction among congregants during church services is typically spontaneous, informal and “unscripted” compared to the seemingly orchestrated atmosphere in most mainstream, non-Black churches. Mensah comments on the atmosphere within the Black church in his observation of a typical service in a Ghanaian AIC:

[the] dress code, combined with the common use of African-flavoured religious pop music in the midst of intense clapping and dancing, often conjures an image of social celebration rather than a solemn church service. On the whole, the worship styles ... were far more interactive, with considerable involvement of the congregation in even the delivery of sermons, than one could find in most mainstream Canadian churches (Mensah, 2009, p. 34)

Although the origin of the Black church has variously been linked to the experiences of prejudice and intolerance (Gillard, 1998); “cultural shock, alienation, and discrimination” (Mensah, 2009, p. 22) by Black people within the Canadian society, the Black church has succeeded in establishing itself as a centre for the propagation of African cultural identity and the

building of a vibrant Black community (Billingsley & Morrison-Rodriguez, 1998; Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990; Mensah, 2009; Myers, 2005; Nelsen & Nelsen, 1975; Nwadiolor, 2011; Paris, 1985; Paris, 1989; Peele-Eady, 2011; Seale et al., 2012).

Barnes (2005) identifies the role of the Black church in using spiritual activities to evoke social change. The spiritual repertoire of the Black church includes rituals such as intercessory prayers, making the scripture relevant to the everyday experience of the congregants, invocation of past heroes of faith and the dependence on the prophetic as a means of using spiritual activities to effect changes in everyday life. Barnes suggests that these rituals are essentials of cultural identity that reflect “elements of Christianity and African traditional religions” (p. 970). Moreover, Barnes also observes that the dependence on ritualistic prayers and community oriented approach to intercessory prayers uniquely set the Black church apart from the mainstream White churches.

According to Barnes (2005), cultural traditions within the Black church are essential for defining an individual and creating group identity. Collective action and identity formation within the Black church reside in the ability of culture to generate meaning that “resonate with adherent and ground the specific strategies of action that groups and individuals develop” (p. 972). Thus grounding in the cultural repertoire of the Black church results in the dissatisfaction often encountered when a Black person decides to be part of a mainstream church. For those who have been indoctrinated into the “culture” of the Black church, the frustration of cultural difference creates an insatiable appetite for a church that truly reflects their identity (Burgess, 2009, p. 256).

## **Education: A dimension of the Black Church**

What role does the Black Church play in lifelong learning? To answer this question, one must first examine the overall objective of organized religions. Elias (1993) suggests that the primary goal of most religious organizations is to foster the personal growth of adherents. This goal is accomplished through the creation of “interpersonal support and fellowship” and ensuring an overall improvement and change within the society (p. 177). From the perspective of Blackledge and Hunt (1985), the church provides an avenue where individuals can engage in social functions that are important for daily living. The church functions as a meeting place; a place of learning and socializing and as a religious organization, it plays a vital role in the overall improvement of its congregants through continuous and supportive learning. As observes by Larsson (2010), “teaching belongs to the very heart of a church, *its being*, and can never be reduced to some kind of activity, *its doing*” (p. 519).

The Black church has always functioned as a responsive agent to the needs of the community through continues learning (Isaac and Rowland, 2002). How then is the Black church using its pulpit, rituals and church based activities to promote lifelong learning among its congregants and the Black community at large? Is the Black church still relevant in fulfilling this role and is it positioned to meet the future lifelong learning needs of its congregants and the Black community at large?

Isaac and Rowland (2002) deem the process of sermon delivery in the Black church an example of culturally relevant learning. For learning to be culturally relevant it must incorporate materials and examples which learners can identify with. Similarly, in culturally relevant learning, learners are active participants and they take ownership of the learning process. Most importantly, culturally relevant learning must integrate key aspects of learner’s culture into the

learning process (Colin, 1989; Guy, 1999; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Sheared, 1994) to empower learners and help them “take control of their [lives] and improve their social condition” (Isaac & Rowland, 2002, p. 2). Furthermore, for learning to be culturally relevant, real life experiences that unambiguously represent and mirror the “culture, values and social and intellectual histories” (p. 2) of the learner must be included in the learning process.

Historically, the Black church has championed racial and cultural identity awareness. It has driven socio-political movements and promoted overall welfare of Black people through its rituals, community based activities and social engagements (Isaac & Roland, 2002). For example, sermon delivery as a ritual of the Black church, projects culturally relevant learning amongst Black congregants. Coulander (1976) posits that sermon as a form of Black oral rendition often serves as a reminder about the unjust and negative experiences of African people. Sermon also elicit a cohesive response on how to effectively address these unpleasant experiences. For those of African ancestry, a sermon is not just the word of God; it is an instrument of hope and affirmation (Isaac and Rowland, 2002).

Likewise, elements such as imagery and sounds are tools employed by preachers to “awaken the senses and move the churchgoer from a listener to active participants” (Rowland, 2002, p. 4). As part of their study, Isaac and Rowland discusses five recurring themes from the sermons of the ten participating preachers: “Self-ethnic personalities-experiences” uses the names of people and places during sermons as a way to remind individuals about past heroes of faith. “Self-ethnic social-experiences” affirm congregants’ personal and collective experiences. “Self-ethnic psycho-cultural” describes how preachers are able to speak words that are directed to freeing congregants from unpleasant experiences peculiar to Black people and prevalent within the Black community. “Africentric affirmations” serves as a reminder that in spite of the

history of oppression, Black people are victors not victims. The last of the theme, “Self-ethnic metaphors”<sup>38</sup>, utilizes familiar imageries and culturally relevant “understanding” to highlight burning issues critical to the overall experiences of congregants (p. 5)

From Este and Bernard’s (2006) accounts, the Black church is the “most important institution” within the African Canadian communities (p. 1). They maintain that apart from the family, the church is the core of the community and membership within the Black church often defines the community. The church, they argue provides an enabling environment where everyone can participate in the affairs of the community and engage collaboratively. In its earliest formation, the Black church was the only avenue through which everyone could fully participate and manage their affairs without the experience of discrimination. The independence of the Black church from the mainstream society allowed it to function as the base for spiritual, economic, social and political development (Gillard 2004).

Describing the African United Baptist Church (AUBA) as an example of a religious organization with an endearing legacy within the Black Nova Scotian community, Este and Bernard (2006) presents the AUBA as a religious and social development stronghold for the Black community. According to them, the AUBA advocates strong leadership and advances a cohesive Black community; it promotes “pragmatic solutions to social and economic challenges” (p. 3) by encouraging self-reliance and communal responsibility; and in recent times, the AUBA and its affiliated churches have been vocal on the issues of “racism and exclusion in all spheres of Nova Scotian Society” (p. 3) by continuing to advocate better opportunities in all areas of life for African Nova Scotians.

With the history of being a key organization within the Black community, the Black church is an important cultural repository (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990) and it functions as a

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<sup>38</sup>I explained this in the previous section as an element of cultural identity in the Black church.

primary source of “materials on the culture, mores, music, songs and lifestyle of African Canadian people” (Este & Bernard, 2006, p. 2).

As an important tenet of Africentricity, spirituality is at the core of everything involving African people (Schiele, 1994). Spirituality provides Black people a tool for surviving prejudice and oppression (Este & Bernard, 2006). Spirituality also sustains an experiential Black identity (Este & Bernard, 2006) through a history of racism, oppression and imperialism to which African people have been subjected to. Spirituality also fosters an endearing legacy of resistance and survival strategies that unite all African people (Asante, 2003; Paris, 1989; Schiele, 1994). In terms of human well-being, Este and Bernard believe spirituality has a strong influence on the overall health of an individual and as a learning process it provides “strength and tenacity” (p. 3) in the face of hostility and oppression.

Este and Bernard (2006) discuss the role of spirituality on study participants involved in two separate studies. The first study, *The Strong Black Woman and Racism (SBW)* involved 50 African Nova Scotian women between the ages of 45 to 65 and from 10 different African Nova Scotian communities. The second study, *Racism, Violence and Health Project (RVH)*, a multi-site, multi-year project explored the effect of race induced stress on 300 African Canadian participants from Halifax, Toronto and Calgary. Participants in both studies consider spirituality as the primary source of resistance to racism and as the most important factor in overcoming racism induced stress. Although not all participants attribute spirituality to religion, 36.7% strongly connects spiritual experience to membership in the local church. Este and Bernard report that over 70% of participants agrees that “God is in control of their lives” (p. 23) while 82% believes they could not “make it” without God. A key element of the study is the



importance of “God” in the lives of participants. Even where church membership has been minimized as an important criteria for spirituality, the concept of “God” is still emphasised.

Este and Bernard acknowledges Eugene’s (1995) observation on how the Black church uses spiritual affirmations as a tool for addressing social issues involving race, gender and class. Eugene, believes that the Black church can use spirituality to buttress human consciousness to effect social and personal changes. Just as Paris (1989) contends that spirituality can be reaffirmed through “word, song, music, dance and story” (p. 4) as important rituals of the Black church, Este and Bernard connect these rituals to the spirituality of resistance embraced by enslaved Africans to keep “hope alive” (hooks 2003, p. 108). The reinforcement of spirituality, by the Black church, shields Black people from the effects of everyday racism. It promotes their overall well-being by providing coping mechanisms from stress induced racism and it allows healing from the negative experiences of racism (Este and Bernard, 2006).

Isaac (2009) explores the importance of Sunday school in the learning of congregants and its value to religious education in the Black church. Since one of the primary goals of Christianity is to create “learners of all ages”, learning in the Black church allows individuals to engage in “honest dialogue and relevant teaching” for empowerment (White, 2004, p. 4). Within the Black church, as religious education promotes spiritual growth, it also addresses myriads of social issues pertaining to the Black community and the society at large. Thus, learning in the Black church, as a form of discipleship, creates a life changing experience and provides congregants with the necessary tools for combating life issues.

Isaac (2009) identifies “Social Interaction and “Self-Direction” as two important elements of Sunday School learning within the Black church. Through “Social Interaction”, individual learns by engaging instructors and other learners in the group on the topics of

conversation thus “Social Interaction” builds active and equal participation. “Self-Direction” keeps Sunday school participants in anticipation of forthcoming classes and builds continuous weekly preparation and in spite of the demands of responsibilities outside of the church, learners still take time to “reflect upon the Sunday school material[s]” (p. 63) prior to meeting the group every Sunday.

Hinton (2009) recommends the practices of the Black church as a template for enriching religious education within the larger Christian community. She echoes Mensah’s (2009) appeal that the academia must give priority to research involving Black churches and equally argues that the Black church is richly endowed with “history [and] curriculum” (p. 18) worthy of consideration by the larger Christian community. Hinton also weighs in on the notion that religious education should not solely be in the domain of the church. This observation by religious scholars is based on the perceived feeling that religious education within the church is about “indoctrination into belief practices” and not about learning (p. 19). She believes that such concerns can be alleviated by paying closer attention to how religious education is practiced within the Black church.

Hinton (2009) views the appropriation of Christianity by African people as an example of lifelong learning. In the early history of Africans outside of Africa, enslaved Africans infused both the innate and imparted knowledge of African religious traditions with the imposed Christian traditions of their captors. These African pioneers were not naïve to the errors in the Anglo-Saxon Christian teachings as they quickly understood that a loving God could not have brought them into enslavement. This realization resulted in the pursuit of a new interpretation of Christianity, one that catered to liberation and devoided of White enslavers’ interpretation of God’s sovereignty. Through this understanding, individual learned and understood the plans of

God for Black people and redeemed themselves from the oppressive teachings of Christian enslavers. Thus in spite of the inability to participate in formal education and with the risk attached to learning to read and write, African people, through the assistance of the Black church, embraced shared African cultural experiences within the process of learning provided by the church.

Hinton (2009) uses Eisner's (2002) educational curricula models: explicit, implicit and null to explain the religious education process in the Black church. Through the explicit curriculum, the Black church remains connected to its roots as an emancipatory agent by using its teachings to promote freedom and liberation. This explicit curriculum is central to the mandate of the Black church and focuses on its primary goals and objectives. The implicit curriculum addresses the "undocumented" and "seldom discussed" which are however inherently understood by Black learners and can be articulated when required. The implicit curriculum teaches "values and expectations not generally included in the formal curriculum" (Flinders, Noddings & Thornton, 1986, p. 34). However, these "undocumented" aspects of learning are essential to the learning process of Black people as they affirm the intangible but essential teachings of the Black church. These invisible elements of learning also underscore the unspoken yet understood desires of the Black church. The null curriculum focuses on what is "taught by not being addressed" (Hinton, 2009, p. 26). The underpinning purpose of the null curriculum is that, what is not explicitly taught or implicitly inferred is equally important in the learning process of the Black church (Eisner, 2002).

Moreau (1987) explores the history of Adult Education within the Black communities in Nova Scotia spanning the period of 1750 – 1945 by revisiting the history of early Black settlers and attributing their survival to the integral roles of the family, the church and community

organizations. For these Black pioneers, these agents (the family, the church and the community) form the core of the Black community and provide boldness to combat the prevailing unwelcoming environment of the time. On the role of the Black church as a core, Moreau explains that it was not unusual to see Black clergy tasked with the roles of spiritual leaders, community educators, liaison officers between the Black and White communities, political informants and community social control officers. Most Black clergy used their pulpits as platforms for “promoting racial awareness and identity, political socialization, and psychosocial well-being” (Isaac & Rowland, 2002, p. 3). Equally, through the implementation of Sunday schools, Black congregants learned to read and write and were able to build self-confidence for combating the White society. Similarly, the ability of the Black church to effectively organize the Black community and bring about positive changes prompts Stouffer (2000) to envision the Black church as the “focal point” (p. 203) for the early Black settlers. These Black pioneers participated in church meetings and programs. For these original Black settlers, the Church was the centre for community development and a safe haven for working together, “winning each other’s confidence” and nurturing “group loyalty” (p. 203). In the contemporary times, the role of the Black church continues to evolve to meet the changing realities of Black community.

Mensah (2009) underscores the increasing role of the African Initiated Church (AIC) in providing an array of social services for its members. With an increasing population of African immigrants in Canada, and most belonging to the AICs, the organization is tasked with providing settlement support and integration assistance to its adherents and the Black community at large. The church provides “food, clothing, transportation, and guidance in [new immigrant’s] search for employment, housing, healthcare and children children’s schools to facilitate settlement in their new environment” (p. 35). In addition to settlement programs, the AICs also provide “ESL

classes, marriage counselling, financial and legal assistance, conflict resolutions, mentoring, sports and summer school programs” (p. 35).

Mensah’s findings among the Ghanaian AICs in Toronto parallels Isaac’s (2005) overview of the new challenges facing the Black church particularly in the face of urbanization and rapid changes within the Black community:

- (i) An increasing demand for modern technology; particularly in employment and education. Churches are increasingly providing technological assistance to congregants since computers have become ubiquitous and knowledge of computers has become an essential skill.
- (ii) With increasing government cutbacks and shrinking private funding for community programs and services, faith based organizations are becoming the “go to” places. The Black community will, in all likelihood, be turning to the Black church for a solution.
- (iii) Education is also a pressing need of the future. As an organization that has historically been involved in community education, there is a huge responsibility to continue this role into the future. The church is tasked with developing programs that can support those that lack formal education. Even with decreasing dropout rate in the Black community, there will be more work to do in the future to maintain this decline. There will be need to create remedial programs, implement educational support programs and provide counselling programs for those that may end up dropping out in the future. Similarly, the provision of English as a Second Language (ESL) programs is equally important as the number of new immigrants continue to rise into the future.

- (iv) Moving into the future, individuals with low skills and/or limited education will be unable to compete in the labour market. Thus, in addition to creating an education support programs, the church may be tasked with providing employment support services as the need arises.

The need to educate and challenge the status quo of oppressive theology is equally integral to the role of the Black church in lifelong learning. Education in the Black church provides an indispensable tool for having “human worth and dignity reaffirmed” (Isaac & Rowland, 2002, p. 3). Spiritual education is key to the well-being of congregants (Constantine, Miville, Warren, Gainor & Lewis-Coles, 2006) and as discussed by Este and Bernard (2006), many in the African community place God at the core of their identity and their existence (Este & Bernard, 2006) and credit the church for providing spiritual insight and social understanding for gaining strength and obtaining reassurance in difficult situations. Through the Black church, congregants fulfil their “coping needs” by getting involved in activities that provide basic education and build self-reliance. They can also satisfy their “expressive needs” by learning for personal desires and not as a means to an end. The Black church also helps to fulfil the “contributive needs” of church members by allowing them to be socially responsible and by providing opportunities to take initiatives. Furthermore, by meeting the “contributive needs” of its congregants, the Black church simultaneously promotes the “influence needs” of its members by allowing them to bring about changes in the larger society (Findsen, 2012, p. 74).

### **Racism and the formation of “Otherness”**

Although Canada became a safe haven for oppressed Black pioneers who escaped the harsh reality of enslavement to begin a new life north of the border, the underpinning societal perception of “slaves” within the Canadian society paved the way for racial discrimination

towards Blacks (Walker, 1985). The institution of slavery gave credence to the subjugation of Blacks and promoted what Walker describes as “stereotypical characteristics” (Walker, 1985, p. 8) with which the Canadian society perceives people of African ancestry.

Walker (1985) explains that the end of the American Civil War, which gave birth to Emancipation proclamation in 1863, also led to the demise of Canada as a safe haven for Africans who escaped enslavement in the United States. By the end of the civil war, some of the Africans who had sought refuge in Canada, during the war, returned to the United States. In addition, the Canadian Confederation of 1867 resulted in a new immigration focus as non Anglo-Saxon immigrants increasingly became less desirable (Walker, 1985). Walker further explains that the various studies on race and racial classifications conducted by European researchers, became a justification for the unfavourable placement of Africans on the bottom of a fabricated pyramid of human evolution. These studies, which unambiguously promoted Europeans to the summit of human evolution, became the “base of empirical evidence [for] proving White superiority” (p. 14).

Walker (1985) further highlights some key instances of racial discrimination against Black people in Canadian. Such occurrence includes a petition against the migration of Blacks from Oklahoma into the prairies in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. According to Walker, the petition resulted in the imposition of stricter border regulations and the provision of special reward to officials who denied Black immigrants entrance into Canada. Other examples of discrimination cited by Walker include the denial of Black passengers from boarding the trains into Canada and the relegation of Black soldiers into construction battalion rather than allowing them engage in combat. Equally, Blacks were also mostly concentrated in unskilled and low paying jobs, and were denied entrance into recreational parks, theatres, hotels and most public places. By

Walker's account, discrimination against Blacks in Canada started out as classism due to societal perception of enslaved Africans but evolved into racism through the propaganda of "international racist theories" (Walker, 1985, p. 16).

There is a prevailing belief in Canada that racism is not a Canadian problem (James et al., 2010; Oliver, 2008). According to Oliver (2008), three myths reinforce this notion of a racism free Canada: most Canadians view Canada as a tolerant society, there is a pervasive assumption that racism is a thing of the past and "doesn't exist anymore" and for most Canadians, there is a belief that regardless of race, everyone has an equal opportunity to succeed. Oliver argues that these perceptions hinder the ability to properly expose the subtlety of intolerance in Canada and they equally impede the understanding of the ills of racism within the Canadian society. These misguided assumptions equally obstructs the efforts of finding a lasting solutions to the problem of racism and intolerance. Oliver further contends that in spite of societal stance, the historical experience of discrimination by Blacks and the continuous marginalization of Black people in various areas of life, confirm that racism is real and it is an everyday reality for individuals of African ancestry (Oliver, 2008, p. 39).

James et al. (2010) discuss "exoticization, dehumanization and marginalization" (p. 70) as ways through which racism manifest within the Canadian society. By racism exoticization, Black people are continuously subjected to questions about the validity of their identity as Canadians. Questions about country of origin (even when an individual has been born and raised in Canada), spoken language, cultural affiliation, religion, spiritual orientation and other inquiries that are suggestive of a perceived "Otherness" point to an underlining assumption that being Black is not akin to being Canadian (James et al., 2010). The concept of "Otherness" places individuals of African ancestry "at the edges of society from which their identities and



experiences are constructed” (Rollock, 2012, p. 66). “Otherness” also assumes that these identities and experiences are alien to Canada. Although James et al. cite multiculturalism as a possible culprit for “Otherness”, they were quick to point to power dynamics as the foundation of “Otherness”. The preservation of “Otherness” through power dynamics, substantiates Rollock’s (2012) assertion that “Otherness” keeps Black people at

the margins through acts and frequent reminders from dominant groups that regardless of achievement, qualification or status they are locked in ‘the power dynamic and hierarchical racial structures’ that serve to maintain unequal order in society. (p. 66)

James et al. (2010) further assert that dehumanization, either intentional or unintentional, perpetuates the exclusion of the exoticized “Other” by keeping “Other” in their own societal defined space. From the experience of being passed over while waiting to be served at restaurants to the reality of a patient questioning the competence of a health care professional simply because of the colour of their skin, dehumanization forms an everyday reality for individuals of African ancestry.

James et al. (2010) contend that marginalization creates exclusion from opportunities that non-Black Canadians take for granted. Marginalization is evident in the disparity in employment opportunities (Oliver, 2008) and it manifests in workplace discrimination experience of individuals of African ancestry (Banerjee, 2012; James et al., 2010). Furthermore, James and his colleagues also probe the lack of recognition for efforts in the workplace, the unacknowledged credentials and work experiences and they subtle workplace stereotyping as some of the ways Black immigrants are discriminated against within the Canadian labour market. They narrate the experience of an African immigrant professional who was left to wonder if “a degree from Egypt is worth less than a degree from France” (James et al., 2010, p. 104) and how this would affect their employment opportunities in Canada.

The experience of racism within the Canadian society is real and it pervades every aspect of the society including religious establishments. As I have discussed at various instances in this thesis, the Black church emerged in response to the culture of intolerance within the Canadian society and within the mainstream churches (Burgess, 2009; Pachai, 1997; Walker, 1989). Describing the contentious treatment of the early Black congregants by White parishioners, Walker explains that Blacks were given “separate pews, and [were] eventually told to hold separate services guided by Black lay readers rather than attend the regular Sunday service” (Walker, 1989, p. 9). Similarly, Burgess (2009) and Mensah (2008) attribute, in part, the proliferation of African Initiated Churches in the contemporary times to the need for a safe space where individuals can retreat from the weight of racial discrimination which is evident in all spheres of life.

## **Chapter Summary**

In this chapter, I present some scholarly works that highlight the interconnectedness of the Black church to the society. I discuss the argument for and against the Black church and highlight the contentiousness of the idea of a Black church among scholars. I discuss the opinions of some scholars who see the Black church as an imperative and progressive organization within the Black community. I also present other scholars who view the Black church as an impediment to the progress of Black people. The chapter also touch on the prevailing view that the Black church emerged as a result of a repressive White society.

I present an overview of the history of Black people in Nova Scotia by discussing the arrivals of key Black groups: the Black Loyalist, the Maroon, the Black Refugees and the recent immigration of Blacks from Africa and the Caribbean into Canada. The overview of these arrivals provide a base for understanding the motivation behind the choice of Canada as an

adopted country and it also hints on how religion, in particular Christianity, has been part of that journey.

Furthermore, I discuss the importance of culture and cultural identity and how they impact an individual's meaning making process. I explain the various elements and manifestation of cultural identity and how these can impact an individual's cultural orientation. I also present the roles of church in culturally relevant lifelong learning. Chapter two closes by showing that the Canadian society is not immune to racism. The chapter concludes by linking the foundation of the Black church and its continued proliferation, as seen in the AICs, to the effect of racism and discrimination.

In chapter three, I discuss Africentricity, Critical Race Theory and Postcolonialism as the essential theoretical framework for this thesis.

## CHAPTER THREE

### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

*I think from personal experience I'd say that coming from Upper Hammonds Plains, you're surrounded by a largely White community. So you have White Hills, you have Kingswood, you have all these other communities and there's always a constant struggle to be considered equal*

*-Shaylene, EBC, November 15, 2013*

#### **An Overview: Understanding Worldviews**

The thesis questions raised in this study requires a “worldview” that can adequately provide a solid and judicious theoretical foundation for emerging answers. Worldviews are essential if we want to understand human societies (Oyebade, 1990). As English (1991) explains, worldviews project the diversity of human perspectives; they are how “people perceive their relationship to nature, other people” (p. 1) and things around them. According to English (1991), a worldview “determines how people behave, think, and define events” (p. 1) and accounts for their cultural perspectives. Thus, worldviews, are not merely essential to the “owners”, they are equally important for “outsiders” to gain insight into new perspectives, new ideas and new ways of knowing.

Oyebade (1990) contends that the worldview of African people have suffered opposition from hegemonic Eurocentric perspectives. He lays the blame at the feet of Eurocentrism which is viewed as a universal perspective – “a reference point... [from] which every other culture is defined” (p. 234). The ubiquity of Eurocentric worldviews subverts other worldviews and continues to jeopardize African “intellectual thoughts” and knowledge (p. 234). It is out of this hovering shadow of Eurocentrism that Africentricity emerges as a viable, and an alternative perspective from which the history, experiences, thoughts, and belief systems of African people can be validated. The need for a different perspective, from which issues affecting African

people can be objectively analyzed, makes Africentricity an overarching theoretical framework of choice for this study. In addition, since the discourse of race and racism is intrinsically connected to my thesis questions, I also employed Critical Race Theory (CRT) as a complementary theoretical tool. Also, since Canada is a nation of immigrants where citizens of former colonies are now part of the mosaic of Canadian society, I have equally chosen Postcolonialism as one of my theoretical perspectives.

These theoretical trajectories provide a tenable ambience for understanding the context of the analysis in this study. With Africentricity residing at the core analysis, Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Postcolonialism both infuse a clearer understanding of the nuances of the experiences of African people by bringing to the forefront the issues of race, racism, identity, language, ways of knowing, meaning making and global migration. Most importantly, the theoretical framework will provide a platform from which the voices of participants resonate within the study.

### **Africentricity: Theory and philosophy**

Africentricity provides a platform from which the individual and collective experiences of African people are made relevant to their identity (Asante, 2003; Merriweather-Hun, 2004; Oyebade, 1990). It espouses the idea of “one African Cultural system manifested in diversity” (Asante, 2003, p. 4) but is uniquely integral to a universal African identity. The orientation of Africentricity views any attempt to analyze the experiences of African people without embracing the centrality of Africa within this experience, as futile (Schiele, 1994, p. 132). As Oyebade (1990) explains, the fundamental purpose of Africentricity is “the placement of Africa at the centre of any analysis of African history and culture” (p. 233) and the proclamation of the diverse experiences of African people. The Africentric paradigm opposes dominant Eurocentric perspectives (Asante, 1993; Diop, 1978; Khatib et al., 1979) which, through the course of

history, have undermined the experiences and “cultural reality of African people” (Schiele, 1994, p. 132).

