# Hustler-Ecclesial Missionaries: Hybrid Identities of Kenyan Anglican Clergy in the U.S.

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### **Abstract**

This article explores the lived experiences of East African Anglican clergy serving in the United States, with a particular focus on factors that influence and shape their identities during cross-cultural ministry within U.S.-American congregations. Drawing on qualitative interviews with Kenyan clergy, the study identifies a recurring theme of "hustling" as a framework through which these ministers adapt to their host context. The article introduces the concept of *hustler-ecclesial identity*, a hybrid missional identity shaped by struggle and adaptability in ministry. Unlike traditional missionary paradigms, these clergy are not institutionally sent but emerge organically as missional agents within unfamiliar and often inhospitable contexts. The article argues that these *hustler-ecclesial missionaries* represent a non-traditional form of mission rooted in lived struggle, vocational flexibility, and transnational ecclesial negotiation. Recognizing this form of mission has important implications for understanding mission as shaped from the margins rather than from traditional centers of ecclesial power and theological production. Ultimately, this study could enrich scholarship on African diasporic identity and cross-cultural mission in the United States.

Key Words: Hustler-ecclesial identity, African migrant clergy, Diaspora Missiology, bivocational ministry, ecclesial hybridity

### Introduction

The United States has traditionally ranked as a principal destination country for migrants from Africa (Hanciles, 2009, p. 223). The majority of African immigrants in the US are from West Africa, but the East African diaspora also constitute a significant share, and Kenyans are the fourth biggest African immigrant group in the country (Lorenzi & Batalova, 2022). The Kenyan diaspora have settled mainly in metropolitan areas such as New York, Washington D.C., and Dallas, where some have gone on to engage in ministry. These clergy either pastor Kenyan diaspora churches or U.S.-American congregations. The latter category includes Kenyan Anglican clergy serving American Anglican churches as a "process of reverse mission" (Ward, 2016, p. 637). And yet their missional success may be linked to their ability to construct and negotiate hybrid identities suitable for the American social and ecclesial fabric.

New African diaspora scholarship has often raised the issue of identity as multifaceted and characterized by a sense of uncertainty. For instance, Simon Aihiokhai noted that African migrants in the United States "are continuously negotiating their identities either as Americans or as Africans with a renewed sense of self (Aihiokhai, 2021, p. 296). This kind of experience implies a struggle to reconcile the American cultural context and their African upbringing. In face of such a struggle, Fenggang Yang argues that "instead of choosing either American or ethnic identities, immigrants may construct adhesive identities that integrate both together (Yang, 1999, p. 17). This means that African immigrants need to continuously consider the American context if they are to incarnate in the host society and thus be better placed to reach white Americans. In this regard, Afe Adogame notes that African immigrants to the West need to pay attention to "the specific religious, political, sociocultural circumstances and contextual factors in the host contexts," since such factors are key in shaping their identity (Adogame, 2014, p. 22).

These are the kind of factors that this paper seeks to examine, drawing on the diasporic life experiences and adaptation to cross-cultural ministry of four Kenyan Anglican diaspora clergy ministering in different U.S.-American congregations. The questions that this paper asks include, how does the societal context shape the clergy's ability to reach the white American population? In what way does the Anglican ecclesial context in the US, impact the clergy's cross-cultural mission efforts towards white host communities? This article argues that the missional success of African Anglican clergy ministering in the US is linked to their ability develop and negotiate hybrid identities during their period of ministry in the country. While the missional experiences of West African ministers, especially Pentecostals, in the US, have been frequently documented, it is significant that those of East Africans, especially from mainline churches, are also brought to table. One such early study focussed on the work of Roman Catholic priests and nuns (Healey, 2003). A more recent attempt concerned the experiences of Kenyan Anglican clergy, albeit with emphasis on their leadership of Kenyan diaspora congregations (Kiarie, 2024).

### Methodology

This article is based on a data from a qualitative case study that engaged four Kenyan Anglican diaspora clergy ministering in different U.S.-American congregations in the U.S. southern Midwest. Three clergy served congregations of the Episcopal Church (TEC), while the other served an Anglican Church of North America (ACNA) congregation. The particular churches and states are not mentioned since participants were guaranteed anonymity.