The detractors of Africentricity are quick to compare Africentricity to a reincarnation of Black militancy aimed at furthering the segregation of African people from the mainstream and bent on portraying the White society as the oppressor (Schiele, 1994). Brigham (2007) condemns this misinterpretation of Africentricity as “an incorrect assumption” (p. 1). She speaks against this misconception, particularly in the promotion of Africentric Education, and explains that Africentricity does not supersede other worldviews nor does it only seek the interests of Black students at the exclusion of other students who are of different cultural and racial background. Similarly, Oyebade (1990) asserts that the intentions of Africentricity is not to usurp “Eurocentricity as a universal perspective” (p. 234) instead Africentricity stands in opposition to philosophical hegemony by embracing “a pluriversal perspective”<sup>39</sup> (p. 234). In spite of these divergent opinions of Africentricity, its integrity lies in three fundamental ideals: “location in one’s own cultural centre” (Merriweather Hunn, 2004, p. 68); rejection of “all forms of oppression” (Asante, 2003, p. 2); and subscription to a “set of common core principles” (Merriweather Hunn 2004, p. 68).

The placement of Africa at the core of analysis in this study, where African people are not merely the subjects but are active and equal participants, is imperative. Some African scholars have affirmed the existence of unique cultural differences between Africans and Europeans (Asante, 2003; Dei, 2012; M’Baye, 2013; Schiele, 1994) and have suggested that these unique cultural elements are undermined by the pervasiveness of Eurocentric ideology. Thus, the only way to recover what has been lost due to the debilitating impact of Eurocentricity, is to locate the individual within his or her cultural centre. As an Africentric point of reference,

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<sup>39</sup>Pluriversal perspective is a term for a pluralistic, non-exclusive and non-hegemonic perspective.

the provision of a place of worship by the Black church where individuals can be Christians, yet Africans, is a manifestation of African centredness. The ability to openly celebrate African cultural values within Christianity (even when it is done unconsciously) dispels the pervasive notion that African culture requires a remedial intervention from European and western societies.

Keith Ferdinando (2007) traces the origin of the subversion of Africans, their identity and culture to transatlantic slave trading when Africans were treated as commodities and not as persons. This period fortified “negative European attitudes” towards Africans (p. 122). The outcome of which, according to Ferdinando, propagated

racial theories that had come to permeate Western thinking, and which saw African culture as inferior and in need of the contribution of the West. Such ideas were shared by those who came with the gospel, and so not only did missionaries challenge African traditional religion, but they disparaged traditional African civilization at every level; conversion therefore implied both accepting Christian faith and embracing the culture of the West. To become a Christian was to become in some sense European. (p. 122)

Sadly, it is laboriously tasking for Africans Christians to situate themselves within this form of European Christianity which sole aim is to strip them of their African identity. In fact, this contentious past of European Christianity and its overall relationship with Africa has led some proponents of Africentricity to declare “African Christianity” an aberration in the context of African consciousness (Mazama, 2003). However, the movement towards the creation of a form of Christianity that promotes African values and cultural heritage within the Christian sacraments, is a direct confrontation of this unpleasant African Christianity past. As such, if Africentricity is the movement towards an African consciousness, the appropriation of Christianity by Africans is, to a large extent, “a positive re-evaluation and recovery of the traditional African religious past”, (Ferdinando, 2007, p. 123) African ways of knowing and African cultural identity.

As previously stated, not only does Africentricity locate African people within their cultural centre, it also opposes racism and every form of oppression (Asante, 2003; Merriweather Hunn, 2004). Africentricity equally provides the tools for combating racism and oppression. I agree with Merriweather Hunn (2004) that Africentricity dismantles the “psychological and material stronghold that have sought to denigrate and disenfranchise” (p. 69). I equally embrace Asante’s (2003) assertion that Africentricity can help combat institutionalised racism by attacking “personal racism”<sup>40</sup> (p. 46). Since the thrust of institutional racism resides in personal racism, going after the “psyches of racists, their lifestyles and the value-beliefs systems” (p. 46), will equip African people to adequately fight institutional racism and its mutant “process racism”<sup>41</sup>. Furthermore, by acknowledging and embracing other cultural experiences, Africentricity unequivocally denounces Eurocentric practice of cultural devaluation of non-dominant cultures. By embracing the Africentric ideal, the Black church functions as an anti-racism establishment where African people can escape the dehumanization of a racist society and the discriminatory theology of the mainstream church.

### ***Core Principles of Africentricity***

Africentricity operates within certain core values (Este & Bernard, 2006; Merriweather Hunn, 2004; Schiele, 1994) which help distinguish its operations from Eurocentric ideology:

#### ***Interdependency***

One of the core values of Africentricity is the interconnectedness of all things. As Mbiti (1990) suggests, the spiritual and the physical, from an African perspective, are inseparable.

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<sup>40</sup>Personal racism refers to racist ideas held in the minds of individuals – unnecessary fear of others because of the colour of their skin, feeling superior to others who are not like you, promoting stereotype views of other culture (Helpful Perspective on Race and Racism, <http://www.anti-racismonline.org/html%20pages/Helpful%20Perspectives%201.html>)

<sup>41</sup>Asante (2003) describes process racism as a “running while standing still” (p. 46) situation where institutional racism appears as being addressed by using other processes that further promotes racism.



Likewise, Mazama (2003) believes that the harmonious manifestation of African people and their environment is inherent in the “common energy” (p. 219) of everything living and non-living. This tenet of interdependency provides a basis for living responsibly by honouring peaceful co-existence, maintaining positive relationships with others, and remembering that “to destroy one component of the web of cosmic elements is to destroy the entire universe – even the creator” (Schiele, 1994, p. 152).

### *Collectivity*

From an Africentric stance, human beings are relational. Interpersonal relationships are important to Africentricity and Eurocentric practice of individualism is shunned and discouraged (Merriweather Hunn, 2004; Schiele, 1994; Schiele, 1990). Relationships in Africentricity are human-centred and not objects oriented. The need to further human relationships supersedes the yearning for the accumulation of material wealth (Schiele, 1994). Moreover, as Graham (1999) asserts, human relationships from an Africentric perspective, are about similarities and not differences. An example of the orientation of Africentricity towards interpersonal relationship can be seen in the words of African Philosopher, John Mbiti. Mbiti proclaims: “I am, because we are and since we are, therefore I am” (Mbiti, 1970, p. 141). Comparing this declaration to that of the French Philosopher, Rene Descartes’ “I am therefore, I exist”, the spirit of collectivity comes alive as an important virtue of Africentricity.

### *Affective Ways of Knowing*

I have previously discussed how African philosophy and religion have been undermined by Eurocentric worldview. This lack of acknowledgement resides in the belief that African philosophical and religious endeavours are non-empirical and as such cannot be authenticated (Taiwo, 1998; Ferdinando, 2007; Mazama, 2002). Mazama (2003) advocates an affective way of

knowing and argues that the lived experiences of African people must not be dismissed even when they cannot be empirically validated. Similarly, Schiele (1994) argues that from an Africentric perspective, “knowing through emotion and feeling is considered valid and critical” (p. 153). For Africans, religion is not confined to the pages of a religious book and sacraments or limited to a set of documented rules and rituals; it is a way of life, a lived experience.

### *Spirituality*

Africentricity provides a lens through which spirituality and its manifestations among African people can be understood. From an Africentric stance, everything in existence has a spiritual connectivity (Schiele, 1994; Mbiti, 1970; Warfield-Coppock, 1995). This view is in line with the concept of interconnected of everything (Schiele, 1994) since spirituality fosters human connectivity through human experiences and “common realities” (Merriweather Hunn, 2004, p. 69). Mbiti (1970) suggests that the lived experiences of African people are intrinsically connected to their spirituality and Mazama (2003) places spirituality at the core of African “struggles for liberation” (p. 219). Moreover, spirituality was an important element of survival in the early Black church (Este & Bernard, 2006), and it remains an important element for maintaining the identity of the contemporary Black church. For Africans, the knowledge of God did not come through the transatlantic enslavement conversion to Christianity nor through the encounter with early European missionaries. The belief in a creator has always been a part of African spirituality (Mbiti, 1970; Idowu, 1962). Thus, for Africans, becoming a part of the mainstream church or establishing their own religious space (as evident in the Black church) is a way to continue the legacy of a religious Africa (Bediako, 1992, cited in Ferdinando, 2007)

## Critical Race Theory

One of the goals of Critical Race Theory (CRT) is to expose “Whiteness” as an advantage and “Otherness” (Rollock, 2010, p. 65) as a disadvantage. With an origin in the legal discourse of the mid-1970’s United States, CRT addresses racism as a part of larger society problem of inequality and discrimination (Matsuda, 1991). Proponents of CRT contend that there are “historical, systemic and ideological manifestations” (Writer, 2008, p. 2) to racism and that these are the basis for the perpetuation of White privilege. Although, CRT emerged out of legal discourse, its application is relevant across every area of human endeavours. The adoption of CRT outside of the legal discourse is predicated on the need to confront pervasive institutionalized racism in every area of life. Viewed from Gillborn’s assertion, CRT rests on the premise that

One of the most powerful and dangerous aspects of Whiteness is that many (possibly the majority) of White people have no awareness of Whiteness as a construction, let alone their own role in sustaining and playing out the inequities at the heart of whiteness. (Gillborn, 2008, p.170)

There are six core principles that are essential to the application and scholarship of CRT (Abrams and Moio, 2009):

*Racism is endemic:* CRT proposes that racism is an everyday reality for people of African ancestry. Likewise, CRT also affirms that racism is institutionalized, it is pervasive and it is not a rare individualistic phenomenon.

*Race is socially constructed:* There are no biological rationale for race categorization.

Race has been insidiously manufactured based on physical characteristics but without any biological basis.

*Racism can be selective:* Racialization of those outside of the dominant and privileged culture occurs at various times to suite the need of the dominant culture.

*Racism has a material and psychological reward:* Those from the dominant group benefit materially and psychologically from the racism. This is the basis of “white privilege”.

CRT contends that change can only occur when the “white” society acknowledges its privileged status and affirms the plight of the oppressed people of colour.

*Racism silences non-dominate narratives:* A central goal of CRT is to create counter narratives to the prevailing dominant culture which “routinely excludes racial and other minority perspectives” (p. 251).

*Racism intersects other forms of discrimination:* CRT contends that in addition to dealing with racism, individuals of colour are also discriminated against based on gender, sexual orientation, class and status, disability and other forms of oppressions. This multifaceted experience compounds how those of African ancestry create coping mechanisms for managing discrimination.

CRT also responds to critics who see policies, such as Affirmative Action or Employment Equity (a term used in Canada), as a form of reverse discrimination. Critics advocate a “colour blind policy” (Rashid, 2011, p. 589) which they believe treats everyone equally and fairly regardless of race. CRT however posits that such assertions fail to consider how history is imprinted with White privilege which promotes the marginalization of non-dominant groups. CRT equally argues that colour-blindness does not equate neutrality and that the exclusion of race from decision making process is in essence an affirmation of the endemic nature of racism (Abrams and Moio, 2009).

Moreover, in agreement with Dixson and Rouseau (2005), Rashid (2011) positions CRT as a tool for providing voice to voiceless Africans who are often silenced by endemic, institutionalized racism within the society. CRT thus become an effective counter-narrative tool

which according to Writer (2006) provides an avenue for non-white individuals to present reality from their own perspective and without interference from hegemonic perspectives. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) identify “parables, chronicles, stories, counter stories, poetries, fictions and revisionist histories” (p. 57) as ways through which CRT gives voice to voiceless, non-white population. Moreover, through the transformative ability of CRT, the White society (as much as it is willing) becomes consciously aware of the realities of disenfranchised, non-white members of the society (Writer, 2006). This transformative ability of CRT

Compels us to understand the nature of racism and White supremacy in modern society, and to struggle in dynamic ways against its distorting effects on the humanity and life chances of communities of color... This acknowledgment emphasizes the emancipatory role of teachers, parents, community stakeholders, students, and educational scholars in challenging the dominant discourse by working in concert to create emancipator spaces (Rashid, 2011, p. 600)

It is this “emancipatory agency” that Asante (2003) advocates as the ultimate role of the Black Church (p. 99) and CRT serves as an effective tool for its propagation. CRT provides the platform for addressing questions such as: why did early Black immigrants choose to establish their own churches rather than become a part of the existing churches? How do the mainline Christian churches react to the presence of Black people as part of their congregation? How relevant is the Black experience within a religion with a history of subjugation and alienation of African people? These questions form the backdrop for Black theologian, James Cone’s examination of the role of the Black church and Black theology in combating racial oppression and creating a safe haven where the Black experience is made relevant within Christianity. Cone remarks:

it is not that Black Theology denies the importance of God’s revelation in Christ; but Black people want to know what Christ means when they are confronted with the brutality of white racism... what does revelation mean when one’s being is engulfed in a system of white racism cloaking itself in pious moralities... what does God mean when a policeman whacks you over the head because you are Black? (Cone, 1970, p. 54)

CRT alerts us to the fact that spirituality from an African perspective is not subordinate to “traditional and exclusively Eurocentric (White) Christian doctrines and practices” (Giles, 2010, p. 357). African spirituality affirms African values and provides a base from which Africans can find meaning, “surmount all threats to their being and existence... and establish their spiritual and ontological location” (Stewart, 1999, p. 3) even within a racially hostile society.

By its definition and application, CRT trumpets how factors such as country of origin, ethnic affiliation, look, accent, belief systems and non-European sounding names, can impede the acceptance of Black people into the mainstream, dominant White society (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). It should also be noted that not only does CRT reveal the endemic nature of racism and its impact on the quality of lives of racialized people, it also functions as a powerful social-justice tool in seeking and ensuring redress.

### **Postcolonialism**

Postcolonialism emerged out of the need for former colonies to confront the imperial, hegemonic power structure of colonization. (Bauder, 2005; During, 2000; Rizvi, Lingard & Lavia, 2006; Rukundwa & van Aarde, 2007; Young, 2005). The formation of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) in the 1950s was a pivotal moment in the expansion of postcolonial ideology. As the founding nations of the NAM resolved to “establish an international political, economic and ideological identity” (Young, 2005, p. 12) completely devoid of imperial powers and “forge a more socially just world order” (Rizvi, Lingard & Lavia, 2006, p. 250), the foundation of postcolonialism was laid.

By Rukundwa and van Aarde (2007) account, postcolonialism can be viewed from an optimistic and a pessimistic perspectives. The optimistic school views postcolonialism as a mean through which “any exploitative and discriminative practices, regardless of time and space, can

be challenged” (p. 1171). The pessimistic view, however, dismisses postcolonialism as an incoherent and circuitous framework. It is dismissive of postcolonialism because of apparent inconsistencies in definitions, and the continuous evolution of meaning and application. The dilemma of postcolonialism are also evident in its approach to addressing the issue of “race, culture and gender, settler and native” (p. 1172). Critics of postcolonialism have insisted on the lack of clarity and the transient nature of these aforementioned terms. As Rukundwua and van Aarde (2007) question:

When does a settler become a coloniser, colonised and postcolonial? When does a race cease to be an oppressive agent and become a wealth of cultural diversities of a postcolonial setting? Or in the human history of migrations, when does the settler become native, indigenous, a primary citizen? And lastly, when does the native become truly postcolonial? (p. 1173-1174)

These questions form the bedrock of contention in the discourse of postcolonialism. Thus scholars such as During (2010) discuss postcolonialism from a reconciliatory or critical perspective where the former leans towards a pessimistic view of postcolonialism. Rukundwa and van Arde (2007) argue for a critical postcolonial approach which reflects the prevalence of an “unequal and universal forces of cultural representation” (p. 1174 cited in Bhabha, 1994). Therefore, critical postcolonialism rests on the notion that there was and there remains a normalization of imperialist ideology which continues to put at a disadvantage those whose histories and cultures have been impacted by colonization.

Lee (2008) suggests that the landscape of Canadian history is adorned with the reality of a “White settler nation formation” (p. 30). Historical evidence, such as the confinement of Japanese Canadians, the contentious Chinese head tax, restricting immigration to those of European descent, the establishment of Indian residential schools, and restricting Black soldiers from joining combat battalions, are vivid reminder of a nation built on the backbone of European

imperialism (Lee, 2008; Miki, 2008; Oliver, 2008). Vukov (2000) agrees that “there is a historical continuum linking colonial settlement to immigration” (p. 7), and contends that this is most evident in the racialization – overt or subtle – of immigration policies. This marriage of colonial past with immigration policies thus becomes what Shohat describes as a machinery through which “the colonial master narrative is being triumphantly restaged” (Shohat, 1992, p. 105). In light of this reality,

Settler nations such as Canada, whose very national formation emerged from the unstable transition between colonial settlement and immigration as a means to secure its population, are particularly invested in imagining desirable and undesirable immigrants as structuring objects of immigration policy. This settler legacy is evident in the historical and ongoing strategy of nation-building through immigration, which has long been a project that seeks to simultaneously attract desirable immigrants while implementing a range of policy measures to exclude undesirable ones (Vukov, 2003, p. 336-337).

Bauder (2005) propounds *habitus*<sup>42</sup> as a root cause of the negative experiences of immigrants moving into a new society. Through *habitus*, Canadian society has structurally created an unfavourable environment for immigrants as evident in the lack of recognition of foreign credentials, pervasiveness of undervalued skills (concealed as “lack of Canadian experience”), subjection to racial and cultural discrimination, and the pressure to “sound [and act] Canadian”. Bauder argues that these factors, which are structurally concealed as Canadian ideals, often jeopardize the social and economic integration of immigrants. From the Canadian labour market experience, immigrants are at a disadvantage in conforming to the “set of rules that guide [the] expectation of behaviour” (p. 82), which has been infused into the Canadian society and which specifically benefit those for whom these who are not from “away”. Thus

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<sup>42</sup>The concept of *habitus* as promoted by Pierre Bourdieu refers to “durably installed generative principle[s]” (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 78): a set of acquired principles of thought, behaviour and taste that generate social practices and is particularly associated with a certain social class. *Habitus* constitutes “a person’s own knowledge and understanding of the world which in part constitutes that world” (Bruce & Yearley, 2006, p. 130)



based on *habitus*, the success of immigrants is contingent on “The ability to follow... and the skills to play by the rules” (p. 82) of the Canadian labour market.

Corroborating Bauder’s assertion, Vukov (2003) affirms that early Canadian immigration policies were set up specifically to “imagine and people the nation through colonial settlement” (Vukov, 2003, p. iii). This intrinsic connection between the new world and the “settlers” forms the backdrop for dominant ideas and prevailing cultural environment essential for maintaining societal status quo. This linkage to colonial past is explained by Stasiulis and Jhappan (1995):

The white settler society construct refers to the intentions of colonial administrators to build in Canada an “overseas extension” or replica of British society... Hence, the dominant culture, values, and institutions mimic those of the “mother” country; they must [therefore], constantly be replenished via immigration and importation of British goods, ideas... and institutions. (Stasiulis and Jhappan, 1995, p. 1)

It is therefore not uncommon for minority immigrants, no matter how long they have resided in Canada, to remain “people from away”:

At street level,... ethnic minorities are frequently deemed ‘foreigners’ regardless of their formal and legal citizenship in those countries... Post-colonialism challenges such situations by flipping the viewpoint from that of the locals to that of the immigrants (Abe, 2008, para. 2).

Postcolonialism can be justified by engaging some key human institutions and endeavours such as humanitarian, economic, political and religious (Rukundwa and van Aarde, 2007). Humanitarian justification emerged out of anti-slavery and anti-colonial activism which denounced the occupation of the Americas by the Europeans after the discovery of the “new world” (Rukundwa and van Aarde, 2007, p. 1175)<sup>43</sup>. On economic justification, Rukundwa and van Aarde draws on Karl Marx’s arguments that economics are the driving force for colonization. They assert that Karl Max’s opposition to capitalism rests on the notion that

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<sup>43</sup>Rukundwa and van Arde (2007) attribute the earliest attempt of an anti-colonial stance to the Spaniard Roman Catholic Bishop, Bartolomé Las Casas who drafted *A short account of the destruction of the Indies* in 1552, an exposition on the inhumane treatment of the indigenous people in the Americas.

capitalism is a by-product of imperialism. Similarly, Zein-Elabdin (2009) asserts that the prevailing economic worldviews lean towards a Eurocentric economic ideals which often trivialize the economic contributions and relevance of non-European cultures. Zein-Elabdin refers to this hegemonic worldview as a “substantive or cultural positivism” which favours

historical context of European modernity and its patterns of unfolding in different world regions. Such modernism has manifested itself most forcefully in the field of development economics. Despite multiple revisions and transformations, the postwar project of international development stipulates a universal conformity to the historical path of industrial modernity, and in effect, engenders the theoretical erasure of all economic patterns conceptualised as pre-modern (p. 2)

The desire for political autonomy amongst former colonies is unquestionably a fundamental pursuit of postcolonialism. As Alemazung (2010) recounts, the history of an imbalance relationship between Africa and Europe going back to the enslavement of Africans and the eventual colonization of Africa, is responsible for spreading the seeds of European domination on “political, economic, and social policies” (p. 63) across Africa. The impact of this socio-political and economic domination is evident on how some former colonizers have been enriched through the appropriation of Africa’s natural resources and how some Africans have become acculturated as “Europeanized Africans” (Alemazung, 2010 ; Rukundwa and van Aarde, 2007; Zein-Elabdin, 2009).

Although Christianity has been vilified for the colonization and exploitation of non-European societies, in particular Africa (Dube, 2012; Rukundwa and van Arde, 2007), it is important to note that Africa is now home to millions of Christians. Today, Africa is a major player in the global propagation of Christianity. The rise of liberation and Black theology and the proliferation of African Initiated Churches within and beyond the boundaries of Africa are examples of how former colonies and their citizens are now using Christianity as a platform for countering imperialism. In Dube’s account, African narratives have been employed in

Christianity to counteract the denial of African converts the ability to “do their own thinking or [maintain] independent leadership” (Dube, 2012, p. 4)

Postcolonialism reminds us that the growth of non-mainstream, immigrant initiated Churches across Canada cannot be ignored. The proliferation of these churches is largely due to an attempt by “Diasporic individuals or groups seeking to find religious spaces for the (re) production of their cultural identity, and to some extent insulation from racial discrimination” (Mensah, 2008, pp. 84-85). For Black immigrants, worshipping in their own Church helps alleviate the unwelcoming reception often encountered within the Canadian society (including in the mainstream Churches). Therefore, the Black church, from the experience of African immigrant, provides a space from which their African values and ideals can be validated and rescued from being perceived as inferior to the “normalized” Canadian, Eurocentric values and ideals.

Postcolonialism thus functions as a tool for engaging and counteracting the “normalized” structural status quo created out of the legacy of a colonial past (Rukundwa and van Aarde, 2007). The goal of postcolonialism is to fight new realities and manifestations of postcolonial past and its agencies in every human society (Rukundwa and van Aarde (2007), p. 1175). Through postcolonialism, our attention is drawn to why “ethnic minorities [particularly those of African descent] are frequently deemed ‘foreigners’ regardless of their formal and legal citizenship” (Abe, 2008, para. 10) within “immigrants friendly” nations such as Canada.

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter discusses the theoretical framework for my thesis through the lenses of Africentricity, Critical Race Theory and Postcolonialism. I present Africentricity as the overarching theoretical framework and discuss how it brings to the forefront the centrality of

“Africa” in the analysis involving African people. Thus Africentricity provides a relevant viewpoint from which issues affecting people of African ancestry can be better understood. I also argue the existence of an African continuum which is useful in understanding the connectivity of an African experience regardless of location and history of African people. Furthermore, the Eurocentric worldview is equally taken to task as I outline Africentricity as an alternate way of capable of countering Eurocentric hegemonies. In the discourse of the Black church, Africentricity affirms the existence and relevance of spirituality amongst people of African ancestry prior to encountering European Christians. By virtue of their being spiritual, Africentricity proclaims that the concept of God (or a divine being) has always been an integral part of African life.

In conjunction with Africentricity, I also present Critical Race Theory (CRT) as a useful tool for explaining the relevance of race and “blackness”. Using CRT, I explain why, in spite of the existence of mainstream churches, individuals of African ancestry are compelled to worship among their “own people”. I argue that race plays an important role in the creation of a distinct Black church that caters to the spiritual needs of Black people and their overall well-being, particularly in a racially hostile environment.

My discussion on postcolonialism asserts that Canada, in spite of its veneration as a welcoming place for immigrants, immigrants of African origin continue to experience discrimination in every areas of life (including within the mainstream church) largely because of their non-European values and ideals (Abe, 2008).

In chapter four I continue the discourse by presenting Africentric Informed Qualitative Methodology (AIQM) as a methodology of choice for this thesis.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### METHODOLOGY

*Whatever you achieve in life, you owe it to the woman or man who stands behind you so that you can help enlighten the world.*

– Archbishop Vincent Waterman, SPAOC, September 28, 2013.

#### **An Overview: An Africentric Informed Methodology**

The above quote speaks to the heart of an Africentric Informed Qualitative Methodology. Studies involving African people cannot exclude the agency of the people. Such studies must echo the voices of participants and the ultimate goal must be for the greater good of the community. It is equally imperative that studies within African communities be people centred; acknowledge the humanity of African people and distance themselves from the prevailing research paradigm of objectifying research participants (Mkabela, 2005). Thus, the primary obligation of any researcher working with African people, is foremost to the “woman or man who stands behind [the researcher] so that [the researcher] can help enlighten the world” (V. Waterman, personal communications, September 28, 2013).

In this study, I utilize an Africentric Informed Qualitative Methodology (AIQM) guided by an Africentric paradigm. By Africentric paradigm, I embrace Ama Mazama’s “Seven criteria for the establishment of an Afrocentric methodology” (Mazama, 2003) by:

1. Ensuring that participants’ experience is the bedrock of the study.
2. Exploring the response and coping mechanism of participants throughout the course of this study
3. Locating myself within the process as an active participant rather than a mere observer.
4. Acknowledging the totality – spirit, body and mind – of participants’ experiences and their extended human connectivity.

5. Not taking for granted nor dismissive of participants' lived experiences even when they cannot be empirically validated.
6. Acknowledging the complexity of human experiences by understanding that experiences analyzed were not the end in themselves.
7. Working towards providing feedback and creating means of redress for identified issues and concerns.

Leaning on Kershaw's (1992) insight into research involving African people, I define AIQM as an African centred methodology which embraces the totality, the uniqueness and the significance of the experiences of participants of African ancestry with the intentional goal of inspiring individual, building community solidarity, fostering relationship within and outside of the community and bringing about overall positive changes within the community.

AIQM is crucial because conventional research methodologies are culturally destitute to effectively embrace the "historical, social, or contemporary experiences of African people" (Pellerine, 2012, p. 149) involved in research. As argued by Mkabela (2005), AIQM provides a framework for moving from hegemonic Eurocentric research perspectives into African centred qualitative methodologies that preserve the integrity and sensibility of African cultural identity. This departure from conventional methodologies requires researchers to become engaged, rather than being distant observers in the research process. Furthermore, immersion is required to sufficiently connect the underlying motive of research to ensuing outcomes and prevent any form of misrepresentation. Consequently, researchers are encouraged to become visible within the context of a study and become active participants in the research process. Furthermore, research analyses and discourses must be presented without compromising the viewpoint of participants. Additionally, it is incumbent on researchers to honour the trust accorded through the interaction

with research participants. Accordingly, the effectiveness of Africentric methodology is reflected in the ability of research participants to take

control of and participate in the entire research process, from beginning to end. It is from this viewpoint and experience that the type of African paradigm will be discussed. The discussion will focus on the underlying assumption regarding the nature of research, research methods, and the role of the “researched” in African indigenous communities. (Mkabela, 2005, p. 181)

Mazama’s criteria for Africentric methodology and Mkabela’s insights into Africa centred research align with Ruth Reviere’s (2001) tenets of Africentric methodology. Reviere’s Kiswahili inspired principles: *Ukweli*, *Kujitoa*, *Utulivu*, *Ujamaa* and *Uhaki*, are essential for consolidating the “diverse African, and other, values and experiences into a coherent and comprehensive definition of place” which will provide a workable lens through which African experience is central, and Eurocentric worldview can be challenged (p. 712). By *Ukweli*, participants takes a primal place in the research. Truths about the research are affirmed through the lived experiences of participants. The voices of African people participating in research must remain eloquent and unambiguous at every stage of research. *Kujitoa* echoes the removal of objectivity from the research. The researcher must be upfront about his or her biases and he or she needs to be cognizant of “self” and how this may impact the research. *Utulivu* encourages the researcher to use the research process and the outcome as a way to promote “harmonious relationships between and within” (Reviere, 2001, p. 717) groups being studied. *Ujamaa* and *Uhaki* call on respectful consensus between the researcher and the researched and moreover since the researcher cannot be considered more knowledgeable than the researched, “the ultimate authority, as defined by Afrocentrism, must be the experiences of the community members” (Reviere, 2001, p. 720). By adhering to these tenets, AIQM ensures that the design, the research

process, data collection, analysis and interpretation are culturally relevant and truthfully speak to the realities of African peoples (Pellerine, 2012).

## **Study Sites**

### *Emmanuel Baptist Church (EBC)*

The origin of the EBC is concisely presented by Reverend Willard Parker Clayton in *Whatever Your Will Lord*. Clayton (1984) lays the foundation of Emmanuel Baptist Church (EBC) upon the “deeply religious experience which was common to dedicated group of [enslaved Africans]” (p. 6) over a century ago. In chapter one I discuss the formation of the AUBA as a pivotal moment in the organization of Black churches in Nova Scotia and I articulate how Reverend Richard Preston was instrumental in the formation of this unique association of Black Baptists around throughout the province of Nova Scotia. One such community, where the roots of an African Baptist church rest, is in the historic community of Upper Hammonds Plains<sup>44</sup> where the EBC flourishes as an important religious organization within the community.

The foundation of the EBC was laid under the leadership of Reverend Richard Preston whose life is considered inseparable from the creation of the EBC and the AUBA at large (Clayton, 1984, p. 17). Through the assistance of community members, such as “Deacons Deal Whiley, William Marsman, Gabriel David, and church elders Henry Whiley and Thomas Jones” (Clayton, 1984, p. 17) the EBC was originally established as Hammonds Plains Baptist church in 1845. In 1939, Hammonds Plains Second Baptist Church, established by Reverend John Burton<sup>45</sup>, amalgamated with Hammonds Plains Baptist Church to become what is known today

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<sup>44</sup> Upper Hammonds Plains is one of the areas across Nova Scotia where the Black Refugees from the War of 1812 settled. The community was established c.1815

<sup>45</sup> In chapter one, I discuss Reverend John Burton as an important figure in the organization of the Black Baptists in Nova Scotia.



as Emmanuel Baptist Church (Oliver, 1985; EBC, 2013, Lieutenant Governor Community Spirit Awards, 2009, L. Anderson, personal communication, October 17, 2013)

Today, the EBC is a vibrant congregation with an average of 400 members from diverse ethnic backgrounds across Nova Scotia and it is under the leadership of Reverend Lennett Anderson, a seventh generation descendant of the Black Refugees (L. Anderson, personal communications, October 17, 2013). The EBC is an important religious organization within the community of Upper Hammonds Plains and among the family of churches under the umbrella of the AUBA. The mandate of the EBC, according to its website, is to remain relevant to the community of Upper Hammonds Plains while welcoming individuals from diverse cultural and denominational background – locally, nationally and internationally:

Since its establishment, Emmanuel has become a place of refuge for the residents of Upper Hammonds Plains and surrounding communities of Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM). Today Emmanuel is truly a church without limits. It has truly become “The Meeting Place” for people of various ethnic, cultural and denominational backgrounds and a voice that echoes far beyond the territorial lines of Nova Scotia, throughout all of Canada and even to various parts of the world (EBC, 2013).

#### *St. Phillip’s African Orthodox Church (SPAOC)*

As previously discussed, the arrival of the Maroons in 1796 signaled the first mass migration of Blacks from the Caribbean into Nova Scotia (Walker, 1984). A century after the immigration of the Maroons, the promise of better employment opportunities in the coal mines of Cape Breton Island by the Dominion Steel Company (DISCO), ushered in a new wave of Black Caribbean immigrants in the early 1900s (Reid, 2001, Reid, 1999; Ruck, 1990; Walker, 1984).

According to Ruck (1990), the White community appeared to view these new Black immigrants favourably by attributing good mannerisms and presentable appearance to them. However, in spite of this appearance of a welcoming environment, many of these Black

immigrants were unable to fully realize the promise of a better life which they had been promised. These new Black immigrant were ready to fully integrate into the Cape Breton society and many became congregants in the established mainstream churches (Reid, 1999). Unfortunately, the established churches did not provide a sense of home for these immigrants. Many were unable to maintain membership in the mainstream churches because of the “refusal by whites in the area to extend the parameters of their congregations to include” (Reid, 1999, p. 91) people of African ancestry. In addition, the Black population also became segregated due to the policy of DISCO that confined immigrant workers to a secluded area outside of Sydney. This area of Sydney, according to Reid, was in proximity to the steel plant and it was also an unhealthy area of the city due to the exposure to noise and toxic air (Reid, 1999).

The experience of segregation within the community, coupled with the unwelcoming environment of the mainstream churches became the motivation for seeking an alternate religious experience devoid of discrimination. This quest for a positive religious experience in a safe and non-discriminatory environment would eventually lead to the establishment of St. Phillip’s African Orthodox Church in 1921 (Ruck, 1990; Reid, 2001). Almost a century later, and under the leadership of Archbishop Vincent Waterman, the distinctiveness of St. Phillips African Orthodox church is best summed up in the words of Harding:

The congregation of St. Philip’s is a unique religious institution within the City of Sydney. Its presence in the community is a testimony of the treatment West Indian immigrants faced when they arrived in Canada. Today the church is a place where the Black community can come together to celebrate their ethnicity and heritage. The church is a witness to the diversity and determination of the Black community to survive in a community which has not always fully appreciated its ethnic heterogeneity (Harding, 1998, pp. 129-130)

### *The Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG)*

The proliferation of African Initiated Churches (AICs) is in correlation with growing global migration (Mensah, 2008; Burgess, 2009; Kalu, 2008; Hunt & Lightly, 2001). Statistics Canada (2011) *Immigration and Ethnocultural Diversity in Canada* report shows that foreign born Canadians account for about 20% of Canadian population. This number is at its highest since 1931 (Chui, Tran and Maheux, 2007). As discussed in chapter one, the increasing number of immigrants coming to Canada is connected to the different immigration reforms that have been implement in the last fifty years. These reforms have paved the way for immigrants from Africa and the Caribbean to become permanent residents of Canada (Li, 2000; Brown, 2011). Just as the growth of immigrants' population has changed the landscape of Canadian ethnic and racial demography, it has also affected the religious diversity of Canada (Mensah, 2008). Immigrants from countries that would have previously been deemed inadmissible have now made Canada their home.

As these new immigrants settle in Canada, they promote Canadian diversity by integrating their cultures into the larger society and practicing their religion. In light of this reality, Burgess (2009) proposes religion centred conversations as a way to better understand why, despite the decline of Christianity in the West, the AICs continue to thrive. Moreover, this conversation will further elucidate why the AICs are rapidly becoming a “social and religious” (Burgess, 2009, p. 256) stronghold for immigrants, and how these roles create “places of welcome and community” for them (Hunt & Lightly, 2001, p. 115).

The Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG) is one of the many AICs spreading across Canada. The RCCG started in Lagos, Nigerian in 1952 through the vision of a local preacher, Reverend Josiah Akindayomi. Since the passing of Akindayomi in 1981, the church has been under the leadership of its current General Overseer, Pastor Enoch Adeboye, a former university lecturer (G. Omamofe, personal communication, November 27, 2013). The RCCG

undergone dramatic expansion since the installment of Adeboye. Today, there are over 23,000 branches around the world with over 600 parishes (and growing) in North America (RCCG, 2013; Burgess, 2009).

The RCCG began in Canada through the efforts of Daniel Ishola, an RCCG member who immigrated to Canada in 1994. Ishola hungered for a church that “offered the closest form of worship” (RCCG Canada, 2013) to what he was used to in his home country, Nigeria. It was Ishola’s desire and the collaboration with other African immigrants that resulted in the first Canadian branch of the RCCG in 1996 (RCCG Canada, 2013). In keeping with the mandate of establishing an RCCG within 5km of major cities around the world, there are now two branches of the church in Halifax. The RCCG, Jesus House Halifax, established in 2007 is one of these two locations.

### **Rationale for the churches**

The RCCG, EBC and SPAOC were chosen in the spirit of Pan-Africanism (Marshall, 2009) to echo and uphold the African Diaspora orientation of this study. Selection of the churches was based on historical formation and the current racial and ancestral composition of the churches. By using these selection criteria, three discoveries emerged in the choice of the EBC, the RCCG and SPAOC as the sites of my study:

#### *The African Factor*

One unifying factor among the three churches is the identification with Africa. Whether the congregants are descendants of enslaved Africans, as in the case of the Black Refugees and the Caribbean Blacks who escaped enslavement to come to Canada, or are recent newcomers to Canada from the African continent, there is a vibrant African ancestry dimension in all of the churches.

### *The Immigration Factor*

Regardless of how and when they arrived in Canada, an enticing factor for all immigrants is the promise of a better life by Canada. The foundations of the EBC, the RCCG and SPAOC are laid on the desire of Black immigrants to find a welcoming environment where they can freely promote their culture and practice their religious beliefs without discrimination. Hunt and Lightly (2001) describe this desire as “a deliberate attempt to create an ethnic enclave, to engender group solidarity, and to construct a refuge from the wider society” (p. 115).

### *The Generational Factor*

In the course of this study, I realized that there is approximately a span of 75 years between the emergence of each of the churches selected for this study. The EBC was established in 1845 and 76 years later in 1921, St. Phillip’s African Orthodox Church began in Cape Breton. Similarly, in 1996, exactly 75 years after the establishment of SPAOC, the first branch of the RCCG in Canada opened its door in the city of Toronto. This time line is critical in affirming that after several generations, with the passing of time and in spite of the social changes within the Canadian society, churches that cater to the needs of Black people are still relevant and they continue to appear around the country.

### **Participants’ Recruitment**

I initiated the recruitment process through phone calls to the three churches (EBC, SPAOC and RCCG). During my initial contact, I spoke with the EBC office manager, the pastor in charge at the RCCG and the Archbishop of SPAOC. I gave an overview of my study and requested permission to use these churches as the study sites for my master’s thesis. Upon receiving the blessings of the three churches, I distributed recruitment posters (see Appendix E, F and G) to invite self-identified African Nova Scotian (Black) members of the three churches to

participate in the study. The posters were displayed on the churches' information boards, copies were attached to the churches' bulletins and also sent to congregants through e-mail distribution lists. Through this advertisement process, I recruited congregants 18 years of age and older who self-identify as persons of African ancestry, and have been attending any of the three churches for at least six months prior to the study. The snowballing effect, a situation where participants and informants that have already been contacted suggested other participants that might be interested in the study (Mack et. al, 2005, p. 3), also helped with recruitment.

Overall, 25 congregants from the three churches expressed interest and agreed to participate in a series of pre-study assessments to determine their eligibility for the study. After the pre-study assessments, 17 (n=17) of the 25 interested participants met the criteria and were subsequently invited to participate in this study.

### **Data Collection**

I use qualitative research methods for data collection and analysis. Mack et al., (2005) consider qualitative research method as a scientific method based on its ability to utilize a well laid out process of enquiry, deduce answers from questions, collect evidence through the process, propagate findings as new discovery for investigator, and ensure findings are relevant beyond the scope of study. Similarly, a qualitative method also aligns with Africentric Informed Qualitative Methodology (AIQM) due to its effectiveness in "obtaining culturally specific information about the values, opinions, behaviors, and social contexts of" (Mack et., al., 2005, p. 1) African peoples.

My approach to qualitative research rests on what Ospina (2004) describes as a process through which the "researcher aims for a holistic picture from historically unique situations, where idiosyncrasies are important for meaning" (p. 4). This holistic view is equally echoed in

the *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans* where qualitative research methods are endowed with the ability to probe human thoughts, emotions and reactionary processes. What people think, how they feel and how they respond are critical to the process of data gathering, and are equally fundamental to the analysis and interpretation of the findings (Tri-Council Policy Statement, 2010). The fervency of a qualitative study is further articulated by Patton (2002) as “going into the field – into the real world of programs, organizations, neighbourhoods, streets corners – getting close enough to the people and circumstances there to capture what is happening” (p. 48).

The efficacy of a qualitative research method from an Africentric perspective, is associated with the process it employs and the type of outcomes it generates. From Mack et al. (2005) analysis, qualitative research methods provide an extensive articulation of individual’s perception of the research question; they have the ability to bring the overall human experience into the research – “contradictory behaviours, beliefs, opinions, emotions, and relationships of individuals” (p. 2); they provide a better insight into the impact of social and cultural realities of participants on the research question; the focus of qualitative research methods is on the immediate group, phenomenon or issue being study rather than extrapolating result to groups, phenomenon or issues using “characteristics similar to those in the study population” (p. 2); and qualitative research methods address the variable complexity of human factors, which are usually undermined in non-qualitative methods. It is with this understanding of qualitative research methods that I recruited and built relationship with participants using strategies that acknowledged their “location, culture, [and the community]” (p. 6) for data collection and analysis.

## **A Case Study Approach**

This study is conducted from a case study approach. The goal of a case study is to “capture as many variables as possible” (Hancock, 1998, p. 6) which can be used to analyze emerging intricate data. A case study is “particularistic and contextual” (Hancock, 1998, p. 7) and it ensures the focus remains on the studied groups at all times. As Carla Willig (2008) explains, the effectiveness of case studies “are not characterized by the methods used to collect and analyze data, but rather its focus on a particular unit of analysis: a case” (p. 74). Thus, from a case study approach, I was able to use multiple data collection methods to bring substance, clarity and diverse perspectives to my study (Hancock, 1998).

I used semi-structured interviews as the primary data collection method. I also used participant observation as a complementary method and substituted with document review where participant observation was not feasible. By using multiple data collection methods, I avoided the limitation of a one dimensional data collection method and was able to enhance the quality of available data through the cross referencing of data between participant’s observation and narratives.

### *Participant Observation*

According to a Yorùbá proverb, “*a kì n gbókèrè k’ àmọ́ dídùn ọbẹ́* (to savour a good stew, you cannot be at arm’s length). Participant observation allowed me to be closer to, and see participants in their natural environment. It opened the windows to their world and provided an avenue for establishing mutual relationships. In addition, it also created a means for reconciling the nuances of human behaviours encountered in the course of my study (Hancock, 1998; Mack et al., 2010; Patton, 2002; Tope et al., 2005). The active engagement in participant observation, provides the researcher an opportunity to experience firsthand a



social event, the events which precede and follow it, and explanations of its meaning by participants and spectators, before, during and after its occurrence. Participant observation provided more information about the event being study than data gathered through any other form of sociological method. (Becker and Geer 1970, cited in Patton, 2002, p. 22)

Furthermore, I adhered to Pellerine's (2012) insight that the "observations of an Africana phenomenon are not simply descriptions of the state of Africana people, but are the conscious recordings of that phenomenon in the most original form" (p. 157). In addition, as encouraged by Pellerine, I sought clarification from participants when required and as appropriate to ensure the veracity of observation.

In spite of its potentials, there are however limitations to using participant observation for data collection. Mack et al., (2005) raise the issue of time. In most ethnography study, participant observations are typically carried out for months to gather extensive information and build rapport with participants (p. 14). Considering the scope of my study, I did not have such luxury. Consequently, I used participant observation as a preliminary phase of my study to identify potential participants and build relationships with them. Participant observation also allowed me to see participants, active within their natural environment. I also used participant observation to stimulate potential questions that could be addressed with potential participants (Mack et al., 2005; Schensul, Schensul, & Lecompte, 1999).

I had originally planned to attend at least two church services at each of the study sites. I visited the EBC on three different occasions. The first visit was during a special seniors' Sunday service where the entire service was conducted by the seniors of the EBC. Some weeks after the seniors' service, I was invited by the EBC's Ladies' Auxiliary group for an African drumming performance at one of their breakfast events. In addition to these two events, I also attended a regular Sunday service.

I attended five Sunday services at the RCCG. Four of these were regular Sunday services and the fifth was a special interdenominational praise and worship service called “Praise is WIDE<sup>46</sup>”.

In the fall of 2013, I met with Archbishop Vincent Waterman for a one-on-one interview. Unfortunately, due to the constraints of time, travel logistics to Cape Breton and Archbishop Waterman’s availability, I was unable to attend an official church service at SPAOC. I however conducted a visual observation of the church environment during my visit and equally gathered some background information from the semi structured interview with Archbishop Waterman.

### *Semi-Structured Interviews*

I originally planned to use focus groups of 6 to 8 participants as one of my data collection methods. I considered focus groups based on the Africentric tenet of collectivity (Merriweather Hunn, 2004). The desire to use focus groups is also consistent with Hancock’s suggestion that a focus group provides the forum through which study participants with common interests could express their views (Hancock, 1998). Likewise, interaction among participants in a focus group can generate diverse insights into the topic of discussion and provide unanticipated but useful data to the study (Hancock, 1998; Mack et al., 2005). However, focus groups were not feasible due to challenges of scheduling participants. As a result, I decided to concentrate on semi-structured interviews which provided better scheduling flexibility.

The process of interviewing is an intentional conversation (Kahn and Cannell, 1957, p. 149) with the goal of engaging participants to tell their stories. White and Dotson (2010) view storytelling as an integral part of African cultural identity (p. 75). The act/art of storytelling provide the researcher with an understanding of “how individuals perceive crises, turning points, growth, and their various identities” (p. 81). Through interviews, participants’ stories naturally

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<sup>46</sup> WIDE is an acronym for What I Do Every day.

unfold (Marshall and Rossman, 2011) as I ensure that the views expressed are acknowledged and considered valuable. Interviews rests at the heart of qualitative study as it moves the researcher away from mere objective data enumeration to concrete interpretation of personal and revealing lived experiences (Kvale, 1996, p. 11). Moreover, using interviews to collect data is in tune with Africentric Informed Qualitative Methodology (AIQM) since participants' stories and lived experiences are continuously affirmed.

I used semi-structured interviews with open ended questions that covered a variety of issues. I equally followed Hancock's recommendation that the process must be focused while ensuring positive interactions between the researcher and the participants to create an open door to issues that may otherwise remained concealed (Hancock, 1998). The use of semi-structured interviews allowed participants to provide an in-depth feedback about their experiences, perceptions, and opinions concerning the role of the Black church in their individual and cultural identities. It ensured a reasonable level of comfort that allowed participants to discuss freely and remained at ease during the interview. Using semi-structured interviews also allowed participants and myself to embrace the process as a learning experience.

As part of the interview process, I presented individuals (except participating clergy), who expressed interests in the study with a series of pre-study questions. Each individual was contacted over the phone or by e-mail and were asked series of close ended questions (see Appendix B). These preliminary questions were used to extract important background information such as race, age, gender, and the length of attendance at the local church. In all, 25 individuals from the three churches participated in the pre-interview questions. Participants were screened based on their responses to these pre-interview questions. I used participants' length of attendance at the local church as the primary criteria for consideration to be part of the study. Six

months of attendance in the local church was used as minimum length of attendance. At the completion of the pre-study questions, 17 participants met the requirements for participating in the study.

I conducted 17 semi-structured interviews between September and December of 2013 by choosing interview times and locations to accommodate participant's availability. Each interview began with a reaffirmation of the objectives of the research. I also reiterated how emerging data will be used and disseminate. I reviewed the Information Letter and Consent Form (see Appendix I and G) with each participant and ensured the documents and provided opportunities for participants to ask questions before signing the forms. I also obtained participants' consent to digitally record the interviews. During the questioning phase, I embraced Gordon's (1975) recommendation that questions much remain constant for each participant and the process must be fairly consistence for all participants. This process ensured that differences in response were based on uniqueness of respondents and not on pattern of questioning. Nevertheless, while maintaining consistency with questioning, I remained sensitive (Mach et al., 2005, p. 30) to individual's needs and differences to allow in-depth responses that were most reflective of diverse experiences of participants.

The open ended interview questions (see Appendix G) were divided into four different sections: an ice breaking section with series of questions meant to initiate a comfortable interaction between me and participants; a series of questions about the impact of the Black church on the community and issues facing the local Black church; a section about the church and the Black identity which probes the culturally relevant programs and lifelong learning opportunities that were available to participants. In addition to these sets of questions, I also asked participants about other programs and/or activities they would love to see in their local

churches. I simultaneously asked about programs they would like to see overhauled. Participants were also provided the opportunity to provide additional comments. At the end of all interviews, 5 congregants from the EBC, 6 from SPAOC and 6 from the RCCG, including clergy from each of the churches participated in the study.

### **Data Analysis**

The process of data analysis is an intrinsic part of a research process which begins very early in the research (Scutt, 2012). Data analysis intertwines with every activity, methods and procedures used during the research. It involves the identification of “problems and concepts that appear likely to help in understanding the situation” (Scutt, 2012, p. 325). This process occurs throughout the lifecycle of the research and it is impractical to separate the process of collection, review and data analysis from one another (Folkestad, 2008).

I reviewed participant’s responses making sure they were within the context of the study and simultaneously clarified perceived ambiguities (Mack et al., 2005). For effective data interpretation, I used the service of a professional transcriber (see Appendix A) and generated transcripts from 8 hours of interview recordings. I followed up with participants to ensure transcripts accurately conveyed transcribed texts. Necessary corrections were then made to reflect participant’s feedback and transcripts were read and re-read as recommended by Mack et al., (2005) for content, accuracy and clarity.

For effective data analysis, I subscribed to Scutt’s (2012) suggestion of “conceptualization, coding and categorizing” (p. 328). Conceptualization was used to extricate observations and connect their relevance to the study and it helped to create preliminary meanings that were further probed and refined as I interacted with participants. In addition, emerging data from conceptualization complemented the semi-structured interview data.

Coding and categorization are processes of thematic analysis defined as “method[s] for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 79). The efficacy of thematic analysis goes beyond simply describing the data; it provides interpretation for collected data. Braun and Clarke (2006) contend that thematic analysis offers flexibility to researchers regardless of theoretical framework. Thematic analysis is embraced as a data analysis tool because of its ability to convey the “experience[s], meaning and the realities of participants” (p. 81). Thematic analysis is equally effective for understanding how these human conditions – experiences, meaning and realities – are a reflection of societal realities. From this perspective, thematic analysis illuminates “the ways individuals make meaning of their experience, and, in turn, the ways the broader social context impinges on those meanings” (p. 81). These attributes of thematic analysis make it a suitable analytical technique for an Africentric Informed Qualitative Methodology.

In a thematic analysis, themes are identified either through inductive (data driven) or deductive (theory driven) approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006). By inductive, themes evolve from data and are not restricted to a pre-defined coding. Likewise, emerging themes also reflect “some patterned response or meaning within the data set” (p. 82). In a deductive analysis however, the researcher’s theoretical interests influence the coding process. The deductive approach is more specific, and it allows the use of a pre-determined coding template for data analysis (Feredy & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). For this study, I combined the two processes. The use of a hybrid of the inductive and the deductive approach is in line with Feredy and Muir-Cochrane’s (2006) argument that

This approach complemented the research questions by allowing the tenets of [Africentricity] to be integral to the process of deductive thematic analysis while allowing for themes to emerge direct from the data using inductive coding. (p. 4)

I apply “descriptive”, “in vivo” and “values” coding filters as an inductive process for inductive analysis (Saldana, 2009). According to Saldana, the “descriptive” coding method captures the diversity of opinions among participants and provides a multi-perspective understanding of the data; vibrant voices of participants are kept alive through the effectiveness of “in vivo” coding to capture key expressions within the data and lastly, “values” coding allows the discovery of “subjective perspectives” from participants’ responses (Saldana, 2009, p. 7).

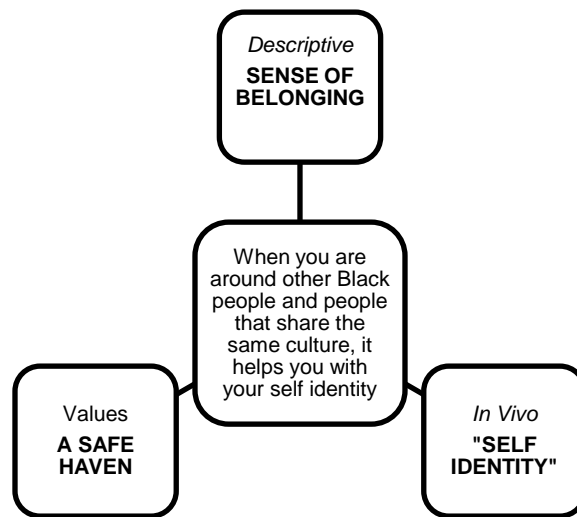


Figure 1. A coding filter highlighting “sense of belonging”, “self-identity” and “a safe haven” as part of the inductive thematic analysis.

Figure 1 depicts the connectivity of description, in vivo and values coding systems to the data set. In this instance, the participant is explaining why she has chosen EBC over other churches in the area. Her response, “When you’re around other Black people and people that share the same culture, it helps you with your self-identity”, contain elements of the different coding formats. From a descriptive viewpoint, I coded for “sense of belonging” since it is an expressive desire of the participant. “Self-identity” identity emerged from in vivo filter since it was literally used in the participant’s response. Values filter was used to ascribe the notion of a “safe haven” since she commented “being among other Black people” implies a degree of trust and safety.

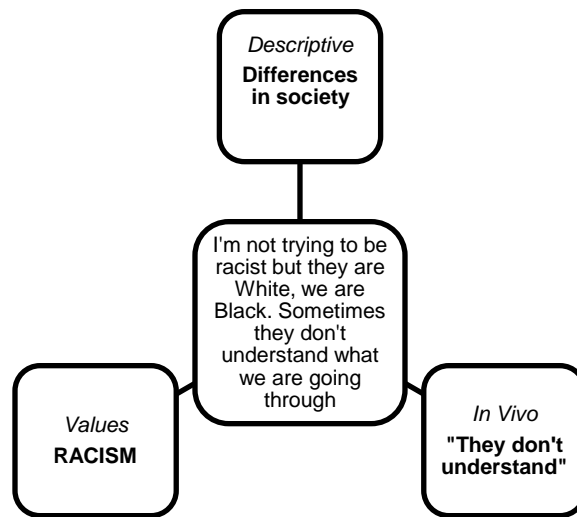


Figure 2. A coding filter highlighting “differences in society”, “they don’t understand” and “racism” as part of the inductive thematic analysis.