The interviews were conducted online through Zoom and in some cases by telephone. Interviews were in-depth and semi-structured, lasting for one hour on average. The respondents included three males and one female. Their ages ranged between 35 and 55 years. Three entered the US for study, while the other came on a family visa. Three were in the roles of associate clergy, the other was a supply clergy. To gain deeper insight in their activities, I followed their online church services and social media publications, and I consulted their church websites and related online publications. The participants freely volunteered to take part, and the initial contact was made through an Anglican diaspora contact in the US; thereafter snowball sampling was used to find participants most suitable for this study.

A challenge with the interviews was time zone difference between Asia (my location) and North America, which meant that it was difficult to find a convenient time in their busy schedule, and interviews had to be rescheduled on some occasions.

My positionality as an East African Anglican clergy living as a diaspora in Asia was important in making a connection with the respondents. The respondents felt more at ease communicating to one who hailed from the same African region and had a similar denominational status. It also appeared that respondents were relaxed to share some aspects of their ministry with one who was not presently resident in East Africa. On the other hand, the fact the I did not come from the same country as the respondents meant that it was challenging to establish the initial contact and rapport. Furthermore, most of the respondents desired anonymity in order to share their experiences; as such, pseudonyms are used throughout this article.

### **Reverse Mission in the Anglican Communion**

In the twenty-first century, Christianity's center of gravity has decisively shifted to the Global South. The shift has perhaps been more explicit in the world-wide Anglican Communion. In this regard, Hanciles notes that "by virtue of numerical preponderance and spiritual dynamism, the younger churches in Africa and Asia represent the Communion's new center of gravity

(Hanciles, 2009, p. 387). A remarkable consequence of this shift is the emergence of reverse mission, where clergy from Africa, Asia, and Latin America evangelize the post-Christian West.

Reverse mission is especially evident within the Anglican Communion (Ward, 2016, p. 637). The examples of the African-born John Sentamu from Uganda and Karowei Dorgu from Nigeria, who both rose to bishops in the Church of England, the former eventually to archbishop, are plain examples of a reversed missional thrust within the Anglican communion. Aside from these prominent cases, several lower-ranking Anglican clergy of African origin are increasing present and influential in Western nations, challenging prevailing assumptions about mission and ecclesiology within the global Anglican Communion.

The concept of reverse mission often hinges on "claims to divine commission to 'spread the gospel'; the perceived secularization of the West; the abysmal fall in church attendance and dwindling membership; desacralization of church buildings; liberalization; and on issues of moral decadence" (Adogame, 2013, p. 169). But this notion has not been without contestation. A key argument points to the fact that "God's mission is God's mission, no matter where it originates or where it flows. Migration trends have reversed, but there is no such thing as reverse mission" (Kwiyani, 2023, p. 97).

In any case, it is important to recognize that this phenomenon should not be construed as a simple reversal of the historical pattern in which Western missionaries were sent to Africa, Asia, and South America. Rather, reverse mission entails at least two distinct dimensions. The first concerns the absence of formal recruitment and sending structures. Many Africans and other Christians from the Global South migrate independently to the West and, over time, find opportunities to engage in mission work within their new contexts. This process is not institutionally managed but emerges organically through patterns of global migration.

The second dimension involves a reexamination of the term "missionary." While reverse mission may evoke traditional notions of missionaries—formally commissioned agents from the West sent to evangelize non-Western societies—those engaged in reverse mission often do not fit this conventional mold. Instead, they belong to a non-traditional category of mission workers who, as Samuel Escobar observes, "do not appear in the records of missionary activity or the databanks of specialists" (Escobar, 2003, p. 17). Taken together, these dynamics suggest that "reverse mission" represents a complex and ongoing reconfiguration of global Christian witness, rather than a mere inversion of past missionary paradigms. Within this reconfiguration, several Kenyan Anglican clergy enter the United States on non-religious visas and eventually engage in mission work within U.S.-American congregations "where their presence or ministry often impacts the life and vitality of the congregation in innumerable ways" (Hanciles, 2009, pp. 350-351). However, their missional success may depend on their ability to forge identities that resonate with the American social and ecclesial context.