Figure 2 shows how the emerging themes of racism, differences in society and the fact that the larger society “don’t understand” is coded using the three aforementioned filters. In this instance, participant expresses the frustration faced by immigrants when trying to integrate into the Canadian society. These two examples suggest that the application of the coding filter is about identifying and documenting key moments in the data (Feredy & Muir-Cochrane, 2006).

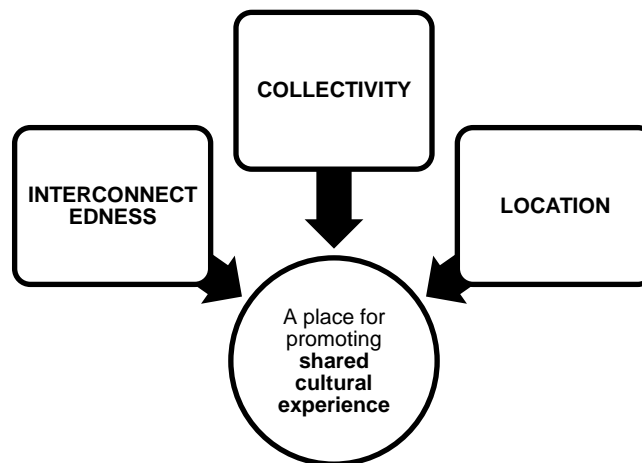
The other approach to data analysis is the use of a deductive thematic analysis. The purpose of the deductive approach is to generate viable templates that can be used to organize emerging themes (and sub-themes) from the inductive analysis. These viable templates are deduced from Hinton’s (2009) overview of the Black Church as presented in chapter one. From Hinton’s exposition, the Black church represents

- i. a place for promoting shared cultural experience
- ii. a space for learning about and obtaining relevant meanings to the word of God
- iii. a setting for nourishing the souls of Black people and inspiring individuals in an unwelcoming environment



- iv. an entity for building the Black community and providing a moral perspective from which to create a cohesive community

By connecting these perspectives of the Black church to the tenets and values of Africentricity, four broader themes – **shared cultural experience, relevant learning, social engagement and a sense of community** – emerged. As an example, Figure 3 illustrates the connectivity of “shared cultural experience” to the Africentric concepts of collectivity, interconnectedness and location. This association is key to Hinton’s pronouncement that “the Black church is a designation that represents a shared cultural experience that is reflected in worship practices, shared understanding of the sacred text, and a foundational community sensibility” (Hinton, 2009, p. 22)



*Figure 3.* An example of Hinton’s assertions about the Black church and its relationship with Africentricity. The emerging theme in this example is **shared cultural experience**

The use of these complementary thematic analysis methods underscores the connection of emerging themes with the theoretical framework of this study (Braun & Clark, 2006). The broader themes, shared cultural experience, relevant learning, social engagement and a sense of

community form the primary themes and also function as templates for organizing emerging secondary themes from the inductive process.

To finalize the process of thematic analysis, I coded and recoded, arranged and rearranged. This repetitive process embraces Saldana's (2009) recommendation that researchers must continuously look for similarities to create categories that will produce patterns. Figure 4 below depicts the outcome of this process.

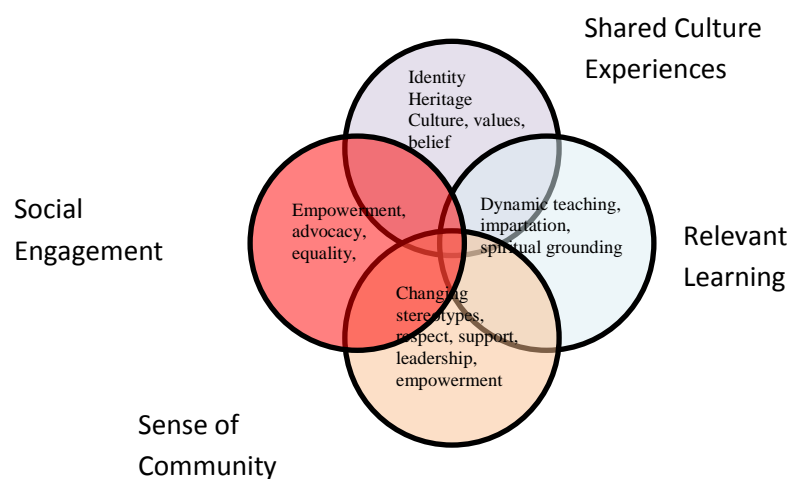


Figure 4. An overview of the thematic analysis process

## Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I explain qualitative research process and discuss the methods of inquiry in this chapter. In discuss the importance of an Africentric Informed Qualitative methodology (AIQM) in study involving African peoples by drawing on Mazama's (2003) seven principles of an Africentric methodology. I lay out the recruitment process for the study and provide a brief background information about the selected sites. I explain how, African factor, immigration factor and generational factor emerged during the course of the study as the key mitigating factors for choosing the EBC, the RCCG and SPAOC for this study.

Similarly, I discuss one-to-one interviews and participant observation as the data collection process and how the data generated become the key ingredients for inductive and deductive thematic analyses. The inductive process yield themes that appropriately project the voices of participants. These induced secondary themes are further organized into deduced primary themes of shared cultural experience, relevant learning, social engagement and a sense of community (Hinton, 2009) which emerged out of the inductive process.

In chapter five, I present my findings by echoing the voices of participants.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### RESEARCH FINDINGS

*I felt more comfortable in my surroundings, we all felt good. We felt good because of the identity here with our own church, it was good experience. I don't know if I went to another church growing up if I would have felt that identity*

-Maureen, SPAOC, September 28, 2013

#### **An Overview: Capturing the Themes**

In this chapter, I present the voices of participants through the emerging themes outlined in the previous chapter. These themes came out of the inductive and deductive thematic analysis process. By using the deductive approach as suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006), primary themes emerged as templates for categorizing and analyzing secondary themes that came out the inductive process. The use of thematic analysis upholds the tenets of Africentricity since its effectiveness does not depend on empirical analysis but lies in its ability to adequately convey the meaning making process which is capable of capturing “something important about the data”, and equally, supported by the research questions (p. 82).

The primary thematic elements that function as templates for categorizing my findings, as deduced from Hinton (2009)’s perspective of the Black church, are:

1. *Shared Cultural Experience* – The Black church promotes shared cultural experiences
2. *Relevant Learning* – The Black church promotes learning and it helps to obtain spiritual, situational and experiential relevance to the word of God.
3. *Social Engagement* – The Black church nourishes and provides encouragement for African people thus helping them to confront instances of hostility and discrimination within society.

4. *A Sense of Community* – Through its various activities, the Black church engages the community and provides a moral perspective where community cohesiveness is maintained.

I project the voices of participants through these thematic features by relying on participants lived experiences even when they appear as subjective, incoherent or inconsistent narratives. For this study, the reliability of participants' narratives is not predicated on details; rather it resides in the ability of participants to tell their stories as dynamic, lived experiences. From Damianakis and Woodford's (2012) assertion, participants' narrations, as tools of analysis, underscore the richness and the diversity of lived experiences. By accurately projecting participant's voices to faithfully tell (and retell) their stories and respect what they see and present as the "truth", storytelling also helps to present the significance of "multiple and/or intersecting diversities" (p. 712) and nuances of lived experiences.

### **Revisiting Research Participants**

In order to adequately express the diversity of experiences that gave birth to the voices present in this chapter, I revisit the study participants. Overall, 17 individuals participated in the study. 5 from the EBC, 6 from SPAOC and the remaining 6 from the RCGG. The names used in the narrations, with the exception of participating clergy, are pseudonyms. This is done in adherence to ethics requirements of anonymity for study participants.

The 5 participants from the EBC are: Shaylene, a young lady in her mid-twenties who has been attending EBC since childhood; Reverend Lennett Anderson, the Senior Pastor who is in his late thirties and began attending the EBC as a child; Corey, 65 years old, a retiree and long term congregant; Jude, in his mid-forties and has been a member of EBC since childhood, and Craig, 63 years old, on the verge of retirement, and also a long term member of the EBC. Each

participating EBC member identifies as multi-generational African Nova Scotian and majority of them live within or close to the Community of Upper Hammonds Plains.

The Participants from SPAOC consist of 5 women and 1 man: Gina is 65 years old was born in Whitney Pier. She attended SPAOC as a child and into adulthood and had attended other Black churches during her many years of absence from the community. She returned to Whitney Pier and SPAOC after retirement. Maureen is in her early sixties, she was born in Whitney Pier, and similar to Gina, attended SPAOC as a child and into adulthood but moved away for few years and has since returned home and to SPAOC. Archbishop Waterman is 86 years old. He was born in Barbados and lived in the United States for several years. He relocated to Whitney Pier in 1983 to become the head of SPAOC after the passing of Archpriest George Francis who was the Rector of SPAOC for over 40 years. Archbishop Water is the sole spiritual authority of SPAOC. The remaining SPAOC participants, Angela, Joyce, and Elma currently reside in the Halifax area where they have also taken up membership in other Black churches. Angela, Joyce and Elma were born in Whitney Pier, they spend their childhood and part of their adult years in the Whitney Pier before relocating to Halifax. Angela and Joyce are in their late forties and Elma is in her early fifties.

Among the 6 participants representing the RCCG are 3 women, Bola, Pastor Omamofe and Becky and 3 men, Olumide, Tola and Niyi. Bola is 25 years old and she is an international student. She was born in Nigeria and is currently pursuing graduate studies at one of the universities in Halifax and has been a member of RCCG for about two years. Becky was born in Toronto, but raised in the United States. She is currently a university student and has been a member at the RCCG for over a year. Pastor Gladys Omamofe is the pastor in charge of the RCCG. She is in her fifties and came from Nigeria about ten years ago. Her professional

background is in journalism and law and she has been involved with the RCCG for more than twenty years. Pastor Omamofe was appointed by the RCCG in Nigeria to come as a “missionary pastor” to Nova Scotia with the goal of establishing new branches of the RCCG across Nova Scotia. Through the efforts of Pastor Omamofe, the RCCG Jesus House has been in operation since 2007.

Tola is 26 years old and was born in Nigeria. He became a Canadian permanent resident after completing his university degree and has been a member of the RCCG for four years. Niyi is 24 years old, a Nigerian who came to Halifax as an international student. He is currently a first year university student and has been attending the RCCG for about six months. Olumide lives and works in Halifax. He is originally from Nigeria but has since become a Canadian permanent resident and he joined the RCCG about three years ago.

## **Research Themes**

### *Shared Cultural Experience*

A resonating stance among participants is the affirmation of a connective yet polymorphous cultural experience. Hall (1990) posits that individuals with similar historical experience and connective ancestry have the propensity for strong devotion to one another. Such disposition promotes a sense of belonging and produces a “collective one true self, hiding inside the many other” (p. 223). Similarly, Marshall (2009) envisions Black cultural identity as an acknowledgement of our African ancestry and the recognition of a shared Black experience which, according to Hall (2009), transcends the “shifting divisions and vicissitudes of our history” (p. 223) as African people. As I engaged participants, the narratives centre on a perpetual longing for the Black experience, the desire to belong, the need to sustain what is

considered passed down traditions, and the desire to keep the “ancestral faith” alive. These are some of the driving forces for wanting to belong to a Black church.

When asked why they have chosen their respective churches in spite of the existence of other churches, participants unapologetically point to the need to be in a church that openly recognizes their African identity. Shaylene voices this undying desire:

*You see if I was going to a Catholic Church that is predominately White, I wouldn't get the same Black experience, I guess you would say. You know, my mother has gone to a Black church, my grandmother, and my great grandmother and so forth. So I think it's just passing along that tradition, and whether that's the music, whether that's gospel music that you're able to identify with, it is all because that's what your ancestors, that's what they sang. And again, the different aspects of it like the dancing, African dancing, all of that contributes to the experience, the Black experience. (Shaylene)*

Shaylene explains that being Black is an important factor for choosing EBC. While she acknowledges the existence of other churches in the area, she has however chosen to remove herself from such environments because she “wouldn't get the same Black experience”. In addition, her statement: “my grandmother and my great grandmother” were all part of Black churches, underlines a generational allegiance to the Black church. From Shaylene's viewpoint and experience, there is a long standing tradition that she would like to continue. Shaylene touches on an essential aspect of that Black identity which manifests in the rudiments of music and dancing and considers this an African tradition which produces an authentic “Black experience”.

The notion of keeping and maintaining the faith of the past echoes in statements such as: “Our parents went there”, “It's our family church. So that's where we were brought up”, “It just was the family church”, “We didn't have a choice”, as participants explain why they have chosen the EBC, SPAOC or the RCCG over other churches. Gina points to the connection between SPAOC and her Barbadian heritage. For her, going to SPAOC was as Barbadian as it can be:



*People were very spiritual from Barbados and we had to go to church. My mom and dad didn't care what you did the night before, you were going to. If you could have company on Saturday you can get up for church in the morning, and you got up in the morning and you had to go to church. (Gina)*

Craig argues that attending the EBC is a devotion to the family way of life. It is simply a way of life within the community.

*Well, for me, it is a community church. It is the community I live in. I have been attending here since three years old, and so I have no reason for going anyplace else. My mother was very devoted. For her, when we were kids and growing up, it was church and Sunday school. We had no choice. This is the thing that you used to do within the Black community. All the kids, seeing them in church Sunday morning, we had to go to church. It was either the 11 o'clock service or the 7 o'clock service. We had no other choice, we had to go". (Craig)*

In line with Hall's (1990) exposition on cultural identity, participants note that being around those who are culturally oriented as them is an important factor in becoming a member in a Black church. The need to be around others who share your belief and values is considered essential to the reaffirmation of one's identity as a Black person:

*When you're around other Black people and people that share the same culture it helps you with your self-identity as well. So I think that's kind of what the church does. It's a place where others like you, who share the same cultures, share the same values, belief, faith and it kind of helps you self-identify as well. (Shaylene)*

For those who are new to Canada, the desire to experience "how things used to be done back home" is an important factor when choosing a church. Although, faced with the reality of being away from home, experiencing being at home is something participants from RCCG desire. According to Niyi, RCCG provides a place where you feel at home among your own people. From his experience, the church is working tirelessly to foster kinship among its members and it is creating an environment where one can experience what going to church is like "back home" even when living in Nova Scotia, far away from home:

*For me it's more like a connection to home. My friends and I when we have fellowship together, I have that direct connection to home even though we are miles and miles away*

*from our immediate family. It is the connection to home and the core-worship. This is how we worship back home and just that tradition. I think we worship the same as other churches but we just have that ability where we can worship the African way. It's just that connection for me to, you know, connection to back home. (Niyi)*

Bola, who has attended RCCG since moving to Nova Scotia from Nigeria, traces her RCCG journey to the assistance rendered by Pastor Omamofe in securing an accommodation. Even without this gesture, she would have only sought out a place of worship that is reflective of her Nigerian heritage, and probably would have ended coming to the RCCG. For Bola, there is an inherent desire to find an African oriented church that will enable her to connect with the Nigerian community.

*For me, I basically came to RCCG first because someone introduced me to the pastor. So I kind of said I'd like to come because she was really so helpful in getting an accommodation for me. Even without [this], I guess I would have still ended up at RCCG because the first thing I would have looked out for was the fact that I'm coming from Nigeria so I need a community where I can see people that I am used to, people that know my culture and know where I'm coming from, [people] I can relate to very easily. (Bola)*

The feeling of being at home and around your own people also resonates with participating clergy. Pastor Omamofe, although presents the image of a church that cuts across cultures and ethnicity, she nevertheless acknowledges that some congregants are drawn to RCCG to be among their “own kind”.

*I would say more Nigerians than other nationals [attend this church]. For example, we have people that have relocated here from different provinces that are to students or working, and they are Nigerians. And I think it's also because when you start off a work you're probably [going to] attract your own kind first. Let me put it that way you probably attract your own kind. (Pastor Omamofe)*

As part of RCCG's Sunday service, lunch is provided at the end of every gathering. Although after-service lunches are common in many churches, including mainstream Canadian churches, the after-service lunches at the RCCG is unique in its purpose and goes beyond fellowshiping to creating a special connection to “back home”. The after-service lunches and

gathering give participants the opportunity to experience a part of their culture that is not readily and regularly experienced within the Canadian society. For Tola, the Sunday lunches provide the only opportunities to eat the kind of food he grew up eating, the food “from home”:

*One of the problems I have had since moving to Canada is the food. I don't like the kind of diet here. It doesn't go well with me and unfortunately I can't really cook the kind of dishes I love to eat most. So this church has actually made me, how can I say it? It has made me connect with, in terms of the food, home. Through those lunches the church provides, the food reminds me of where I come from and, you know, it makes me forget the fact that I'm not living in Nigeria anymore. (Tola)*

I also gathered from participants that the desire to belong to a Black church transcends time and space. It is an unquenchable longing that years of separation cannot hinder. Even though Gina was away from Whitney Pier for several decades, she did not hesitate to return to what she knew upon her return to Whitney Pier. For her, going back to SPAOC was very natural.

*I was in Toronto for 21 years. When I moved to Halifax, I joined the Baptist church and I kind of liked that because their services were totally different to our services and, you know, we could really get in the spirit or whatever. But when I came home, this is my church even though I was away for many years. I felt that my home church was St. Phillip's African Orthodox Church. People even asked me here, like why would you go back to that church? That's my church. That's where I was raised. (Gina)*

The influence of shared cultural experiences cuts across congregational differences. This experience is so powerful that individuals of African ancestry are willing to forgo their congregational affiliation to embrace their cultural membership as a Black person. Maureen speaks about Mrs. Desmond, an SPAOC member with a strong Baptist background. When Mrs. Desmond moved to Whitney Pier, in spite SPAOC's traditional, solemn and orthodox style, she was willing to relinquish the lively and upbeat Baptist style for SPAOC's mellow style in order to be with other Black people.

*Mrs. Desmond was from Truro. So you know, Truro was Baptist, but you know, she wanted to go to a Black church, so she ended up being in the church for years. She just got herself used to this church. (Maureen)*

Becky who has also attended a Baptist church in the past explains that it was an easy transition to the RCCG because of the similarity in worship style and the connection to the people.

*I've been to the Baptist church there and it's an experience to see how they conduct their service, which is very similar to the Redeemed. I think it's more of the connection to back home. RCCG gives you a co-connection to other members and it's a good experience because it also reflects how we worship where we are from, where we came from. So I think that is the reason why I chose this church. (Becky)*

Joyce, who grew up attending SPAOC and is now a member in a Black Baptist Church, also echoes the sentiment of “feeling at home” in a Black church regardless of denominational affiliation:

*I look back at, you know, growing up. African Orthodox Church is similar to Catholic practice, and then when we moved to New Glasgow and joined the Baptist church, so there wasn't any of this, you know, incense, and going to kneeling at the altar, and – so that wasn't it, so we had to adapt to that type, well, different sort of practice within the Baptists. Not that I find a difference in, you know, in terms of the scriptures, the bible, that kind of thing, but it's just how the process of being in the church works. So it was different yet the thing with identity didn't really change because for me they were both Black churches – I was in churches that were Black, so it was just being around other Black people (Joyce).*

To stand out as a visible minority and to be separated from your own people and culture within the framework of a mainstream society, can be frustrating. For participants, particularly those from the recent immigrants' community, the church provides a place where they can feel welcome. For Tola, coming to RCCG every week and not having to worry about the unpleasant every day experiences in the Canadian society has been comforting:

*After speaking a lot of Canadian grammar and, you know, too much English during the week, this is somewhere I can come to and speak my local dialect and hear people speak their local dialects. It's comforting. (Tola)*

Similarly, Bola provided another example of how the RCCG is helping members to reinforce their cultural traditions that would have otherwise been suppressed in the mainstream Canadian churches:

*When you come in here, I will use the pastor as an example. The way people relate with her shows that people still have that culture within them. In this church, you will hear people say something like “Aunty E Kaaro” [Good Morning Aunty], something like that. If you’re just in a normal [mainstream] church not a Black church like this one, you forget these kinds of things and you don’t do them. In fact, what I have noticed in Canada is that for some, when you even show them respect, it’s either they are shocked or surprised. When I first came to Halifax, there was a time I was trying to show respect to an elderly lady at the grocery store. I pulled back in the line for this lady because that’s how we have been brought up but she refused to move forward in the line. She tells me, “No, no, I’m not going anywhere, you got here first”. I think that’s what this church reminds us of not to forget. (Bola)*

The ability of the RCCG to reinforce African cultural values manifests in various forms. When you visit the church, it is not uncommon to see congregants dressed in traditional African attires. It is also not unusual to hear various African languages been spoken around you. From my several visits to the church, these African values are also demonstrated in the acts of respecting the elders and those in position of authority. There is also the presence of a vibrant spirit among congregants with singing, dancing, and worshipping in a celebratory atmosphere. Niyi reminds me that what I have observed are simply some of the few ways through which the RCCG is helping to promote the essence of African values and identity by maintaining the ways things are done back home:

*Well, in relating this church to my identity I must say that the church keeps us informed about who we are. The various demonstrations of this are important and they have helped with building my character. The church is filled with culture. You can even see this in how people dress. Whenever this happens, it gives you a sense of home and that makes me love the church. I love the environment. The atmosphere in this church helps my identity based on who I am – I am proud to be a Nigerian. (Niyi)*

The ideals of shared cultural experiences are rooted in the understanding of a Black identity. Speaking about the idealization of a “Critical African Personality”<sup>47</sup>, George Dei argues that solidarity among African people without the full understanding of African identity is futile (Dei, 2012). Similarly, Asante suggests that understanding African centred identity is impossible without first realizing that Africans are not Europeans (Asante, 2003). In order to realize an African agency with African people as the core, there is a need to embrace a true African identity “informed by the Indigenous African cultural experiences, local cultural knowledge, and the histories of the politics of resistance that have shaped and continue to shape our existence as African beings” (Dei, 2012, p. 43). Only through this understanding can the “African soul” be protected from the lure of a society intended on distorting the innate and experiential African identity (Asante, 2003; Dei, 2012).

This calls for a new mindset based on “thought and action in which the centrality of African interests, values, and perspectives predominate” (Asante, 2003, p. 2). In addition, connecting shared cultural experience to an African identity will lead African people to the understanding that African cultural experience, as much as it has experienced European incursion, can remain authentically African (Mkabela, 2005).

Participants affirm the interweaving of culture, spirituality and religious belief (Beals, 2012; Hinton, 2009; James et al, 2010). While spirituality does not necessarily translate into religiosity, spirituality amongst Black people has historically been demonstrated through rituals and belief systems connected to religious practices (James et al., 2010). By propagating the notion of a shared cultural experience, the Black church is in essence creating an environment where Black congregants can have a better understanding of who they are and celebrate their

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<sup>47</sup> Dei envisions “Critical African Personality” as an authentic of African collective identity[ies] embedded within Indigenous African cultural experiences and histories of African people.

African identity without the fear of reprimand and the shame of denunciation by the mainstream church. Shared cultural experience is a tool of engagement within the Black church. Its impact supersedes merely embracing religion or simply becoming spiritual, it is an anchor that keeps the ship of the Black church ashore. Listening to the voices in this study, there is a resolute stance that, a vital part of being is “finding and utilizing support for daily life experiences” (Hinton, 2009, p. 23) from people of the same heritage and this can be realized through affiliation with the Black church.

### *Relevant Learning*

Shared cultural experience in the Black church is connected to its religious practices and congregational activities (Hinton, 2009, p. 22). Participants speak about how church activities, laced with implicit and explicit culturally inspired learning, are impacting their lives. These teachings, in the words of participants, resonate with who they are and affirm their lived experiences as Black people. For participants, the articulation of the words of God goes beyond the spiritual; it affirms their humanity and builds them in body, spirit and soul (Bola, Gina, Niya, Shaylene and Tola). Scriptural interpretations offered by the church also provide a better understanding of what many Black folks perceive as the complexities of being Black and being a Christian at the same time. Thus, the Black church, from the viewpoint of participants, provides the strength for living today and the hope for facing the future (Bola, Maureen and Shaylene).

Participants attribute spiritual grounding to the teachings, rituals and different activities of the Black church (Gina). By spiritual grounding, they speak of a structure that reinforces the connectivity to a higher power (Donahoo & Cafey, 2010; James et al, 2010) while providing the strength to go through life. With its ability to nurture spiritual grounding, the church is viewed by

participants as having an emancipatory effect (Shaylene and Archbishop Waterman). This emancipatory propensity of African spirituality is eloquently echoed by Ama Mazama:

One commonly noted feature of African resistance is its reliance on spirituality. Indeed, spirituality has always historically played an important role in our many struggles for liberation, from Nanny in Jamaica to the Haitian revolutionary war and Nat Turner. (Mazama, 2003)

Gina speaks candidly about how learning in the church – through rituals, scripture reading and other church based activities as well as learning from the older generations – has reinforced her spirituality:

*I think learning from the older generation gave me my spiritual grounding. When I think of my grandmother, she would always say she was very proud of who she was. I think of her as being very spiritual and very involved in the church, and she influenced me in terms of my, I don't say religious, but my spiritual beliefs. She taught me the Lord's Prayer. She taught me the importance of if I have a problem that you need to pray. I think that impacted me through troubles, when I had troubles in my marriage. You know, for some reasons – because I was grounded spiritually – I would always feel I have to get to church, I have to get to church. (Gina)*

In Gina's words, this spiritual grounding goes back to the many Sunday school lessons, the constant reminder by her grandmother and the several messages from the pulpit:

*My life wasn't easy and I think it gave me strength and it came from that rooting from the church. My parents would ask you if you went to church, and they wanted to know about Sunday school and what you did learn. So it wasn't a matter of just going and attending, you really had to maintain what you learned, and I think that was very important. And I this has made me to be very spiritual and it all began at St. Phillip's.*

*[The church] is my centre, it's what has kept me grounded, and I've gone off the trails several times, but there's always that drawback. You know, I've gone off the trail where I just felt dead. I just didn't want to attend church and I would think that I was running, I call it running from myself, but there was always that little voice, whether it was my grandmother's voice, or remembering something that Father Francis said, or just feeling like, you know, I have to have God in my life. This was planted very deep within me, that was a very deep seed, and so it kept me on track, and often brought me back when I was off track. (Gina)*

The relevance of sermons to the lives of many in the Black church is also an important reason for belonging to the Black church. According to Shaylene, churches with predominately



Black congregants are intentional about addressing issues that are important to the cultural well-being of the congregation through their sermons. However, this kind of experience is often lacking in mainstream Canadian churches.

*One aspect from the Black churches that I've attended is the dynamic word (the scriptures) and the dynamic preaching. I think that comes from looking back and just kind of connecting that to the way my pastor speaks. It's very uplifting. You can go back to the days when Black people, especially in Nova Scotia, where perhaps they needed that uplifting word and that dynamic teaching. I think the one aspect of the Black church that you might not get anywhere else is the teaching. (Shaylene)*

For Shaylene, being grounded culturally through the teachings of the church is a recipe for building a sense of community and it is equally important for identity affirmation.

*I think it again goes back to the church fostering and creating that sense of community and showing that community is important, particularly to Black people in Nova Scotia. I would say lifelong learning continues to further our African roots and shows why it's important that we are grounded in it (Shaylene)*

She further highlights some practical ways through which EBC is involved in the provision of church based learning opportunities that are important to her identity as a Black person. One such program is the *African Heritage Circle*, a program that started as a university practicum by one of the congregants at the EBC.

*The church started an African Heritage Circle, a program geared towards younger people in the church but which is also open to everyone in the church. Through this program, there would be a display of different African artifacts and books that you probably couldn't get anywhere else. We would also have elders in the community come in and speak about their experiences growing up in a Black community as well. This program is ongoing, and it is offered. (Shaylene)*

Shaylene also sees learning opportunities in how the EBC commemorate African Heritage Month and the Remembrance Day as a reminder to the congregation about the EBC's African roots.

*During African Heritage Month, even though our church is now diverse, there's always been a heavy emphasis on the fact that we are still a Black church and that is our identity. This is evident in how the church is intentional about its activities around that*

*time. Even during Remembrance Day, for example, instead of using a generic video of soldiers, we use a video from a particular Black battalion. So there's always emphasis on, you know, we are a Black church, and even though there are many denominations represented and we are multicultural, we still have to acknowledge our roots. (Shaylene)*

In addition to the *African Heritage Circle*, the EBC is also involved in a joint program with three other predominately Black churches in the Halifax area to address the issue of youth violence in the Black community. Reverend Anderson explains that this program, appropriately named *Save Our Sons, Save Our Sisters* (SOS), is a rite of passage coalition through youth mentorship. According to Reverend Anderson, SOS

*is about identity. It's about knowing who you are, celebrating Kwanza, celebrating our history, our achievements. We do this program because we feel there's a lack of knowledge on who we are as a people. In particular among the youth. (Reverend Anderson)*

Shaylene, herself a young adult, echoes Reverend Anderson's summation of the SOS program:

*There is something called "Save Our Sons, Save Our Sisters". It's a youth mentorship program that our church has started with three other churches, and the program assigns a mentor to each youth that comes to the program every second Saturday. This is a way for them to have a forum to speak about, you know, the violence and the other issues facing the community. (Shaylene)*

The goal of SOS is to create a collaborative effort to meet the needs of the Black youth involved in the program. According to Pastor Anderson, SOS is about "impartation" and continuous support:

*There was just a city wide revival that we put on. We put on a basketball tournament up in North Preston. We're just really trying – the RCMP just partnered with us to give us the Tim Horton's Camp during March Break so that we could take our kids there again for a session of impartation. I just want them to walk with their shoulders – with their head up and – because I'm a recipient of people that spoke life into me. And so I think that's our greatest story right now, this mentorship program through childhood into adolescence, into adulthood. Yeah, so it's not just a one shot. We journey with them. (Reverend Anderson)*

Summing up the importance of the SOS program, Reverend Anderson believes it promotes self-esteem among the youth and it reminds them that they descend from “priests and kings and queens and the richness of the historic” (L. Anderson, Personal Communication, October 17, 2013).

Another learning opportunity forum instituted and supported by the EBC is the Prostate Cancer Support Group. This program was established through the efforts of two members of the EBC who are both prostate cancer survivors. This initiative is a response to the high rate of prostate cancer among men of African ancestry in comparison to men from other racial background (Hoffman et al., 2001; Kheirandish and Chinegwundoh, 2011; Prostate Cancer Website, 2013)

*I was told by a medical professional in our church that for people of African descent the rate of prostate cancer is far greater, so we decided to start a cancer support group.*  
(Reverend Anderson)

The prostate cancer support group has received recognition from Prostate Cancer Canada which describes the support group as “first of its kind within the Prostate Cancer Canada network (Prostate cancer website, 2013):

*We met with Prostate Canada and they said we’ve never had a support group for men of African descent, this is the first in Canada.* (Reverend Anderson)

The Prostate Cancer Support Group is one of the ways through which the EBC is ministering to human concerns in addition to their spiritual needs:

*[Through the Prostate Cancer Support Group] The church is trying to minister to the whole person and not just the spiritual.* (Reverend Anderson)

The Prostate Cancer Support Group receives medical advice from a radiation oncologist who is also a member of the EBC. The group also meets once a month program at the EBC where men are now talking and taking action about prostate cancer.

*We've got the men talking. Men are opening up and sharing. But there was one time we had nobody to go to, now we do. (Corey)*

The program is also open and inclusive as it attracts both Blacks and Whites from other congregations and around the province.

*We have a Black support group for cancer, prostate cancer. And we have white people that come in because they are also dealing with cancer. We are the first group in Nova Scotia but we welcome anyone who comes to us. So we get people coming from New Glasgow, they were coming down to our group for support; and we get men from Dartmouth, from Sackville, and all over. And they're amazed because we don't shun people. (Craig)*

The ultimate goal of the Cancer Support Group, according Corey who is also actively involved in the group, is to empower Black men by providing them a "voice" and removing the stigma that is often associated cancer.

*So now we're into trying to help Black men. Black men are close mouthed. We have family members that had cancer for years and wouldn't tell you. I have an uncle in Winnipeg, he had cancer for years, prostate cancer and when he finally had his surgery I asked him "how come you wouldn't tell us"? And he didn't know what to say. This is the problem. Being so close mouthed, they don't want to share. This is what we're trying to get away from. We got to share. Our Black people are dying because of lack of knowledge. This is what we tell men in the group. (Craig)*

With a significant membership of Africans, particularly recent immigrants, international students and those with temporary immigration status, RCCG provides settlement and integration support through orientation, education, counselling and continuous support. Pastor Omamofe explains how the church provides orientation to Canada and settlement information to new immigrants:

*We have a program where we welcome new people coming into Nova Scotia. We used to do it informally by meeting new people and getting them settled. We helped with accommodation, assisted with knowing city, connected them with friends and people who can help them, who can direct them, support them, and all that. But this year, we made it more formal. So this September we decided to have what we called a Welcome Service. Now, it's going to be more formal. So every year we will always have a welcome service. (Pastor Omamofe)*

The welcome program is inclusive, it is open to everyone and it is not just about church membership:

*The program is for anybody that's new to the city. Anyone that is just coming to Halifax whether to go to school, to live or to work here. They are all welcome, and whether they come back to the church or not is irrelevant. That's the way we did it. (Pastor Omamofe)*

Pastor Omamofe further describes the format of the "Welcome Service".

*This summer we had a Welcome Service. We had a very big launch. We had PowerPoint slides prepared, titled "Welcome to Canada: These are the things you need to know". We discussed credit cards, banking, housing and most things that a new immigrant should know. We gave out gift cards to assist with buying some few groceries since these people are new to Canada. (Pastor Omamofe)*

The themes of spiritual grounding, cultural grounding, dynamic teaching, community, identity, impartation, support, welcoming and community resonate under the main theme of relevant learning. For participants, the ability to learn about oneself as a Black person, particularly in a society where such opportunities is a rarity is emancipatory. The church provides strengthen and resilience through culturally relevant enlightenment. According to Harold Jude Trulear this legacy of the Black church carries

upon its broad shoulders the heavy responsibility of helping [Black people] find answers for the following question: What does it mean to be Black and Christian in a society where many people are hostile to the former while claiming allegiance to the latter? (Trulear, 1997, p. 162)

Similarly, Anne Wimberley believes that many Black people participate in culturally relevant church based learning because they

seek spiritual and educational enrichment through their dialogue with the Bible and one another. They seek freedom from these circumstances and pathways to a better and more meaningful life. Others seek insights and guidance that can result in their lives being changed and set in a new direction. (Wimberley 1994, p. 19)

## *Social Engagement*

As previously mentioned, one of the goals of spirituality is to effect change. Change for the individual and the society is a key mandate of the Black church. Due to the role of the Black church in the affairs of Black congregants and since its influence permeates many aspects of life for many within the Black community, (Isaac, 2005), the church is a symbol of empowerment and a source of strength (Gregory, 1995).

Participants speak about how the EBC, the RCCG and SPAOC, through sermon deliveries, church activities and involvement in the community have intentionally delved into and addressed important matters affecting individuals and the community at large.

Shaylene talks about an issue on a road (Pockwock Road) that leads to the Black community of Upper Hammonds Plains. She explains how the speed limit suddenly increases just as one enters the section of Pockwock Road that leads to the predominately Black community. According to her, people from the community are concerned and they view this as a nonchalant attitude towards the Black community:

*Coming from Hammonds Plains, you're surrounded by a largely white community. You have White Hills, which is on the same street. You have Kingswood, you have all these communities. And there's always a constant struggle to be considered as equal. You see in Hammonds Plains, once you get to the Black community, the speed limit goes up by about, I think, 10 km/hr. It's 60 km/hr until you see the Upper Hammonds Plains sign and right when you get there it gets to 70 km/hr even though the density of the houses are the same. You never kind of get an explanation for why that is. (Shaylene)*

From her statement, Shaylene sees this as part of the Black community's "constant struggle to be considered equal" with the rest of the communities around them. In situations such as this, the EBC has been quick to respond on behalf of the community:

*The church, as it always does, continues to build relationship with government officials and remains a strong advocate of equal policies. Our pastors are very close with the MLAs and the councillors and through this relationship they are creating dialogue and asking questions about the concerns of the community. The church also encourages*

*church members and members of the community to go to meetings and let the government know that what's right is right and what's wrong is wrong. (Shaylene)*

Similarly, Reverend Anderson speaks about his commitment to fighting for the rights of the community of Upper Hammonds Plains. He provides another example involving the previously mentioned Pockwock Road. In this instance, Pockwock Road, which is the main connector to the Black community was been repaved. Mysteriously, upon reaching the section of the road where majority of the Black people in Upper Hammond Plains call home, the construction work suddenly stopped. Reverend Anderson took the situation and enquired with the municipal office:

*I contacted the city's office and asked if this action was deliberate or if it was an oversight. I asked them how they could pave a road and run out of Asphalt upon reaching the Black community. I demanded an answer. (Reverend Anderson)*

The city provided a response that was not very pleasing to him.

*I got back an e-mail from the city talking about, "oh yes: because of budgetary restraints we weren't able to pave this section". (Reverend Anderson)*

Stunned by the response, Reverend Anderson sarcastically remarked:

*You just put that in writing that you could not pave the Black community? Even if that's true, don't put it in writing. Save your own behind. (Reverend Anderson)*

The road paving situation compels Reverend Anderson to revisit the history of discrimination against the Black community of Upper Hammonds Plains. He refers to the formation of the all Black firefighting department<sup>48</sup> as a historical example of how the Black community came together to create their own fire services instead of continuing to rely on the poor fire protection services provided by the city of Halifax:

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<sup>48</sup> Several members of EBC including George Marsman, Maurice Allison, Neil Anderson and Alceid Williams were instrumental in the formation of what became the first Black fire department in 1976. The fire department began in 1966 as Upper Hammonds Plains Volunteer Fire Department through a series of negotiations between the Black community and the city of Halifax concerning fire protection services in the community of Upper Hammonds Plains (Clayton, 1984)

*So no wonder our seniors said, pastor, there's a reason. You don't know, you weren't born, but there's a reason your father and other men in this community built the fire department, because Hammonds Plains would not respond to our 911 and if they did by the time they responded, our houses were gone. (Reverend Anderson)*

The act of social engagement, as demonstrated by the EBC, is also prevalent across the other churches. At SPAOC, Archbishop Waterman believes the active involvement of the church in the affairs of the community is critical for making the voices of the Black community in Whitney Pier audible.

*You see as the church gets involved in various issues, there will be opposition as everybody is not going to agree with what we are doing but you have to have the stamina to speak the truth as you know it and think about the community as a whole, not just a single person. (Archbishop Waterman)*

Thinking about the community and having “enough stamina” to speak the truth, Archbishop Waterman cites his efforts in the allocation of bursaries to assist Black students from the community.

*I sit on an education committee that issue a \$5,000 bursary to students who have overcome obstacles and are now trying to pursue their education. I connect with the local schools, the Black Educators Association and other organizations in the community to ask if they have anyone to recommend. These organizations help to get a list of students who have overcome obstacles. I do this because I want to put the church out there by helping the students in need. I want people to know that the church is still here and as a judge once told me, “in your line of business, whether you are wearing a collar or not, you are on call twenty four seven”. (Archbishop Waterman)*

The belief that “whether you’re wearing a collar or not, you are on call twenty four seven” extends beyond the community and the congregation of SPAOC, it transcends denominational boundaries and trumps religious affiliation. According to Maureen, Archbishop Waterman demonstrated this in his calling:

*I remember this woman who was denied marriage by the Roman Catholic Church because she was a divorcee. She was a devoted Catholic and refused to get married by the justice of the peace. So she came down to the Archbishop and asked if he would marry them and even though she was not a member of our church, the Archbishop agreed and they were married here. (Maureen)*



Elma equally recalls how SPAOC was a focal point of community mobilization during what became known as “Black Friday” in Whitney Pier (“Black Friday” was the term for the announcement on October 13, 1967 of the impending closure of the Sydney steel plant<sup>49</sup>). This announcement took the whole community by surprise, particularly the Black community whose existence in Sydney is intrinsically connected with the steel plant. However, the community did not despair instead it galvanized in solidarity:

*As the steel plant was going to close down, we had this march and St. Phillips was really involved in getting people from the community to get involved in this event that was called Black Friday. And it worked out well, because at that particular time the steel plant didn't close. They kept it open for few more years after the march. (Elma)*

Elma explains that although SPAOC did not spear head the protest, it nevertheless was the primary agency involved in organizing the participation of members of the Black community:

*Father Francis was involved but the march was organized by different businesses in the Sydney area. He got the people from the church to come and be involved in it. And most of the men from the church would have been employed with the steel plant at that time. So the involvement of the community stem from the subcommittees within the church who were active organizers. (Elma)*

The RCCG equally encourages congregants to become actively engaged in the affairs of the community and the society at large. The church’s involvement in an anti-violence “prayer walk” one of the university campuses in Halifax is explained by Pastor Omamofe:

*I received a call from someone and he said, "Pastor, I think we should pray for this campus so that things will be well." So I took some of our members. We went and spent about two hours just walking around the campus and praying that, Lord we just want things to be right here. No violence. We don't want somebody to come into classroom*

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<sup>49</sup> Dominion Iron and Steel Company (DISCO) was the economic powerhouse of Cape Breton region and in particular the Sydney area. Its inception in the 1900s resulted in the influx of skilled workers from around the world including Black migrant workers from the Caribbean with many of them settling in Whitney Pier. Over time, DISCO went through several organizational restructuring, and the British company, Hawker-Siddeley eventually took over ownership in the 1950s. On Friday, October 13, 1967, Hawker-Siddeley announced its intention to close the steel plant, thus the coinage of the term “Black Friday”. The outrage and protests in response to the announcement compelled the Nova Scotia government to step in, turned the steel plant into a crown corporation and operated another three decades until its closure in 2002. (Whitney Pier Historical Society, 1993)

*spray people with guns and kill people. So we prayed for that campus, and by point, also prayed for other campuses. We made our presence visible and we made passerby understand why we were there. This is one of the ways our church is getting everyone involved to act. (Pastor Omamofe)*

In addition to galvanizing church members to spiritual rallying on campus, the church also mobilizes its members to serve the residents of Uniacke Square<sup>50</sup> through a food bank program it runs in the community.

*During one of our services, we talked about how we could take the church to the community. This discussion led us to start a food bank. We started about a year ago. Though we encountered some problems initially we kept at it because we believed in the vision. Now, after a year, it's got better because we've tried to be hospitable to the members of the community by showing love and devotion (Pastor Omamofe)*

Pastor Omamofe further explains that, the presence of the food bank does not only provide essential social services to the community, it is also inspiring those the food bank patrons.

*Also, because most of our volunteers are students from the church, they have influenced two or three people who come to use the food bank to go back to school. So when the food bank visitors see that our volunteers are in school and they are Africans who came all the way here for school, it challenges them to want to go back to school. (Pastor Omamofe)*

Pastor Omamofe goes on to share the success story of one of the patrons of the food bank.

*One of our members at the food bank went back to Nova Scotia Community College. She finished and was able to get a job. She graduated top of her class. I was really happy for her. For me that's wonderful. We've had instances such as this and I believe we are "breaking into the community". (Pastor Omamofe)*

Although, social engagement is the prevailing theme in this section, other important themes resonate through the voices of participants. The section is filled with themes such as the struggle for equality, relationship building, encouragement and empowerment, advocacy and community involvement.

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<sup>50</sup> Uniacke Square was established in 1966 to house the displaced population of Africville (Wikipedia, 2014)

### *A Sense of Community*

The emergence of cohesive and vibrant Black communities across North America is directly or indirectly connected with the Black church (Tempesta and Isaac, 2001, p. 121). In *Towards Community: Black Methodist in Nineteenth-Century Nova Scotia*, Stouffer (2000) views explores the roles of the Black church through the lenses of community development. According to Stouffer, the Black church was the hub of the community. It was a gathering place for Black people regardless of geographical location, economic status, vocation and hierarchy within the society. Historically, the Black church has served as a liaison between the church community and the communities outside of the church. As the first point of contact for those settling into new communities, the church provided “needed approval and verification of their legitimacy” (Stouffer, 2000, p. 203) to the larger society. By functioning in this role, the Black church has been able to legitimize its role as a trustworthy community institution.

In the contemporary times, community development has also been a prominent role of many Black churches. Perhaps, the AUBA is good example in this capacity. With affiliated churches spread across the Black communities in Nova Scotia, the AUBA is not just as a religious authority but it is also a key agent in community solidarity (Este & Bernard, 2006). Participants view the church as the centre of community cohesion. This perspective echo Pachai’s (1990) and Grant’s (1980) assertions that the Black church is the most important institution within the African Nova Scotian communities.

An example of community oriented efforts emerging out of the Black church is the previously mentioned SOS program.

*You know it is one thing for people outside the community to say there is violence in the Black community, but we do know that there are some things facing the Black community that are true. So our church is taking steps to address that through social programs. There is something called “Save Our Sons, Save Our Sisters”. (Shaylene)*

The SOS program recruits and trains mentors from the community to guide youth ages 11 to 18 participating in the program. Participants in the program undergo sessions dealing with issues of heritage and culture, health and sexuality, family matters, spirituality and social concerns. The ultimate goal of SOS is to confront the prevailing culture of violence in the Black community and ensure that apathy towards this culture is eradicated. The SOS program works in partnership with the community, organizations, businesses and the government to address pressing issues and offer appropriate community driven solutions.

In addition to using the SOS as a platform of change within the community, Shaylene explains that the EBC is equally intentional about building a sense of community:

*I think one thing in Hammonds Plains that's an issue, and I think that the church is addressing very well, is the sense of community. That sense of having a Black community. I mean, we're far out from Preston; we're far out from any other Black community, so sometimes in Hammonds Plains that sense of togetherness is lacking. So, I think as a church, EBC has tried to build this network for the community, whether that's through social events, or our youth group reaching out to the Black youth in the community and again, the SOS programs, the church is just trying to be the centre of what's happening. (Shaylene)*

EBC is also fostering communities beyond the boundaries of Upper Hammonds Plains.

*One of the things we have to manage is that we have gone from a community church to a commuting church. And that – traditionally, when you are called to a Black church in Nova Scotia, because we are in pockets, we are communal... but our reach is not limited to the community of Upper Hammonds Plains. So I would say on a given Sunday, 20 percent of our membership is probably community, and the other 80 is commuter. (Reverend Anderson)*

Although the influence of the EBC has extended beyond the community of Upper Hammonds Plains, the church remains committed to its roots:

*I celebrate that God is bringing people in and that we are now a community church and I celebrate that, but I believe that we have been strategically placed here [in Upper Hammonds Plains]. And the important thing is not to forget where you've been planted. So we have been very deliberate, we've made the commitment. It's one thing to do missions globally and provincially, but what are we doing locally? How are we*

*impacting this community? So we have been strategic and we just had this dialogue in the last six months and so we've now heightened our partnership with the elementary schools. We're now looking at educational programs, rites of passage programs for our kids here in the community. (Reverend Anderson)*

As a commitment to the Upper Hammonds Plains Community, the EBC has also instituted policies that make the community of Upper Hammonds Plains its primary focus. This is demonstrated through its benevolence program which primarily focuses on the residents of Upper Hammond Plains while still catering to congregants from outside of the community.

*When people call for assistance our policies is that we have to serve the community in which we've been placed. But again we have commuting congregation, so the two realities have to be reflective in our policies. (Reverend Anderson)*

Reverend Anderson describes the dilemma of balancing the needs of the community where to which the EBC is historically and geographically connected against that of the larger church communities of individuals from outside of Upper Hammonds Plains:

*We give money to the Upper Hammonds Plans Education Fund to help our kids go to college, community college and university, but then we were questioned why kids who have come to this church all through their high school cannot get a scholarship from this fund. So we had to think outside the box and say okay, we have to help the kids in this community and also help the kids in our church community who may have been coming and are part of our youth group and the church at large but they don't geographically live here. (Reverend Anderson)*

Similar to participants' experience at the EBC, congregants from SPAOC also considers the church a key agent in the affairs of the community. Maureen expresses her frustration that most Black people tend to undermine this vital role of the Black church:

*And what gets me is that people don't realize the importance of this church – I'm talking about Black people – because when they get in trouble who do they call? Archbishop Waterman. When they are in jail or whatever, who did they call? The Archbishop. (Maureen)*

Maureen believes that whether the community acknowledges it or not, the SPAOC is the first point of call whenever there is crisis within the Black community. She recalls a fatal boating

accident involving some members of the Black community who were not members of SPAOC yet the Archbishop was the first person to get a call from the police:

*The police didn't know who to call so they called St. Phillips African Orthodox. When they finally found the bodies they called the Archbishop again and said, "could you go and tell the families before we release the news"? So, that is his duty, to tell people these kinds of things. Who would they call if we didn't have a Black church here? I mean those men didn't belong to our church but because they were Black, they called the Archbishop. (Maureen)*

Maureen suggests that there is a high value placed upon the opinions of Archbishop Waterman regarding the Black community particularly by the White communities.

*The White community puts a lot of emphasis, on his word about somebody. Like they would say, they value his opinions. (Maureen)*

Archbishop Waterman does not only function as the spiritual head of the SPAOC, he also serves as the "de facto" leader of the Black community Maureen provides another example to demonstrate this:

*There was a situation in the community some time ago. We had a person whose wife wanted custody of their children, and they went to court. Although, this guy did not think too much of the Archbishop, he came approaching the Archbishop to help him out in court. The Archbishop went to the court and testified that no matter what, this man took care of his children. They were never dirty, they were clean, and they went to school and because of this testimony, this man got the custody of his children. (Maureen)*

Maureen further explains how the Archbishop uses his connections and influence to advocate for Blacks in the community:

*The church plays a role too in that sometimes, especially when the Archbishop is on these committees and they want to know a little more about someone, or maybe they want to get rid of somebody, that this person doesn't have the credentials, and so forth. The Archbishop always speaks up on behalf of the Black person. I know of a particular [case] where the Archbishop requested that an individual be given a second chance after a decision had been made to fire them. So this person, if it wasn't for the Archbishop, would have been let go. (Maureen)*

Maureen provides yet another example of Archbishop Waterman's influence in the community.

*Also, I know this particular guy who didn't attend this church but respected the Archbishop as a mentor. Anytime he went for a job, he would use the Archbishop as one of his references. When he moved to Halifax and wanted to get a job with the police department, the Archbishop was called as a character reference. And this man always says, "I know, Father, if it wasn't for you I wouldn't be having this job". (Maureen)*

Elma and Joyce agree with Maureen about SPAOC's tradition of influence in Whitney

Pier. Elma recalls a time when she had been scheduled to work during a special church event:

*I remember during one of our Sunday school concerts and I had to work that night. Father Francis (Archbishop Waterman's predecessor) went up and talked to [my boss] and he got me off so I could come to the concert. (Elma)*

And Joyce agreed that SPAOC's influential position is the result of its integrity within the Black community:

*The church was kind of a place of credibility. So if the church or Father Francis, in particular, vouched for you, then you were good. (Joyce)*

Elma also speaks with pride about Father Francis' influence in promoting community focused agencies in Whitney Pier.

*Everybody saw how Father Francis, who was before Father Waterman, used to be involved with the Children's Aid and with the United Way and many organizations like that and helped bring them into the community. (Elma)*

Angela remembers how SPAOC was central to life in Whitney Pier and how its influence was real and strong.

*If you lived within the community, the church was the staple of the community. Anything that happened or you needed anything it was the place to go. Like most of our Black churches, for example, the church helped with education and employment, the church played such a big role and it was the place where we could all go to. So from there, the church was also involved in many things, even social services based program like the Children's Aid, as Elma said that Father Francis brought that in. The church was involved in different aspects of social programs and there was such a broad scope. So, growing up, the church played a vital role in all aspects of our lives. (Angela)*

Gina expresses the belief that the church will always occupy an influential position in the within the community and that this influence extends beyond the boundaries of the home community:

*I think the church will always be in an advocacy position for the community. So it doesn't matter whether the community agrees with the church or not. Often, when the outside people want to know anything about the Black community, the first person they go to is Father Waterman; they identify and understand the vital role of the church.*

*So it's the inner community that doesn't really relate to the church, but the outer community, if they're going to do anything in the community – and I think it's always been that way – they will go to the church first; they will contact the church first. (Gina)*

According to Jude, the role of the church as the centre of community is diverse and encompassing, it touches every area of life.

*The church is taking a leadership role in reaching out to members of all age groups in the Black community catering to empower individuals educationally, spiritually, socially, and economically via a variety of opportunities to encounter support in these areas. In addition to regular church services, there are often special events, workshops, and opportunities to obtain external support confidentially as required for personal matters. (Jude)*

Participants from the RCCG, the majority of who are recent immigrants, speak about how the church is building a cohesive immigrant community in Halifax. They believe that coming to RCCG is not just about Sunday worship, it is about building a community of people who are frequently alienated by mainstream Canadian society. Olumide attributes the ability of RCCG to provide a sense of home and a sense of belonging to why he chose RCCG as a church:

*Before I started coming to the RCCG I attended another church, a mainstream Canadian church, in the city. I was there for six years and I found that I didn't feel at home. I didn't feel like we were together. It felt like people just wanted to talk to me or wanted to interact with me because it was church. I didn't feel there was any contact or relationship with the people. If it wasn't for Sunday, I don't think I would talk to any of those people. I don't think they would have been able to relate to me on the level that I was or the level that I wanted. And when I got invited to this church and I would see some of the church members outside church during the week you feel that connection, you feel like, okay, these people actually care about you, they ask questions, they follow up on you, they want to know what's going on in your life. If you have problems, you share with each other.*



*At the other church it was just come to church on Sunday, but when the service is done, you might not get a call from somebody until you see the person next Sunday. (Olumide)*

After spending the whole week either at work, at school or in the company of non-African, coming to church on Sunday allows Tola to reconnect with other Africans. For him, the church is a haven for interacting with a community that he is seldom around during the week. For this reason, Tola eagerly looks forward to coming to church every Sunday to be among “[his] people”:

*It is true that I'm connected with the African community but am also connected with the larger community because of work and social life. And from being here [in Canada] for a long time you interact with different people and it's not basically the core Nigerian community. And I would say just because of my daily activities I hardly interact with the core community unless on Sundays. That is one of the reasons why I make it a point of duty to come to church, because then I can see my people. When I see my people, I can say, you know, hey, what's going on, let us catch up because when I go back during the week, it's a different environment. (Tola)*

The RCCG participants see the church as a place where immigrants can find assistance to successfully integrate into the Canadian society. The church is building a community of individuals who have gone through the struggle of finding their place within the Canadian society (Bola and Niyi). These congregants are now helping others to navigate their ways. For Bola, this role is as simple as knowing that you can find someone who would listen to you and can relate with where you are because they have been there:

*To me the church is a support system because I like to be around family, I like to be around people who can counsel me. So it's like a counselling system, because they understand what you're going through, because in our different schools we obviously have counselling resources where you can go when you have problems. I'm not trying to be racist but they are white, we are Black. You get the feeling that sometimes they don't understand what we are going through because they try to fit everyone with the same shoe but the shoe doesn't always fit. They are just giving you a professional standpoint. So this church gives that counselling and supporting system. (Bola)*

Niyi, just like Bola, believes the church is creating a community of support system particularly for those from away:

*I think it's more of interaction too because you can't just go to a white man and tell him this is your problem because he will feel it's your responsibility to take care of that, right? But someone from your own culture would sit down and counsel you and this will come from his heart. And you're just grateful for that conversation you have with them. I think it's a good interaction that the church gives. The church is like a family, it's like a supportive family. It's good to have a family again, especially in a foreign environment. (Niyi)*

Olumide and Tola provides specific examples of how the RCCG builds this support network among newcomers. Tola shares his personal experience:

*I am studying for a first degree in economics but the people here expect you to already know some basics. Unfortunately due to the standard of education in my country, I do not I do not have these basics. If I approach a counsellor at the school, he or she might advise me from the standpoint of "I assume you know this so let me go on from there". Unfortunately, I don't. It is not because I'm lazy to know but I was never taught. I didn't have the opportunity to learn it. However, meeting with someone who has already gone through that phase makes more sense. It's easy for them to understand me, right? So if I say I don't know this stuff about economics he or she knows that I don't because they have been there. So this is one way that this community really helps you. The church uniquely they know your unique problem and where you're coming from because in a way most of the people here have experienced it so it's easy for them to relate with the problem you're having. (Tola)*

Olumide draws another comparison between RCCG and the mainstream Canadian church he spoke about earlier:

*Comparing my old church to this church, if you were a person, one who just moved here, if you were to go to that other church there isn't anybody who right off the back you can go to and say "I'm just here for the first time, I need accommodation, where do I get a phone? Where do I buy this? Where do I get a jacket? Where is the grocery store?". All these kind of things that your family, friends or those close to you would help you with, are automatic here at this church. (Olumide)*

Olumide also underscores the RCCG's genuine concerns for new immigrants:

*If somebody is new here, everybody in the church knows this person is new because we always make the person stand up to be received by everyone. So this person knows that if they need to make an appointment to do something, they know who they can talk to. I know that If need to buy a home this is the brother I have to ask a question. If I need banking information this is the person I have to talk to. If I need accommodation this is the person I can talk to and generally people will approach you and ask questions. It's very different here unlike the other church. (Olumide)*

Olumide further explains that it is customary for the Pastor at RCCG to go around after Sunday services and ask if anyone requires a drive home:

*As soon as the service is over, the Pastor is always asking around “do you need a ride home? How are you getting home”? Once she finds someone who needs a drive, she will go to church members who have vehicles and ask: “this person doesn’t have a ride can you help drop him? This person lives by your house please drop her”. It doesn’t happen like that in the other. Once the service is done it’s every man for himself. Whether you live in Tatamagouche, it doesn’t matter; you’re going to find your own way. Unless you ask, you know, unless you seek that kind of help it’s not offered to you. So that’s the difference between what this church can do in the sense that when you get here, you have that backbone. If I have any problem, if I ask one person he will be able to point me out in the direction to somebody that can help me in a way that is going to benefit me and I don’t really have to worry about it. (Olumide)*

He concludes that at the RCCG, it is about a communal support and there is an intentional effort to ensure that no one is left behind.

*You could be in that church, I’ve been there before going through things for months and months I just got the brunt of it. It was like no one saw me. If it was here there would be somebody that I would have been able to ask and they would have taken the time out to assist me without it being a problem or stuff like that. So that’s the obligation for every member here, that if somebody is in need you will have to be able to help; if you can. If you have to go to other Canadian based churches it’s just like, yeah, you know, let everybody carry their crosses. (Olumide)*

Whether it is in Upper Hammonds Plains, Whitney Pier or among the emerging African immigrants’ communities, the role of the Black church in building these communities cannot be undermined. For instance, Craig sees the EBC as a vital link to the community of Upper Hammonds Plains:

*If I didn’t go to Emmanuel Baptist Church in my own community and I have to go to a church outside of [this community], I think I would very rarely go. Emmanuel is my home church. I grew up there, and I know a lot of the older folks, and I knew what our church stands for, and I know the purpose and I know it is a community church. Our church is basically the link to our people within the community. So that’s where everything within the community connects. The focal point of our community is our church. (Craig)*

Although the church offers comfort in the form of hope in the hereafter and provides spiritual solutions to life's problems, it nevertheless creates a space for "increased social interactions of church members" (Nelsen and Nelsen, 1975, p. 6). This ability to build congregational interaction equally translates into community collaboration and as Reddie (2008) affirms, the church is an important "political, educational and organizational entity in the collective and communitarian experience of Diasporan people of African descent" (p. 1) and according to Walker (1995), outside of the family, the church is centre of the community.

### **Chapter Summary**

In this chapter, I echo the voices of participants through the four primary emerging themes: shared cultural experience, relevant learning, community engagement and a sense of community. There are also emerging secondary themes and sub-themes that bring to the forefront the longing for a place to call home, the desire to belong, the need for empowerment, the quest for identity, community solidarity, the power of impartation and an abiding spiritual grounding etc.

Although each of the themes is unique and independent in how it conveys participants' responses, there are several overlaps in how the themes evolve. For example, the voices echoed in shared cultural experience also resonate in other themes. The issue of identity raised in shared cultural experience is also loud and clear in sense of community. This reality of intersecting themes reveals that lived experiences cannot be restricted to one particular theme. It is dynamic and cross thematic.

In addition, I use resonating phrases such as "same Black experience, "passing along the tradition", Black experience, "being among your kind", "feeling of being at home", "when you are around other Black people", "constant struggles to be considered equal", "it is a community

church”, “we have culture”, “I didn’t feel at home”, “I can see my people”, “this community really helps you”, “this community understand your unique problems”, “the church is catering to empowering individuals”, “church is like a supporting system” etc. as links between participants voices and emerging themes.

In chapter six, I discuss the findings of the study through the lenses of Africentricity, Critical Race Theory and Postcolonialism.

## CHAPTER SIX

### ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSIONS

*But the reason why the church is here is because years ago the church was segregated, and a lot of people don't remember that. The country was segregated legally and the churches were just as guilty because they had their benches marked off with numerals. And if a family is sitting on a bench and you, a native or immigrant came and sat on the bench, you were expelled from the church or you could be locked up because legally you rendered the bench, as they used to call it, a pew wrinkle.*

– Archbishop Waterman, RCCG, September 28, 2013.

#### **An Overview: Making Sense of Theories**

In this chapter, I revisit participants' narratives presented in chapter five and connect the emerging voices to Africentricity, Critical Race Theory and Postcolonialism – the theoretical framework of this thesis. Although this chapter is devoted to understanding participant voices, it is not the beginning of data analysis. As I discuss in chapter four, data analysis is a journey through the entire study and does not spontaneously emerge and my goal as a researcher is to present an African centred analysis that

produces indigenous African knowledge that recognises the African voice; that tells another story (counter story). [that] re-affirms the centrality of cultural experience as the place to begin to create a dynamic multicultural approach to research. (Mkabela, 2005, p. 184)

#### **Theoretical Framework Analysis of Findings**

##### Africentricity

##### *Promotes Shared Cultural Experience*

Africentricity promotes the collectivity and interconnectedness of African people. In spite of the importance of interconnectedness and collectivity, Africentricity does not interfere with the rights of individuals, and their pursuit of life's happiness. Neither does it preclude individual from self-actualization. However, from an African centred perspective, human existence is communal. This concept of humanity echoes a Yorùbá saying that “*ìgì kan ò lè d'ágbó ẹ̀*” (a

tree cannot make a forest). The individual (the tree) cannot be elevated above the communal (the forest) since the forest provides a home base for the tree. Likewise, the forest cannot undermine the tree because what makes a good forest (the communal) resides in the tree (the individual).

The orientation towards the collective fosters “harmony and balance of an interrelated and essentially an egalitarian system” (Mkabela, 2005, p. 185) and the ability to maintain harmonious relationship within a communal experience is a venerable African centred value. The interconnectedness of all things is also a cosmological orientation of Africentricity. This belief that all things are connected is an Africentric value that promotes unity among every element of nature – living and non-living (Schiele, 1994). Interconnectedness transcends time and space and embraces ideas and knowledge that “charge all who adhere to it with an ethic of personal responsibility in which people exist on a spiritual plane that supports peaceful and equitable coexistence” (Merriweather Hunn, 2004, p. 69).

Collectivity and Interconnectedness is the foundation of what James et al. (2010) describe as “collective identity”. The understanding of collectivity is that as human beings, we are all responsible for one another and this mutual responsibility promotes human bonding; encourages respect for one another and fosters accountability towards one another. Moreover, through collective identity, there has been an emergence of what Asante (2003) describes as an African Cultural System (ACS) which is an inherent camaraderie amongst African people regardless of geographic location, language and history.

At the beginning of my interaction with participants, I asked four questions that set the tone for the rest of the interview questions: (i) How long have you been a member of this church? (ii) Why have you chosen this church as a place of worship? (iii) How long does it usually take you to travel to the church? (iv) Are there other churches closer to where you live?

If so, why did you choose this church instead of attending the one closer to home? Although responses from participants varied and were reflective of individual experience, each response points to the desire to be among “your own kind” as a primary reason for attending a Black church. For instance, by attending a mainstream church where membership is predominantly white, Shaylene “wouldn’t get the same Black experience”. For her, it is more than just going to a church; it is about being able to fully enjoy who she is as a Black person. The ability to connect with other Black people is key in this response since going to a “predominantly white” church will essentially alienate her from that Black experience. Shaylene’s response also underscores the Black experience as a generational one since her mother, grandmother, great grandmother have all attended Black churches. Thus, her comment about “passing along that tradition” aligns with Africentricity’s stance that African Cultural System is “trans-generational” (Asante, 2003, p. 4) and immutable.

The Black experience validates an internal quest to better understand life in its fullness as a person of African ancestry. Although the Black experience and African Cultural System are not singular concepts, they are nonetheless unique experience manifested in diversity (Asante, 2003; Dei, 2010). Since the Black experience emerges out of the African centredness, it is neither presumptuous nor ambitious to speak about the existence of a common African struggle and pursuit. Furthermore, this understanding “recognises the deleterious effects of colonization, slavery, and the continuation of structural racism on the material and spiritual well-being of African people” (James et al, 2010, p. 24).

Africentricity affirms that shared cultural experience is part of an African continuum. It emerges out of an inherent African identity that is reflected in the traditions of the African diaspora. African continuum carries with it a distinctive Black identity as evident in mannerism,



languages, taste of music and expressions (Oyebade, 1990; Asante, 2003) of African people who lend their voices to this study.

The Black church, as an influential organization within the Black community, provides a powerful channel for this African continuum as revealed in the spiritual songs, dancing and drumming. This continuum also manifests in oratory preaching, call and response, clapping, foot tapping, shouting, moaning, head shaking, circling, being slain in the spirit and the presence of a celebratory atmosphere (Asante, 2003; Isaac, 2002) which is typically foreign and sometimes considered inappropriate in most mainstream churches.

During an invitation to an RCCG event called “Praise is WIDE (What I Do Every day). I observed a spontaneous solidarity in spite of having diverse Black culture in the same space. At this event, there were continental Africans, with different countries of origin, languages and cultural manifestations. There were multi-generational Canadians with heritage going back to the Loyalists, the Refugees and the Maroons. There were also those who would consider themselves Americans, Jamaicans, Trinidadian and Blacks from different parts of the world. Together, everyone was deeply engaged in the rituals of worship, praise and dance in an atmosphere that demonstrated an African Cultural System expressed through various cultural forms. This observation also underscores Asante’s assertion that African people, “respond to the same rhythms of the universe, the same cosmological sensibilities, [and] the same general historical reality” (Asante, 2003, p. 4).

This propagation of an African continuum, as demonstrated in the Black church, is an infusion of what Bode Omojola (2010) describes as *àṣà* (socio-cultural activities) and *ẹ̀sìn* (spiritual engagement). The intersection of socio-cultural activities and spiritual engagement enables the Black church to promote interdependency and interpersonal relations, develop

emotional connectivity to self and others, and stimulate spiritual development which is an essential value of Africentricity.

*Advocates Culturally Relevant Learning*

Religious education is one of the foundational pursuits of Christianity. From Sunday schools to learning about the basic tenets of the church, education within the church is crucial to the survival of Christianity. The debate about religious education centres on the failure of the church to go beyond “mere indoctrination into belief practices” (Hinton, 2009, p. 19) and start promoting learning that brings meaning to everyday experience.

A cornerstone of Africentricity is the need to place the cultural heritage of African people at the centre of their learning (Brigham, 2007; Merriweather Hunn, 2004; Oyebade, 1990; Schiele, 1994). In commenting on Carter Woodson’s *Mis-Education of the Negro*, Elaine Richardson (2000) views “mis-education” as a deliberate attempt at reinforcing learning that promotes dominant Eurocentric ideals at the expense of non-dominant ideologies. Similarly, Steadman (1996) observes that conventional views in education are reflective of the worldview of a White, dominant culture “whose language and world vision are alien to members of different cultures” (p. 5). Sadly, a tragedy of “mis-education” and White cultural hegemony is that it is far reaching and its tentacles are securely wrapped around the church. This reality prompts Hinton (2009) to suggest that true religious education should not be limited to merely promoting doctrines and traditions. Instead, religious education must educate about the belief systems of others and tell the stories of all traditions by upholding learnings that are relevant to the lived experiences of all adherents. For a successful culturally relevant learning in the church, Hinton concludes that

at its best Religious Education should provide contextual location for people. It should explore and explain origins, not just religious but cultural and social origins. Authentic

Religious Education shapes identity, not just individual but communal identity (Hinton, 2009, p. 19)

The recommendations made by Hinton align with a primary goal of Africentric education that needs of Black learners must be central to learning and that these needs cannot be separated from their identity (Merriweather Hunn, 2004). Since culturally relevant learning is a mandate of the Black church (Hinton, 2009), the concept of a culture based learning resonates with participants in the study.

Shockley (2007) speaks about six cultural imperatives of Africentric education which are critical to the learning outcome of African learners. These cultural imperatives develop around identity, interconnectivity, culture, values, community building and sense of agency. In the Black church, cultural imperatives are beyond canonical rhetoric, they delve into the history, identity, cultural and communal affiliation, and experiential knowledge of African people. They provide a base for Black congregants to garner tools that will enable them to fully function within their cultural reality in a society detached from this reality.

Gina's comment about how learning in the church is the source of her spiritual grounding is at the core of the transformative ability of Africentric learning which purports a spiritual journey through which the outlook on life is refined and new ways of seeing things emerge (Asante, 2003). This spiritual journey, through education, builds virtues and creates a complete human being (Beals, 2012).

Culturally relevant learning employs the use of the learner's cultural orientation, their personal and group experiences, and their overall worldview. Through experiential learning, learners situate themselves within their cultural centres and are able to subdue the burden of learning from the perspectives of a dominant culture (Merriweather-Hunn, 2004)

The ability of the Black church to address life's issues that are pertinent to African people was a central point of conversation with participants. There is an intentional pursuit by the Black church, as seen in the use of oratory sermons and interpretative scriptures, to uplift the spirit of African people. The use of sermons to encourage and strengthen Black congregants is an important legacy of the Black church and as Shaylene explains, culturally relevant learning is an *“aspect of the Black church that you might not get anywhere else”*. In addition to the rituals and worship styles, the Black church also uses church based and community focused programs as culturally relevant learning tools. Some key examples of how culturally relevant learning manifests across these three churches include:

1. **The implementation of an African Heritage Circle** that showcases *“different African artifacts and books that you probably couldn't get anywhere else because they're very limited”*.
2. **The inclusion of inter-generational learning** in an African Heritage Circle where *“elders in the community come in and speak about their experiences growing up in the Black community”*
3. **The celebration of African Heritage Month** in a congregation that is becoming racially diverse with *“emphasis on, you know, we are still a Black church and that is where we came from”*
4. **The inclusion of materials/resources reflective of Black people and Black experiences** during the commemoration of Remembrance Day, *“instead of using a generic video of soldiers, they used a video from a particular Black battalion”*
5. **The implementation of the SOS program**, a rites of passage program which is *“about identity. It's about knowing who you are, celebrating Kwanza, celebrating our*

*history, our achievements. SOS bridges the “lack of knowledge on who we are as a people”*

6. **The creation of a prostate cancer support group for Black men**, first of its kind in Canada which “[ministers] to the whole person and not just the spiritual” especially where “*Black people are dying because of lack of knowledge*”
7. **The development of an immigrant support program**, “Welcome to Canada”. The program addresses and provides practical solutions to common concerns among newcomers, such as “*credit cards, banking, housing and other concerns*”

There are elements of Africentricity in the purpose and delivery of these programs. The learning process draws on learners’ experiences and gives room for the ownership of learning. The delivery is communal and does not elevate one person’s interest over the group. Instead, it provides a space where individuals can feel connected through the sharing of common experiences. There are manifestations of affective elements in the structure of these programs which allow participants to fully connect with “self” in a safe and non-judgemental environment. Moreover, these programs create avenues where participants can construct their own reality and challenge societal definition of their identity. As Reverend Anderson says, the SOS program, “*is about changing the culture of the youth not valuing themselves; not knowing that they come from priests and kings and queens and the richness of the historic*”. All of these programs are about telling participants who they truly are and not who the dominant society says they are.

During my study, I witnessed another culturally relevant learning through *ìṣọmọlórúkọ* (naming ceremony). In the Yorùbá culture, *ìṣọmọlórúkọ* is a celebratory event. Naming a child is not a random act, neither is it a mere formality to generate a name to put on the birth certificate. Names are chosen based on circumstances of birth, the situation at home, the type of birth

(multiple or otherwise) or as an acknowledgment of the goodness of the divine. Among the Yorùbá people *ìṣọmọ́lórúkọ* is an important rite of passage and a key religious ritual (Aluko, 1993).

Prior to *ìṣọmọ́lórúkọ*, a baby remains nameless. *Ìṣọmọ́lórúkọ* thus become a public declaration of cultural values that formally proclaims the identity of the new baby and their acceptance into the society (Aluko, 1993). The event is typically witnessed by family, friends and well-wishers. In the African traditional way, *ìṣọmọ́lórúkọ* is overseen by an elder in the family but in its adoption by the church, it is presided over by a member of the clergy or one of the elders of the church. *Ìṣọmọ́lórúkọ*, in its original format<sup>51</sup>, cannot proceed without the use of symbolic items such as salt (*iyò*), honey (*oyin*), sugar cane (*ìrèké*), bitter cola (*orógbó*), kola nut (*obì*), dry fish (*ẹja gbígbe*), palm oil (*epo pupa*), alligator pepper (*ata're*) and water (*omi*). As each item is presented, it is followed by an invocation that explains its meaning (Aluko, 1993):

1. *Salt* – used to add flavour to food and also as a preservative. The invocation here is that child will always “have flavour” and that he or she will “never go bad” in life.
2. *Honey* – a sweet, sticky substance. It symbolises “sweet life”. Moreover, because of its stickiness, any attempt by insects to get into honey often ends in fatality. Thus, honey is used to declare that no one will ever be able to harm the child and if they try, it will end in futility.
3. *Sugar Cane* – sweet, succulent and luscious. It is an invocation that the child will always flourish and he or she will never “run dry”.

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<sup>51</sup> Due to its appropriation by the African church, *ìṣọmọ́lórúkọ* has been modified by various Christian denominations to conform to their tenets and doctrines. It is important to note that at this particular *ìṣọmọ́lórúkọ*, these traditional symbolic items were not used. However, the call and response in the announcement of the baby's names, the powerful and “encoded prayers” and the passing of bowl for monetary gifts for the new born were highlights of what I witnessed.

4. *Bitter Cola* – the Yorùbá word for bitter cola, *orógbó*, is a vocalic alliteration with the syllable *gbó* which when translated can mean ripe, aged or blossom. Essentially, bitter cola symbolises longevity, it denotes a good and flourishing life for the child.
5. *Kola Nut* – the symbolism of kola nut can also be connected to vocalic alliteration of its Yorùbá name *obi*. The syllable *bi* can be interpreted as “to ward off”.  
  
Symbolically, using kola nut is a declaration to ward off evil. Death is averted and the child is precluded from all harm.
6. *Dry Fish* – Fish resides in water, yet they never complain of cold. Fish also move about freely searching for what to eat and usually with no obstacles in their path. The declaration on the child is that he or she will live a life of comfort and their earthly pursuits will be fruitful.
7. *Palm Oil* – an oil used as an immediate antidote in ingestion of a poisonous substance. It is also used to suppress itchiness when someone lands in a shrub of poison ivy. Palm oil is therefore used to declare a life of ease and comfort for the child.
8. *Alligator Pepper* – a type of pepper with multiple chambers filled with seeds. The symbolism associated with alligator pepper is that the child will be fruitful. He or she will leave behind many progeny. Alligator pepper also foretell the world the child will live in. On first bite, alligator pepper produces a “sharp” taste but overtime, it sweetens up. This is a reminder that, “the human world is not always a bed of roses, there are occasions when things go sharp but not forever” (Aluko, 1993, p. 30)
9. *Water* – a vital liquid. There is a saying in Yorùbá: *omi l’àbùwẹ̀, omi là’bùmu, ẹ̀nìkan kà n b’ómi n s’ẹ̀tá* (Water is for bathing, water is for drinking. No one chooses enmity

with water). Water symbolises likeability. May this child always experience love from everyone.

As the invocation occurs, each item is brought close to the child's mouth as a symbolic gesture of ingestion and prayers are offered upon the completion of this process. Aluko (1993) suggests that these types of prayers are not the typical European type prayers. The prayers are "the encoded indigenously offered prayers that touch all aspects of life of a person" (p. 28). At the end of the ceremony, the child's names are revealed (officiating clergy has prior knowledge of what the names are) for the first time. Everyone in attendance is encouraged to repeat the names in a call and response manner. The conclusion of the ceremony is usually the passing of an empty bowl to encourage guests to give monetary gifts to the child.

Although *isomolórúko* has its root in African traditional religious rituals and celebration, it has been appropriated by African Indigenous Churches and has consequently been amended to reflect the doctrines and belief systems of different congregations. Nevertheless, it has retained its African distinctiveness as evident in the child not having a name until the event, the rendition of "encoded" prayers, the use of call and response to announce the names of the new child, the passing of the bowl for guests to offer monetary gifts to the baby and the celebratory, ritualistic atmosphere. The process of *isomolórúko* reflects Africentricity even in its modified. It is an open declaration of "African allegiance" (Shockley, 2007, p. 104) which demonstrates that cultural heritage is an inseparable entity of religious heritage.

The presence of cultural imperatives of Africentric education is evident in the several programs and church based activities that are the cornerstone to culturally relevant learning in the church. These programs reaffirm individual and collective identity and they underscore the importance of shared identity. The programs help participants navigate cultural elements that are



integral to their identity as Black people and it instills in them the African values within these cultural elements. African-centred learning in the Black church is about developing a sense of pride, and encouraging African agency to realize a prosperous Black community.

#### *Drives Social Activism*

One of the principal goals of the Black church is to effect social change (Hopkins, 1999; Lincoln and Mamiya, 1990; Paris, 1989). The foundation of the Black church rests on the pursuit of a society where Black people can fully participate as members of the society. From its formation, the Black church has offered a reinterpretation of Christianity and provided a space where Black people can feel at home (Mitchell, 2004). The Black church goes beyond helping individual to understand the reality of oppression and why he or she is being oppressed. It goes a step further to provide an avenue for confronting those oppressions (Cone, 1970) by remaining an epicentre of social activism in the Black community (Morris, 1984).

Highlighting the tensions faced by the Black church as a central figure in the Black community, Lincoln and Mamiya (1990) warn the church not to be too heavenly focused and forgets its earthly obligation. Similarly, Barnes (2006) reminds the church that to be at the forefront of social activism, it must remain dedicated to pursuing social equity that will bring about “political and economic empowerment” of African people (p. 372). As a pivotal agent of change, the mission of the Black church is to fight oppression and bring about hope for those whose humanity is continuously undermined. To accomplish this, there must be an intentional move beyond religious conversion and a move towards an awareness of issues faced by the community such as “racism, sexism, unemployment, and poverty” (Barnes, 2006, p. 372). Moreover, finding ways through which these issues can be addressed must also become a principal goal of the Black church. It is therefore not uncommon to see these social issues

becoming topics of sermons as a reminder to congregation about their earthly obligations (Lincoln and Mamiya, 1990; Barnes, 2005). Clergy, church leaders and congregants are also active in speaking out against social injustice, racial and economic inequality, and other social ills.

The AUBA has stood on the side of justice for African people throughout its 160 years of existence. As a religious body, the organization continues to “do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow's cause” (Isaiah 1:17, ESV). The practical approach taken by AUBA distinguishes it as a prominent organization whose primary role is to cater to the needs of Blacks in Nova Scotia. Whether advocating for better and quality education, equitable employment opportunities, affordable housing, availability of municipal services or fighting against racial inequality, the AUBA has remained socially active within the African Nova Scotian communities throughout its existence as a religious organization in Nova Scotia (Este and Bernard, 2006).

Reverend Anderson affirms this legacy of the AUBA through the activities of the EBC. While acknowledging the evolution of the EBC from a historic Black church to a multiracial and multi-cultural church, his devotion to protecting the integrity of the Black community and ensuring social equality remains unshaken. His commitment to the Black community is reflected in communication with politicians and government officials: “I write many letters. Letters to the mayor, letters to the premier. I'm a letter writer. That's half of my job. And I always talk about the senior pastor of Emmanuel Baptist Church in the historic Black community”. Reverend Anderson also uses his position to speak against injustice and in particular on the needs of the Black community. This is also reflected in how he made an inquiry to the municipal office

regarding the abrupt stoppage when paving the section of Pockwock Road that leads to the Black community.

Reverend Anderson's stance of not shying away from speaking his mind is typical of most clergy including those within the AUBA. As a result, the Black community has become in tune with the leadership of the church and trusts its lead in fostering social justice and community engagement. As a member of EBC, Shaylene sees how her church is leading the way in building relationships "with government officials and advocating for equal policies". She has also seen how the interactions between the pastors and politicians are bringing about constructive dialogue and better relationship.

Social activism in the Black church is best explained through the ideals of liberation theology. In its simplest form, liberation theology produces faith driven ideology for social transformation (Berryman, 1987; Sindima, 2008). It demonstrates faith through social actions and finds ways to alleviate human suffering as a true reflection of God's love and Christian calling. The heart of liberation theology rests on "engendering social justice and respect for human dignity through re-sistance to exploitation and oppression in society" (Odion-Akhaine, 2006, p. 759). Liberation theology advocates that once an individual's identity as an African is established, the natural disposition must be "against all forms of oppressions, racism, classism, homophobia, patriarchy, child abuse, pedophilia, and white racial domination" (Asante, 2003, p. 2). Therefore Africentricity stands at the cusp of two complementary realities: firstly, it guides an individual into self-discovery and secondly it steers them towards the pursuit of social justice and freedom.

### *Fostering a Sense of Community*

The implication of the Yoruba proverb, “a river that forgets its source” is a reminder of the African belief in the interrelationship of the individual and the community. One of the several ways of differentiating Africentricity from Eurocentric ontology is in the concept of community. From an Africentric perspective, the community is the soul of the individual. According to Menkiti (1984), to understand an individual you must look at the community since the “community defines the person as the person” (p. 172). He argues that community in the Eurocentric world emerges because individuals with different goals are often compelled to work co-operatively to achieve what an individual cannot otherwise accomplish. Thus, within this system, the community is driven by its individual constituents. However from an African perspective, community is organic. One does not become a member of the community because of convenience nor because it is prudence to do so. Rather, the devotion of an individual is foremost to the communal body and it supersedes personal goals and desires (Menkiti, 1984)

The Black church has variously been described as the core of the Black community and considered a principal player in the affairs of the community (Lincoln and Mamiya, 1990). As Pastor Anderson explains, since the EBC has “been strategically placed” in Upper Hammond’s, there is an obligation of commitment to the community where the church has been planted. As a result, the EBC is actively involved in building its geographical community and has now extended its efforts of community building beyond Upper Hammond’s plains.

Olumide’s experience of lack of interaction with other congregants outside of church while attending a mainstream White church is an example of a community formed out of necessity. The interaction in this instance only occurs because of membership in the same church. At the end church services, relationships cease until the next service. However, the

experience after Olumide started attending RCCG goes beyond just being a church member. There is a sense of belonging and a feeling of true connection with other congregants outside of the church setting. Others congregants express genuine interest in him. “They ask question, they follow up..., they want to know what’s going on in [his life]”. According to Olumide, at the RCCG, “If you have problems, you share with each other”. In this setting, there is a sense of true connectivity. Similarly, Tola also views the RCCG as coming home to your “core community” after an exhaustive week in the mainstream, Eurocentric community and when he goes back [to the mainstream community] “during the week, it’s a different environment”.

### **Critical Race Theory**

#### *Black is an Identity*

In discussing my thesis with others, particularly Christians who hold firmly to the doctrine of “one fold, one shepherd”, they seem to be taken aback by the pairing of the word “Black” with “church”. Although, some of my Black acquaintances subtly express this feeling of uneasiness, it was particularly pronounced among my White Christian audience. There seems to be an instant denunciation of presenting a church along racial line. This rejection is in part anchored in the scriptural pronouncement, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28, ESV).

The tendency for visible minorities to define themselves in terms of race is closely linked to shared experiences within the group (Shelton & Sellers, 2000). These experiences provide a point of reference for understanding how society functions and how it impacts either negatively or positively. CTR contends that racism is normal and ubiquitous (Rollock, 2012) and as a result affects the lives of visible minorities and members of racialized groups. The far reaching effects of racism call for a concerted effort towards “a liberatory social ethic that would be embodied in

a reconceptualization of race, or more directly – group identities constructed towards the goal of social transformation” (Rashid, 2011, p. 588). Consequently, for individuals of African ancestry, identification with “blackness” is an empowerment to fighting racism and discrimination.

The foundation of the Black church is built on the Black identity which is distinctive from the rest of the society. The common understanding among congregants is that what goes on in the Black church – the singing, the dancing, the oratory sermon, the call and response – are foundational to “the Black experience”. Likewise, the positioning of the Black church at the core of the community and its role as an intermediary – with the larger society – help define what it means to be Black since the larger society is oblivious to the daily struggles of Black people.

This is the tragic reality of a people whose identity is myopically constructed at a strange distance and whose existence is confined to the margin of the society (Rollock, 2012). It is from this disadvantaged location that Black people are constantly reminded that their efforts are inadequate, their accomplishments are insignificant and their experiences are inferior to that of the dominant society. Therefore, as a place where shared racial experiences and Black identity thrives, the Black church provides a platform where congregants

are able to acquire not simply an ‘oppositional world-view’ (hooks 1990, p. 149 cited in Rollock, 2012) but what might be understood as a unique surround vision that is able to recognise and deconstruct the multifaceted contours of Whiteness and therefore advance the broader objectives of the racial justice project (Rollock, 2012, p. 66)

#### *Race Matters in Church Education*

I begin this section by rephrasing Brigham’s question in *Theorizing Race in Adult Education: Critical Race Theory*. Brigham asked: “Why should adult education scholars, students, and practitioners be concerned with race”? (Brigham, 2013, p. 119). I rephrase, *what has race got to do with learning in the church?*

I discuss in the previous section how Black experience and the formation of Black identity are connected to racism. Outten et al. (2010) explore four racial ideologies for understanding the uniqueness of the Black experience. The first ideology, “nationalist ideology” affirms the distinctiveness of the Black experience relative to the larger society. The second ideology, the “oppressed minority ideology” suggests that there are similarities between the experiences of Black people and other racial minority groups but these similarities differ from the experience of the dominant society. The third ideology is the “assimilationist ideology” where Black experience is viewed similarly with that of the larger society. Lastly, there is the “humanist ideology” which subscribes to the universality of human experiences (pp. 175-176)

The mainstream society typically subscribes to the “humanist ideology”. This projection of oneness of humanity assumes that everyone is on a level playing field. Such assumptions are common place in Canada where multiculturalism celebrates Canadian tolerance for diversity at the expense of the reality of racism and discrimination. As Brigham argues, even with the enactment of legislations such as “*the Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, the *Employment Equity Act*, the *Canadian Human Rights Act*, and the *Multicultural Act*” (Brigham, 2003, p. 119) racism and discrimination are everyday reality for those outside of the dominant culture.

The stance of the Black church is “nationalistic” and this affirms the existence of a distinct Black experience (Outten et. al., 2010). By using its pulpit to speak about issues pertaining to Black congregants and the Black community at large, the Black church is answering the question of *what has race got to do with learning in the church?* It is using its traditions, rituals, programs and community engagement to say to the larger society that *race matters, and it has everything to do with learning in the church*. Rituals such as sermons, songs, call and response and prayers as some of the tools within the Black church that brings to life the

Black experience. Congregants believe that the church brings a message that speaks to the heart of their identity, a message that moves them away from the “pathological invisibility of blacks in European eyes to a new visibility in the light of their African heritage” (Chamberlin, 1998, p. 178).

In spite of the proliferation of multiculturalism, even within the Black church, there is still a strong commitment to promoting African cultural ideals as part of the mandate of the Black church. For instance, Shaylene speaks about how the objective of African Heritage Month is to remind people that “*we are a Black church, and even though we have many denominations and we are multicultural, we still have to acknowledge our roots*”. Likewise, Reverend Anderson comments that the goal of having a culturally relevant program such as the SOS program is “*about identity. It’s about knowing who you are, celebrating Kwanza, celebrating our history, our achievements. It’s – because we feel there’s a lack of knowledge on who we are as a people*”

Going back to Brigham’s question: “Why should adult education scholars, students, and practitioners be concerned with race”? Brigham addresses this question from two perspectives: racism is pervasive and is ingrained into everyday “way of doing things” and there is the normalcy of Whiteness against which “Otherness” is measured and validated. Therefore, bringing race into lifelong learning in the church provides a different perspective from societal status quo and prevailing ideologies. The discourse of race brings to the forefront important issues that are often left unacknowledged by mainstream churches and allows Black congregants, as Shaylene suggests, the opportunity to continue to promote “*[the] African roots and...it’s important, [and ensuring that people are] grounded in it*”.



### *A Challenge to the Status Quo*

The principal objective of counter narratives is to provide a point of reference from which individuals can construct their own realities and counteract the normalcy of Whiteness. This, according to Rollock (2012), will “advance the broader objectives of the racial justice project” (p. 66).

Cone’s (1970) argument regarding social justice and the Black church is anchored in the notion that if Jesus identified with the oppressed, why not the church? Cone believes that liberation from oppression and the maintenance of social justice are inalienable duties of the church and thus, the church is a

community of sufferers in any society which believes in, and lives on the basis of, a reality of liberation that is not recognized by the ruling class. The church is that community which refuses to accept things as they are and rebels endlessly against the humiliation and oppression of man. It is the community through which the Oppressed One has chosen to make his will known to the world. It is a liberating community whose chief task is to be to the world that visible possibility of God's intention for man. It is not possible to be for Christ and not to be for his people, the oppressed and unwanted in society. (p. 53)

While social justice is a lofty mandate of the church, as variously prescribed in the scriptures<sup>52</sup>, Cone argues that the mainstream church has failed in this responsibility. The call is therefore upon the Black church to become the focal point of opposition to every form of injustice (Cone, 1970). Similarly to Cone’s assertion, the Racism Working Group (RWG) of the Convention of Atlantic Baptist Churches (CABC) also reports that just as racism is prevalent within the larger society, it also exists within the church; sadly, “many churches and individuals may not be conscious of racism...and may assume that if they don’t see it, it doesn’t exist” (RWG, 2010, p. 9)

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<sup>52</sup> See Isaiah 1:17, Zechariah 7:9-10, Proverbs 31:9, Psalm 82:3, Amos 5:24 in the English Standard Version (ESV).

Participants from the three churches view the church as an agent of change. They believe that when the church perceives any form of discrimination it uses its position of trust and mandate to speak out against such injustice and in spite of its relationships with politicians and bureaucrats; the Black church does not hesitate to make its voice heard. Confronting the status quo is not just limited to the larger society; it equally extends to the church community. The practicality of social justice beyond the realm of society and into the confines of the church can be seen in the willingness of Archbishop Waterman to marry a couple who had been denied marriage by their home church on the grounds of divorce.

#### *Towards a Community*

It has been discussed previously that the emergence of the Black church and its rise to becoming the “cultural womb” of the Black community was a direct response to the racism and discriminatory practices in society (Este and Bernard, 2006; Walker, 1995). Based on this foundation, the Black church has been instrumental in providing a space for communal solidarity: an avenue for affirming “positive identity” and an opportunity for members to derive a “sense of self-worth” (Este, 2004, p. 5). It is from this root that momentum is built for addressing societal issues confronting people of African ancestry.

Barnes (2005) connects the ability of the Black church to garner community solidarity to the “Black church culture”. This culture manifests in the traditions of storytelling, oratory sermons, prayers that are culturally encoded, hymns and spirituals which are able to stir the congregation and galvanize the community towards a responsive social action. Through the Black church culture, the church builds a cohesive community and fosters a sense of solidarity in spite of the prevalence of negative experiences within the Black community. Walker (1979) sees the Black church culture as a tool for creating

a distinct view of life that is rich and satisfying to its members. [the Black church culture] is, of course, a Christian definition of the meaning of life, a gospel-oriented definition that has survived despite the increasing materialization of mainstream society. If Blacks could hold values that are distinct from white society's, those distinctions can be traced to the central importance of the Gospel in the Black community life, as preserved and transmitted by the Black church. (pp. 86-87)

Likewise, Shreve (1983) describes the Black church culture as having a transformative ability in how congregants perceive themselves. The Black church culture builds a sense of relevance and importance amongst members. It creates an overall sense of purpose. As Shreve explains, the Black church provides an escape from the reality of an oppressive society by offering a welcoming environment where members can “participate with dignity, pride and freedom” (p. 13). The Black church allows members to be “deacons, deaconess, the lead tenor or soprano in the choir, or superintendent of Sunday school” (p. 13) and it gives individual member a purpose, promotes their self-worth and progressively builds a sense of community.

From the perspective of CRT, the ability of the Black church as an agency for community mobilization is rooted in the elements of the Black church community action (Barnes, 2005): The ability to propel congregants towards a shared conviction and reassurance about a just God who is interested in the affairs of Black people; the promotion of the values of Black identity and a reminder about the need to pursue social equality; the provision of scriptural examples of triumph over evil to bring hope of victory to congregants; and the fostering of common understanding of how to effectively commune with the divine from the perspective of being Black through church activities and rites to instill courage and bring reassurance in difficult times.

## Postcolonialism

### *A Connection to Home*

There are two schools of thought regarding the objective of African Initiated Churches (AIC) such as RCCG. One attributes the proliferation of the AICs to the need for missionary work in the host country which is commonly referred to as reverse evangelism. The other notion sees the growth of AIC as a way to bolster cultural identity and provide a safe haven from the pervasiveness of racism, build communal relationships to support the immigrant communities (Mensah, 2009). Regardless of which side one stands, it is not uncommon to see manifestation of both perspectives across the AICs.

Recent African immigrants are often left in a quandary when it comes to choosing a place of worship. Many have had to experiment, scouting around to find a church that “fits”. While there are obvious similarities across Christian denominations in spite of geographical locations, there are also essential regional differences.

A major concern among these immigrants is finding the church that will provide the *“direct connection to home even though [they] are miles and miles away from home”* (Niyi). This desire to find a church that produces the feeling of “home”, as expressed by Niyi, often supersedes liturgical disposition. Similar to Niyi, Bola also reveals that even if he had not been invited to attend RCCG, he would still have ended up at the church anyway because in his search for a church, would have first sought out a Nigerian based church where he can be able to interact with people who understand his culture and can relate to him. Even where the mandate of the church is mission driven, as explained by Pastor Omamofe, most congregants are drawn to RCCG because of other Africans attending the church.

There are several aspects of the AICs that attract both recent and established immigrants. An examination of the activities of RCCG reveals certain elements that are seldom seen or all together missing in most mainline churches. At RCCG, sermons are crafted in such a way that they do not only speak to the spiritual needs of congregants but also underscore their socioeconomic concerns. Prayers are rendered the “African way” with fervor and sense of urgency; often focusing on prospering in the host nation. Announcements are also interspersed with vital information on immigration, employment, educational, health and other social needs of the immigrant congregants. Looking around RCCG, one can quickly see a church setting that is far removed from the atmosphere of the mainstream Canadian churches. I saw some congregants dressed up in their formal North American attires while others showed up in expensive traditional African attires. Worship was done the “African way” with African flavoured gospel music accompanied by drumming, celebratory dancing and songs rendered in different African languages.

The devotion of many African immigrants to churches that have the flavour of home is essential for reproducing their African identity. Even African immigrants who are members of the mainline churches are often lured back to the AICs during special events. For Tola, this is the draw. He sees RCCG as an important part of his identity – a place where he can come to be around other Nigerians. This is one place he comes to see “his people” because when he “goes back during the week [into the mainstream Canadian society], it’s a different environment”. Regardless of the mandate of the AIC, the desire of African immigrants to be part of its membership is not just about spiritual pursuit but it is equally (if not principally) a craving to “be at home” amongst their own people. This is one of the reasons that Tola “makes it a point of duty to come to church... to see [his] people”.

*Knowledge: Language, culture and spirituality*

One of the reasons cited by RCCG participants is the need to remain “cultured”.

According to Bola, Africans have “a sense of culture”, which must not be forgotten even while living in Canada. Being at RCCG also allows her to remember “that you have to be cultured” and without the church, it is easy to forget this important fact if you live in the Canadian society.

While most immigrants want to become integrated into their host country, the fear of “losing” their cultural heritage prevents them from being assimilated into their new society. In this regard, the RCCG becomes a safe haven and a cultural centre for reinforcement and reproduction of African cultural ideals.

Another concern raised by immigrant congregants is that mainstream Canadian churches have become indifferent in their approach to Christianity and as such are in need of a “revival”. There is a commonly held belief that churches in North America have drifted away from the teaching of “healing, exorcism, Holy Spirit empowerment, protection from the influences of the malefic spirits operating within any area, curses and blessings, divine direction through dreams and many other similar phenomena” (Garrard, 2009, p. 234). Appropriately, Ranger (2007) concludes that the AICs are redeeming Christianity, since the “these churches [are responding] to these unfilled needs, striving to make African Christianity deeper and more effective” (p. 69). In a similar tone, Pastor Omamofe equally laments the lethargic approach towards Christianity within the Canadian society:

*So the Canadians are – they are indifferent to religious things, they are indifferent, they are cold. They used to be hot before, because I know that Canadians came to Africa to do missionary work. They changed our lives. That's why I can be here today talking about Christianity, you know, they changed our lives. The same thing we are trying to do now they did it to us so many years ago. And I'm thinking that maybe for mercy's sake God has sent us back with a message to them to see if maybe they could be revived, but they are not getting the message. They are indifferent to things.*

This stance of a lukewarm North American Christianity is the driving force behind the global evangelism efforts of the AICs which has resulted in their proliferation. These perspectives give an understanding of why African congregants are drawn to the AICs.

In a typical Sunday school class at the RCCG, the focus is often on “digging deeper” into the word (the scriptures). Instead of the lecture style Sunday school delivery, which is common in the mainstream churches, Sunday school delivery at the RCCG are interactive, communal and participants directed. Discussions during Sunday schools often centre on practical applications of the word of God and their relevance to everyday living. Sermons at the RCCG are usually thematic with the opportunity to search the scriptures to validate what is being delivered. Most sermons, just like the Sunday schools are crafted to connect with participants to exhort, reprimand, or deliver a mandate.

Most AICs such as the RCCG also infuse into their services what can be considered nuggets of “cultural reminder”. It is not unusual to hear ministers make statements such as “back home”, “if we were in Nigeria”, “according to our culture”, “our tradition” etc. Such statements point to the existence of something distinct which is important and worth remembering. Moreover, the use of African proverbs and sayings to clarify situations is also not on usual.

AICs also provide the opportunity to worship in other languages apart from the official language of the host society (such as English and French). As such, it gives congregants the opportunity to learn something new in other languages and it also helps traditional speakers of these languages to become reacquainted. There is also a conscious effort to reinforce “proper” mannerism often through the usage of the “language of respect”, which is essentially formality in everyday conversations and interactions amongst congregants. An example of “language of respect” can be seen in greetings. Typically, a Yoruba congregant will say *Ẹ kààárò* (good

morning) instead of Káàárò (Also good morning). The first format (È káàárò) is linguistically the used when referring to multiple people while the second (Káàárò) is good morning directed towards an individual. However, as a “language of respect”, È káàárò becomes the acceptable format regardless of the number of people. In addition to language, AICs also participate in Christianity appropriated African traditional rites such as naming ceremonies (see pp. 146-149.), wedding engagement and special thanksgiving.

It is also very common for the AICs to invite special guests to speak on topics that are relevant to congregants. Most of these “talks” often centred on issues such as employment, education, health, finance, immigration and settlement. These topics are typically presented from the viewpoint of African people. I witnessed one of such “talks” during the Seniors Day event at the RCCG. The guest speaker, a Nigerian Registered Nurse, spoke about Elder Abuse. There were several striking moments during this presentation. First of all, I noticed his refusal to use the word seniors instead defaulting to using the word “elders”. He later explained that from an African perspective, referring to elders as seniors is another way of telling them, they are old and irrelevant. He underscores some reasons why elders occupy an important place within the African community:

1. Elders have wisdom and knowledge and decisions should not be made without consulting them
2. Elders are caretakers of spiritual powers and are able to “see” beyond our vision.  
*What an elder see sitting down, a child cannot see standing on the mountain top*
3. Elders provide family and community support: they care for children, resolve conflicts, they counsel and guide



His message centred on the need to accord elders due respect because this is *the African way of doing things*. He concluded by drawing a scriptural connection, citing the biblical relationship between Ruth and Naomi<sup>53</sup>.

### *An Escape from Colonial Ideologies*

One of the tragedies of colonization is that it is a wild fire; vicious and difficult to contain. Decades after the colonies were “released”<sup>54</sup>, the European imperial powers continue to exert unfathomable influence on these former colonies by shaping their post independent “discourses and institutions—politically, culturally and economically” (Rizvi et al., p. 250). The fingerprints of colonization are imprinted on every facets of the society, including the church. Refusing to carry the weight of this suffocating ideology, Africans continue to extricate themselves from what has variously been described as neocolonization, recolonization and colonial legacy. Africans Christians are embarking on an oppositional journey to the status quo of mainstream European oriented churches and in the process continue to carve a notable global religious identity that challenges the legacy of colonial Christianity.

What is seen today in the AICs is indicative of the resolve of Africans to obtain spiritual and religious independence from their colonial past. The infusion of African culture into Christianity is a direct affront on this colonial past. Equally, the global move of African Christians to bring the AICs to the doorsteps of every nation, particularly Europe and North America (Adogame, 2004; Mensah, 2009) is a bold declaration of African agency in Christianity. Simply put, Africans, through the AICs, are announcing to the world that they are capable of

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<sup>53</sup> The story of the complete devotion of Ruth, a widow to Naomi, her aging mother in-law. See the book of Ruth in the Holy Bible (ESV)

<sup>54</sup> Release is used here in the sense of reluctance to independence on the part of colonisers. Moreover, independence was still tied to the approval of colonisers and it only became effective after ratification by the imperial powers

bringing the “good news” of Christianity to the world and can do so without the endorsement of Europeans.

### *Building Africa in Diaspora*

A major success of churches that have gained independence from colonial Christian legacy can be seen in their ability to build African community capacity. These churches have become fulcrums for the stability of the African community by creating avenues from which social relationships are built. Mensah’s (2009) appraisal of some Ghanaian AICs in Toronto also points to how Africans are using the AICs to build a strong African community that is reflective of their identity and cultural heritage. This is similar to the RCCG where there is a vibrant sense of community solidarity among congregants.

An example of how the AICs help to build the African community in Diaspora is reflected in Tola’s statement: *“after speaking a lot of Canadian grammar and you know, too much English during the week, this is somewhere I can come to and speak my local dialect and hear people speak their local dialects”*. Hearing languages other than English or French is common within the AICs. It is also not unusual to hear various African languages used in songs, sermons and various activities of the AICs. Food is also an important element in how the AICs continue to build sociocultural relationships among congregants and Tola did not hesitate to express his feelings about the after service lunches at the RCCG: *“through those lunches, they prepare food that reminds me of where I come from and, you know, it makes me forget the fact that I’m not living in Nigeria anymore”*. The RCCG also has as its mandate to provide social welfare support in the form of financial assistance, accommodation, transportation, settlement needs warm clothing, groceries and other immediate needs to newcomers. The church also provides financial support to bereaved families when repatriation of their loved ones is required.

The RCCG equally functions as a liaison between the congregants and their home countries. A case in point is the dissemination of information through the RCCG to Nigerian congregants about the visit of the Nigerian consulate to Halifax to facilitate a special renewal and acquisition of Nigerian passports. This information is vital as those requiring consular services would normally have had to travel to Ottawa, where the Nigerian High Commission is located. Another instance of community connection occurred during the 2014 FIFA Women World Cup tournament held in Canada. The RCCG was able to secure tickets and made transportation arrangements for congregants and non-congregants of Nigerian origin to travel to Moncton to support the Nigerian soccer team.

As part of the plan to extend its social support services beyond the walls of the church, RCCG has also instituted a food bank in conjunction with Feed Nova Scotia<sup>55</sup>. Through this initiative, the RCCG has garner support from its congregants to volunteer, thus building a sense of collaboration and cooperative endeavour among congregant who are mostly Africans. This initiative has brought awareness to the church and has consequently introduced the African community to the larger society.

## **Discussions**

The findings in this thesis have illuminated the various ways through which the Black church maintains its relevance to congregants of African ancestry and the Black community at large. Likewise, the theoretical foundation of this study has also provided a worldview into why the Black church does what it does and how it does it.

Africentricity is the primary framework that lays the foundation for understanding why the Black church is needed. It affirms the centrality of African people in their religious pursuits

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<sup>55</sup> An organization that assist with collecting and distributing food resources to food banks across Nova Scotia  
<http://www.feednovascotia.ca/>

and herald the identity of African people as an imperative in understanding the relevance of the Black church. Africentricity upholds the interconnectedness of individuals as the key for promoting shared cultural values and experiences by subscribing to an African Cultural System (ACS) Asante (2003). ACS proclaims that Africans may be diverse in their cultures, they may be dispersed geographically, speak different languages, and have different histories, their cultural orientation is one. The immutability of the ACS has kept African cultural heritage alive in the Black church in spite of the history of enslavement and colonialism.

In alignment with Akbar's (1998) stance that power does not come from "the conquest of other people but only [through] the acquisition of those things which have been realistically assigned for the advancement of one's own people as participants in the human community" (p. 35), the Black church is at the forefront of empowering its congregants. It is achieving empowerment through rituals such as sermons, singings, dancing, chanting, call-response, and programs such as Sunday schools, small groups and community outreach. As a cultural hub, the Black church infuses African "cultural imperatives" into its religious education endeavours, thus allowing congregants the opportunity to obtain culturally relevant religious education that shapes both the individual and the communal identity (Hinton, 2009).

The Black church stands at the crossroad of social justice by continuously using its platform to advocate and fight for human rights. Whether it is ensuring the rights of an individual or campaigning against injustice towards the Black community, the Black church has a long standing tradition of advocacy for social justice. The devotion of the Black church to social justice, equality and human rights is key to its identity as the core of the community and since community from an Africentric perspective is organic, the Black church is the community and the community is the Black church. Moreover, since the foundation of the Black church is linked

to the experiences of prejudice and hostility, the orientation of the Black church is towards social transformation (Rashid, 2011). Upon this foundation rests a platform through which individuals of African ancestry can be grounded in their identity and be effectively equipped to combat racism and all forms of discrimination.

The Black church also ensures identification with Blackness is an objective of its religious education and lifelong learning ventures. The celebration of the achievements of people of African ancestry through the events marking African Heritage Month; the recognition of African values through the *Nguzo Saba*<sup>56</sup> and the intentional inclusion of opportunities that validate African identity are ways through which the Black church makes race and cultural identity relevant to church education.

Just as CRT highlights the centrality of race in the experience of injustice by Black people, the Black church has vehemently stood on the side of social justice, and has been very vocal about the issue of race and racism. It is also important to note that where the main stream churches have remained indifference to the issues of racism and prejudice, the voice of the Black church continues to resound. By making race relevant to social discourses, the Black church is builds community solidarity to address the issues of race and racism within the Black community. It provides a base for recreating a positive “Black identity” which sits contrary to any negative portrayal emanating from the larger society. Equally, the Black church allows Black congregants to see themselves as responsible people capable of participating in the affairs of the society without the fear of oppression. This is achieved through empowerment and the instilment of self-worth. Consequently, the church creates strong, capable and resolved individuals who will in turn build a stronger, determined community.

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<sup>56</sup> The seven principles of Kwanza – *Umoja* (unity), *Kujichagulia* (self-determination), *Ujima* (collective work and responsibility), *Ujamaa* (cooperative economics), *Nia* (purpose), *Kumba* (creativity), *Imani* (Faith)

In conclusion, the Black church, in particular the AICs, has wrestled the pervasiveness of colonial legacies wherever it has been established. It remains resolute in trumpeting African values, ideologies, culture, and identity through its religious activities. By severing themselves from shoot of colonial religious culture that continues to plague African Christianity, these churches have channelled a course towards regaining African dignity and doing so independently, unashamedly and without the need for the endorsement of imperial Christian authorities.

### **Chapter Summary**

Chapter six started out by revisiting the theoretical framework: Africentricity, Critical Race Theory and Postcolonialism that shape the discourse of this thesis.

I analyse emerging themes through the perspectives of this framework. Relevant sub-themes such as, “An African cultural system”, “Culture is imperative to learning”, “On the side of social justice”, “Black is an identity”, “Race Matters in Church Education” etc. emerged under each of the elements of the theoretical framework analysis to further substantiate the “whys” and “hows” of the Black church. The chapter concludes with a reflective discussion on how the theoretical framework analysis, with focus on how emerging themes have been able to bring focus to this thesis

In the chapter seven, the concluding chapter, I provide an overview of the chapters in the thesis. I look at some pivotal moments of convergence and divergence during the study. I also discuss the positioning of the Black church in a multicultural society and I conclude with my reflections and recommendations.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### CONCLUSIONS AND REFLECTIONS

*I think when you're around other Black people and people that share the same culture it helps you with your self-identity. So I think that's kind of what the church does. It's a place where others like you, who share the same cultures, share the same values, belief, faith, help you self-identify.*

*- Shaylene, EBC, November 15, 2013*

#### **An Overview: A Closure**

This chapter concludes “*Journey to fostering Cultural Identity: Are there any roads leading to the Black Church? A Case study of three churches in Nova Scotia*”. I begin the chapter with an overview of the previous six chapters. By doing this, I remain true to a Yoruba saying: *t’ómọ̀dé bá ẹ̀bú a w’o wájú. T’ágbàlagbà bá ẹ̀bú a w’ ẹ̀yìn wò* (when a child falls, because of naiveté, he or she gets up and keeps going but when an adult falls, because of their wisdom and life experiences, they pause to see why they have stumbled). Therefore, revisiting the past is essential for shaping the future.

#### **A Summary of Chapters in the thesis**

Two important questions are raised in this thesis. Firstly, what factors make the Black church a relevant institution in the advancement of the culture and identity of African people and secondly, how and why are these factors significant within the context of a multi-cultural society?

Chapter one lays the foundation by providing a basic understanding of religion and its overall importance to human experience. The chapter establishes the connection of religion to human experiences. I present an overview of the study as an exploration of religion and religiosity from the perspectives of African people (Paris, 1989). I also lay out the thesis questions, the relevance of the study and the rationale for the study. I present the context of the study by providing a definition for the Black church, highlighting the Africentric basis for the

study, discussing the Black church as a “cultural womb”, delving into the understanding of African Religion/Spirituality and I also provide a definition for the Black church. The chapter concludes by discussing the different manifestations of the Black church in Nova Scotia through the AUBA, AOC and AIC.

In chapter two, I review a selection of relevant literatures. The first section of the chapter examines the argument for or against the Black church from the viewpoints of scholars such as Winks, Este, Clairmont and Magill, Henry, Cone, Washington and Paris. In the following section, I discuss the impact of immigration on the formation of the Black church by reviewing the history of Black people in Canada going. I draw on the arrival of Mathieu da Costa, the settlement of Olivier LeJeune (believed to be the first Black permanent resident of Canada), the stories of the Black Loyalists, the Maroons and the Black Refugees. I also discuss how the Caribbean migrants’ workers in Cape Breton during the Sydney Steel boom laid the foundation for the only African Orthodox Church in Canada. Chapter two also focuses on the immigration Blacks from Africa and the Caribbean after the immigration reforms of 1960s. I use the remaining part of the chapter to discuss the impact of culture and identity on the Black church and its connection to the tenets of Christianity; the role of the Black church in education by focusing on how the Black church uses its religious activities and community involvement to provide culturally relevant learning to its congregants. I conclude by discussing how racism is an important factor in the formation of the Black church.

Chapter three focuses on the theoretical framework of the study. I present Africentricity as the overarching framework by discussing its placement of African people at the centre of analysis (Merriweather Hunn, 2004). Critical Race Theory is discussed to underscore the impact



of race and racism on the Black church. Lastly, I bring postcolonialism in as an important framework for explaining the response of the Black church to the legacy of colonization.

Chapter four outlines the methodology of the study. I discuss the relevance of Africentric Informed Qualitative Research Methodology (AIQM) by drawing on the seven criteria of Africentric methodology. I also discuss the methods and designs of the study by focusing on the study sites and the rationale for their selection, participant's recruitment, data collection and analysis.

Chapter five lays out the research findings. The chapter provides an overview of how the findings evolved through the application of inductive and deductive thematic analysis. I discuss how inductive analysis generated themes that were further discussed under the broader themes (shared cultural experience, relevant learning, social engagement) deduced from Hinton's (2009).

Chapter six focuses on the analysis and discussions of the findings relative to the theoretical frameworks.

## **Conclusions**

### *Point of convergence: Identity and African Cultural System*

This thesis has raised some questions that demand answers. It is my hope that participants' narratives, emerging themes, and the analysis of findings have successfully provided some answers to these probing questions. I was motivated to pursue this study based on my personal experience as a Black congregant in a predominately White church. I have also been stirred into writing this thesis by what I see as an insatiable quest to find a place of worship that truly convey the religious experience of individuals of African ancestry. With a 10 years membership at my current church, I have witnessed Black congregants, in particular multi-

generational Black Nova Scotians, moving back and forth between the traditional Black churches and my predominately White church. There seems to be a struggle to remain rooted here at my church; something keeps drawing them back to their “home” churches. Similarly, there are many recent Black immigrants who have joined the mainstream, predominately White churches but continue to seek out churches that remind them of “home”. Moreover, I have also been inundated with the question, “is there a Nigerian church around here” by African immigrants, in particular the newly arrived. These new immigrants automatically assume that I must attend an African Initiated church, or perhaps, I can lead them to one.

Findings across the three churches indicate an unspoken desire that can only be explained using Asante’s (2003) “African Cultural System” (ACS). Although this system is non-monolithic, it nevertheless affirms the diversity of African people as an entity of a unified African cultural experience. The argument raised in defence of an ACS is that it is an intrinsic cultural system which transcends geographical demarcations. ACS is an immutable part of an African that allows the discernment of several African dispositions. This indestructible African soul enables swift response to racism, discrimination and other forms of oppression.

Just as Asante (2003) points us towards an immutable African soul residing in every individual of African ancestry, Myers’ (2005) interpretation of culture as “values that unify a social collective and guide its actions or as actions that emerge, endure because of their functionality, and become valued over time” (p. 117) is another affirmation of the ACS. Moreover, if Myers’ conclusion that individuals with “shared values” (p. 117) have the tendency to exhibit similar behaviours is tenable, the idea of an inalienable African Cultural System becomes tenable.

Through my interactions with participants, there seems to be a consensus that religion is key to their identity. There is also an acknowledgement that being a Christian is an important part of that identity. Nevertheless, in spite of the converging opinions that religion vital to their existence; participants also affirm that belonging to a church that reflects their identity and celebrate the ACS is crucial:

*“you wouldn’t get the same Black experience”*  
*“people were very spiritual from Barbados”*  
*“it was a community church. It was the community I lived in... I have no reason for going anyplace else”*  
*“When you’re around other Black people and people who share the same culture it helps you with your self-identity”*  
*“for me, it was like a connection to home”*  
*“I need a community where I can see people that I’m used to, people that know my culture and know where I’m coming from”*  
*“Let me put it this way, you probably attract your own kind”*  
*“that’s my church, that’s where I was raised”*  
*“it makes me forget the fact that I’m not living in Nigeria anymore”*  
*“I think it’s more of the connection to back home”,*  
*“this is somewhere I can come and speak my local dialect”*  
*“If you’re just in a normal [mainstream] church not like a Black church like this”*  
*“the church keeps us informed about who we are”*  
*“I think that’s one aspect of the Black church you might not get anywhere else”*  
*“she wanted to go to a Black church”*  
*“So it was different, but the thing with identity didn’t really change because for me I was in churches that were Black, so it was just about being around other Black members”*

Through these voices, I am reminded about how important it is for these individuals to belong to churches where they are unambiguous accepted, where their identity is celebrated and where they can be around others “who share the same cultures, share the same values, belief, faith”. (Shaylene)

#### *Point of Divergence: The dilemma of the Black Church*

I set out on this journey with open mind about what to uncover. Although, there were certain expectations based on personal experiences and accrued background information, I left myself open to discoveries.

During my semi-formal interview with Reverend Anderson, I waited eagerly for what I would describe as a golden opportunity to ask a simple question that I believed would be salient to this study. When the opportunity finally arrived, I asked:

*Looking at where – and I don't know how you're going to answer this – so looking at where Emmanuel Baptist Church has come from; the heritage, the history, and all of that, and looking at where it is today and where it's going, would you consider or identify this church as a Black church?*

After a thoughtful pause, Reverend Anderson responded:

*That is a big question, and I don't think my theological constructs would allow me to self-identify as such, especially when I think about where we're going. Historically, yes. But when I think about our current reality and where we are going, I will say no.*

Before I could relay a follow up question, Reverend Anderson continued:

*I hail from the historic Black community of Upper Hammonds Plains. The history is rich. But the current reality of the church is that we're trying to be the church of Jesus Christ and Christ has gone beyond cultural barriers. He went beyond historical barriers, cultural barriers and racial barriers to meet people. I believe that's still the great commission of the church where we have to be more inclusive.*

While my background information on the EBC gave a hint of this revelation, what came next was very revealing:

*In my 14 years here I've preached hard on celebrating diversity in the community. I've preached hard. That's my heartbeat. That's my heartbeat that there's a oneness in us. That does not mean that we're homogenous. Our oneness is taken from the New Testament where it says, "One spirit, one Lord, one hope, one faith, one baptism, one God who is in all and working in all". We're the human race, and so I believe that there has to be inclusivity in the body. He died for the world. And I think the dream team of God, from Revelation Chapter 5, you know, out of every tribe, tongue, people, and nation. I believe that's what the church should be. That's how I'm going to answer the question. That's my definition of church*

Right after this pronouncement, Reverend Anderson divulged his delicate position of reconciling his theological orientation to the communal responsibility of being a descendant of the Black refugees, a son of the AUBA and the senior pastor of a historic Black church:

*I'm in a difficult place because I'm a son of the African Association (the AUBA) and many in the African Association feels that I don't appreciate my heritage, I don't appreciate my history and I'm selling us out. They say "You want to dissolve this and just blend us in with the wider church". I've heard those comments. Those are very hurtful because I'm seventh generation descendant of the Black Refugees. I'm very confident. I self-identify. I am Scotian. No, you can't take that away from me. I am Scotian, you know. I'm from Africville, I'm a descendant of the Browns, this is who I am. But when it comes to my occupation and my vocation as a minister of the gospel of Jesus Christ, He said there is no longer male or female, there's no longer Jew or Greek, we're one.*

*And so – if you ask me do I have peace. I have no peace. I'm in constant struggle because I know who I am [on the] surface but it's much more than skin deep. This is bone deep, and the blood of Jesus Christ runs through.*

This conversation with Reverend Anderson marked a key moment of “discovery”. How do I place this revelation against how other participants from the EBC perceived their church? Evidently, Reverend Anderson’s revelation is indicative of EBC’s current situation and points in the direction of its future. However, the legacy of a historic Black church is equally an inescapable reality and the responsibility towards this legacy explains why the EBC has included “heritage” as one of its core values<sup>57</sup>. This fact is explained on the church’s website:

Emmanuel has a rich heritage. The history and traditions of our church have shaped us into the kind of family we now have. In celebrating the faithfulness of God, we believe in honoring and celebrating the contributions of all who came before us. It is this deep sense of appreciation for our history that helps us to be so committed to building on a solid foundation of Excellence, Worship, Unity, Relationship, Fellowship and Service. Lest we forget, we remember

### *Multiculturalism and the Black Church*

It was in 1971 when the Canadian government first embraced multiculturalism as one of its policies. This policy became ratified under the *Canadian Multiculturalism Act* in 1988 thus giving birth to what has become a Canadian identity. As Ekwa-Ekoko (2008) puts it, multiculturalism advances equality of cultures and promotes integration into the larger society.

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<sup>57</sup> EBC Seven Core Values: Excellence, Worship, Unit, Relationship, Fellowship, Service, Heritage.  
<http://ebcmeet.com/about/core-values/>

But nearly thirty years after its enactment, multiculturalism remains as contentious as it is synonymous with Canada.

Perhaps, one of the ironies of the multiculturalism policy is reflected in how the dominant society perceives minority groups through the lens of multiculturalism as: different, exotic, and “people from away”. In addition, by celebrating their cultural heritage, and becoming visible as encouraged by multiculturalism, minority groups become vulnerable to scrutiny. Questions arise whether minority groups have the same values as the “Canadians” and it is not unusual to hear statements such as “they are taking jobs away from us”, these people are becoming a burden on our health system” become common place in a multicultural society such as Canada (Uslaner, 2010). Moreover, contrary to its lofty goal of integration, many have argued that multiculturalism disenfranchises minority groups since individuals tend to remain within their own specifically defined groups rather than integrate with the larger society (Alesina and Ferrara, 2000).

Concerning the idea of a multiracial church, scholars such as Emersons and Smith (2000) have contended that purpose and ideology within racial groups, particularly Blacks and Whites tend to be different. Within the White culture, there is the tendency to be naively indifferent to the issues of racism and social inequality. In this context of a multiracial church, this becomes veiled by the notion of “we are one in the Lord” and “we are all children of God”. Thus the expected social responsibility of fighting injustice and intolerance often remains silent.

Marti (2010) argues that since individuals of African ancestry constantly “negotiate their identities in different context” (p. 201), a multiracial church must be prepared to acknowledge this complexity of identity within its religious practices. Marti discusses “ethnic transcendence” and “ethnic reinforcement” as the two oppositional approaches to the realization of the objectives

a multiracial church. By ethnic transcendence, achieving integration is the sole responsibility individual Black congregant. By this approach, a congregant of African ancestry, with their complex identities assimilates into a unifying congregational identity by obscuring their cultural affiliation in favour of a “pure Christian identity”. According to Marti, through this the process of identity negotiation, Black congregants diminishes “their ethnic identification and bring out other valued aspect of their personal identity” (Marti, 2010, p. 203). The process of ethnic transcendence elevates shared religious identity over other forms of identity.

Conversely, the process of ethnic reinforcement acknowledges the pre-eminence of race to the success of a multiracial church. According to Edward (2008), the concept of race – in spite of its controversy and ambiguity – is a crucial identity locator for Black people (Edward, 2008). Therefore, in order to achieve full integration in the multi-racial church, the process of ethnic reinforcement calls on Whites to embrace and celebrate the cultural and racial identity of the Black people. Accordingly, Emerson (2006) calls for White congregants to check their white privileges at the door and encourages Black congregants to become racially reaffirming. He also challenges the leadership of the church to intentionally advocate cultural and racial equity and ensure that this is not merely an addendum to the overall objective of the church.

Although the idea of multiculturalism and a move towards a multi-cultural/multiracial church continues to be garner support from the Christian community, it does have its challenges. Just as it is within the larger society, the aspiration of multiculturalism, cultural integration and racial cohesion within the church is not without their issues. For those who have implemented a multicultural/multiracial church or are thinking about it, they must ensure that the romance of celebrating diversity does not obscure the reality of race and racism. The messages of these churches cannot trivialize the real dangers of an imbalance of power in the society. Churches

embracing multiculturalism/multiracialism must ensure that it does not put a lid on important racial and social issues that must be address in the name of “being one in Christ”. Let us heed Bannerji’s (2000) plead, that multiculturalism must not turn “the problem of social justice into questions of curry and turbans” (p. 549).

*The Black Church as a lifelong learning site*

In the opening chapter of this thesis, I discuss religion as a meaning making venture. For some individuals, obtaining answers to the question of existence and the meaning of life is often entrusted to religion (Findsen, 2012). Some require answers to the questions of life and mortality while others are concerned about the concept of good and evil. Yet, there are those who are preoccupied with finding answers to what purpose and destiny mean. These are the areas of life, which for some, cannot be understood without some form of religious intervention. (Berger and Luckmann, 1966; Finden, 2012).

Findings in this study reveal the desire of participants to find answers to some personal life concerns such as identity, belonging, empowerment, heritage, racism etc. These individuals have in essence turned to the church, seeking and expecting some answers. They have subscribed to the doctrines, rituals and church activities as avenues for finding those answers. Similarly, churches in this study – to a large extent – have been responsive in providing answers to these questions. Programs such as the SOS and African Heritage Circle at EBC, the “Welcome to Canada” program at RCCG, and the occasional programs for ladies at SPAOC are some ways through which congregants have been able to find answers. In addition to these church programs, participants, point to the dynamic preaching in the Black church as something most Black congregants can connect to since it uplifts and provides answers to the questions of many. The presence of African centred elements such as call and response, chanting, African



affirmations, metaphors and narratives (Isaac and Rowland, 2002) during sermons are some of the factors that allow congregants to make connection to the dynamic sermons.

The Black church is a viable template for teaching and learning as revealed in the organic leadership of the Black church which is based on mentorship and continuous negotiation of roles to reconcile differences in personalities, age, status, and gender. Members of the clergy constantly ensure that messages are relevant to the congregants. The church is also intentional about ensuring generational cohesion as seen in how church activities are designed to be intergenerational; ensuring that no one is left out (Finden, 2012). Gender equality is also becoming an important learning process in the Black church are now occupying key leadership roles including the clergy in most churches. Through this study, learners and educators can become better acquainted with the pedagogical values of the religious and community activities of the Black church.

### *Relevance of the Study*

The answers to the questions asked in this thesis are critical for understanding the significance of the Black church in building, reproducing, maintaining and affirming the cultural values and identities of African people. In addition, this study also allows us to critically examine the intersectionality of culture and religion particularly in the face of Christianity's propensity for "colour blind" theology.

More importantly, by challenging the theology of "leave your culture behind", I hope that self-identified Black churches will continue to uphold and celebrate the rich cultural heritage of their identities. Likewise, emerging multicultural and racially diverse churches can ensure that "ethnic reinforcement" as proposed by Marti (2010), takes precedence over "ethnic transcendence" (p. 202). It is through ethnic *reinforcement* that the racial identity of congregants

can be collectively<sup>58</sup> affirmed and celebrated in contrast to ethnic *transcendence* where racial and cultural identities are subverted. At the same time, visibly White churches can move towards real cultural integration by understanding that non-White members do not have to “obscure their racial specificity” (p. 204) in order to become active participants in fostering congregational unity.

### *Recommendations and Future Studies*

The role of the Black church will continue to be defined and redefined going into the future as the demand on the Black church is bound to increase. It is imperative for the Black church to be strategically positioned and remain relevant. The Black church must continue to cater to both individual and communal needs of Black congregants as there are bound to be changes in the family system and community dynamics.

As expressed by Shaylene, there is a perceived diminishing role of the church in reaching out to the youth. She believes it is crucial that the Black church remains connected with the youth for the sake of posterity. While she believes the church is trying to reach out through the implementation of programs such as the SOS, she strongly believes it can do more.

The current situation at SPAOC is also concerning due to declining membership and aging congregation. It is recommended that future studies investigate the relevance of the Black church to the youth culture and how this is intertwined to its future. Similarly, future studies should also specific roles the younger generation can play in this future.

Future studies into the role of the AICs, such as the RCCG, as social service providers would be equally insightful. It would also be worth revisiting the EBC to see how its multiracial

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<sup>58</sup> Matti (2010) observes that true racial integration within the multi-cultural church can be problematic since it sometimes manifest in the form of sporadic, romanticised exoticism of pockets of congregants instead of collectively intention to embrace and celebrate diversity (p. 203)

policy is working to create an environment that promotes other cultures and racial identities, while affirming the history and heritage of the EBC as a Black church.

### **Personal Reflections**

This work has been a courageous attempt at exploring an issue dear to my heart yet which is often not explored in the field of lifelong learning and adult education. I can only hope it has been diligently explored. The objective of *Journey to fostering cultural identity: are there any roads leading to the Black church? A case study of three churches in Nova Scotia* has been from its conception, a voyage to self-discovery.

Just as religion plays a prominent role in my life, so does it in the lives of millions of African people all over the world. A resonating stance in this thesis is that religion, from an African perspective, is a way of life: it is integral to who we are and it is a part of our identity (Mbiti, 1970).

From a biblical perspective, the principle of “one fold, and one shepherd” in John 10:16 is reassuring to everyone who ascribes to Christianity as a religion. This simple but foundational Christian text gives the hope of “sameness” and presents a message of equality and togetherness. Unfortunately, the history of Christianity is far from presenting this harmonious picture.

The notion of colour blindness rooted in the pronouncement in Galatians 3:28: “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus”, is equally troubling. I argue that colour blindness in the church undermines God’s creativity and stifles the potentials of the church. Moreover, I have presented the arguments of Scholars that Christianity cannot divorce itself from the vastness of human diversity be it race, nationality, colour, class or creed. Consequently, Christianity cannot, and must not be counter-cultural; it must embrace culture and celebrate it as God’s gift to humanity.

My journey through this thesis has also taken me deep into the reconciliation of theories and human experiences. How can one be Africentric and be a Christian at the same time? A staunch proponent of this quandary, Ama Mazama, pricks at the very core of many Christians who also view themselves as adherents of Africentricity and African consciousness. As an advocate of Africentricity who is also a Christian, I am often left to question my devotion to both. If Mazama's view of Africentric-Christian contradiction holds true, am I to choose one over the other? This is a dilemma for those holding firmly to the virtues of Christianity while subscribing to the tenets of Africentricity.

Fortunately, I take solace in the position of scholars such as Nwadiakor who see no contradiction in African centredness and Christianity. I equally agree with Marshall's insistence that the "one and many" are the same and that Christianity's insistence on monotheism does not contradict Africentricity's polytheistic orientation (Marshall, 2009). My consolation also comes from knowing that Africans have successfully embraced Christianity and have successfully appropriated it (Nwadiakor, 2011). Africans have succeeded in infusing their African identity and cultural values into Christianity thus being an African and a Christian is after all not an anomaly.

Why do Black people gravitate towards Black churches? From my experience as a Black congregant in a predominately White church, I have witnessed what can be described as a manifestation of the "White culture". Perhaps I can point to the choice of music as part of that culture. There is also the worship style, probably something that most folks are not used to in the Black church. What about the presentation of a typical Sunday sermon which may not sound like what most Black congregants will normally hear sitting in the pew in a predominately Black church?

I have shown in this study that Black congregants are constantly on a journey, a journey to finding a place of worship where they can celebrate a shared cultural identity. I have suggested that these individuals want to learn from the church but they want to do so in a way that validates their shared identity. This study equally points to the desire by these Black congregants for a place of refuge where they can be sheltered from discrimination and hostility entrenched in the society – a place where they can regroup and fight back. Most importantly, for members of the Black church, there is a longing to belong to a community where they can fully participate and their humanity is fully acknowledged.

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## Appendix A

### TRANSCRIBER CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT

**TITLE OF STUDY:** Journey to Fostering and Preserving Cultural Identity: Are There Any Roads Leading to the “Black Church”? A Case Study of Three Churches in Nova Scotia

**RESEARCHER:** Ayodeji (Ayo) Aladejebi, Candidate, Masters of Arts in Education, Africentric Cohort, Studies in Lifelong Learning, Mount Saint Vincent University: E-mail: [ayodeji.aladejebi@msvu.ca](mailto:ayodeji.aladejebi@msvu.ca)

As a transcriber of this research, I understand that I will be hearing recordings of confidential interviews and/or focus group discussions. The information on these recordings has been revealed by participants who have given their consent to be part of this study on the condition that whatever is said remains strictly confidential. I understand that I have a responsibility to honour this confidentiality agreement.

I agree not to share any part of information on these recordings with anyone except the researcher of this study. Any violation of this and the terms detailed below would constitute a serious breach of ethical standards and I confirm that I will adhere to the agreement in full.

I \_\_\_\_\_ agree to:

1. Keep all the research information shared with me confidential by not discussing or sharing the content of the interviews in any form or format (electronics or paper transcripts) with anyone other than the researcher.
2. Keep all research information in any form or format (electronic or paper transcripts) secure while it is in my possession
3. Return all research information in any form or format (electronic or paper transcripts) to the researcher when I have completed the transcription tasks
4. After consulting with the researcher, erase or destroy all research information in any form or format regarding this research project that is not returnable to the researcher (e.g., CDs, flash drives, or information stored on my personal computer).

Transcriber:

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Print Name)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Date)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Signature)



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## **Appendix B**

### **PRE-SCREENING QUESTIONNAIRE**

- Do you identify yourself as Black (person of African ancestry)?
  - ☐ Yes
  - ☐ NO
- Do you identify as:
  - ☐ Male
  - ☐ Female
  - ☐ Others
- How long have you been attending the church? (EBC, RCCG, SPAOC)
  - ☐ Less than 2 years
  - ☐ Between 2 to 5 years
  - ☐ More than 5 years
- Your Age Group
  - ☐ 18 to 25
  - ☐ 25 to 35
  - ☐ 35 to 45
  - ☐ 45 to 55
  - ☐ 55 and above

**Do you self-identify as a Black person  
who is 18 years or older?  
Do you attend \_\_\_\_\_?**

**Would you like to participate in a study on the  
role of the church in the cultural identity of  
persons of African ancestry?**

***When is this happening?***

This study will take place in September 2013

***Why are you needed?***

The primary goal of this study is to explore the role played by the Black church in influencing and nurturing the cultural identity of people of African ancestry.

I want to hear about your personal experiences as a Black person and as a member of the Redeemed Christian Church of God, Jesus House.

- How can you best describe your church?
- How is the church relevant when it comes to your identity as a Black person?
- What do you see as the role of the church within the Black community?

This study is part of a master's thesis research in the Africentric Cohort of Studies in Lifelong Learning, Faculty of Education at Mount Saint Vincent University. Your responses will be kept anonymous, and you can choose to participate in a focus group or a one to one interview.

**Refreshment and a \$20 honorarium will be provided for your participation**

***Are you interested?***

Please contact Ayo Aladejebi by August 30<sup>th</sup>, 2013

E-Mail: [Ayodeji.Aladejebi@msvu.ca](mailto:Ayodeji.Aladejebi@msvu.ca)

Phone or Text: (902) 802-5678