### The United States Mission Field

The ministry engagement of diaspora African clergy in Western societies is significantly shaped by cultural and theological negotiation. Kwiyani notes that "the western mission field is uniquely difficult in many aspects. Africans entering the West encounter distinct challenges that make it harder for them to connect with Westerners," including societal and ecclesial challenges (Kwiyani, 2014, p. 175). This complex situation means that diaspora African clergy must navigate the challenges of ministering in multicultural and often secular environments, where they must adapt their theological perspectives, worship practices, and leadership approaches to effectively serve their congregations and engage with the host society.

With respect to the Anglican Communion, Paul Avis notes that "Anglican ecclesiology today must take into account the various ways that Anglican identity is perceived and understood in diverse global contexts and the degree of inculturation (which is encouraged, especially in worship matters) therein" (Avis, 2018, p. 39). Such inculturated Anglicanism calls for a nuanced understanding of the American Anglican ecclesial structure by diaspora African clergy ministering in U.S.-American Anglican congregations. The following sections discuss this study's findings concerning how, during their ministry to white communities, the diaspora Kenyan Anglican clergy perceived and navigated both the societal context and the Anglican ecclesial context.

#### Societal Context

The participants reported an awareness of the host context, often highlighting differences compared to their home context. The two key issues they encountered during their time of ministry in the U.S. were the high cost of living and racism. For example, Stella described costs such as housing as being "extremely expensive" (Stella, 2024). Tito, who is a father, complained about babysitting expenses. He stated that he could not leave his kids alone and whenever he gets a babysitter, he has "to pay them. It's expensive" (Tito, 2024). Justus emphasized, "It is expensive to live in the United States. That I cannot help but tell you, it is expensive" (Justus, 2024). The participants, therefore, viewed the U.S. as an economically demanding environment in which sufficient financial resources were necessary to function effectively. Such a difficult economic situation often suggests that these Africans may be perceived as less effective in missional partnership with the host church leaders due to their economic disadvantage (Hanciles, 2013, p. 77).

Regarding racism, participants noted that it was more common to encounter racial discrimination in the Southern United States. When I asked Tito about his experiences with racism, he first compared the South to his former residence in the Midwest: "When I got here, I realized in the South, of course, it is warmer. So many Africans prefer it. But there was more racism in the South" (Tito, 2024). Similarly, Alex described the cold reception he received in his predominantly white neighborhood, which he believed might be related to his race. He explained, "People are not very friendly. So, you can just walk on the road and out of courtesy, you just smile to someone or say hi to someone, and nobody is interested" (Alex, 2024).

Participants also observed that they experienced less racism within TEC compared to ACNA. For instance, Tito, who serves an ACNA congregation, said that the "ACNA is conservative. So, in the issues of sexuality, they are great, issues of race, they are not great" (Tito, 2024).

Overall, participants reported experiencing discrimination based on their identity as Africans, facing prejudice from both American neighbors and church colleagues. These accounts align with Kwiyani's (2014, pp. 175-185) observations on the significant challenges African pastors face when adjusting to ministry in American society, particularly concerning racism and systemic disadvantages.

## Navigating the Societal Context

Participants reported the strategies of bi-vocationalism and diaspora networks in navigating the challenging social context of the U.S. All four participants had jobs alongside their ministry roles. While they emphasized that their primary calling was to preach the gospel, they also took on secondary vocations to meet the high cost of living in the United States. Notably, bi-vocationalism has long been practiced in Western contexts as a means of financial sustainability for pastors (Bentley, 2022, p. 113). This practice is also consistent with experience of other

African missionaries in the West who take on other professions alongside their ministry (Kwiyani, 2014, p. 183). These similar approaches suggest that bi-vocationalism can serve as a valid approach to overcoming economic constraints among diaspora African clergies in the US, provided that ministry remains the primary focus.

Navigating experiences of racism was, to some extent, mediated through regular connections with fellow members of the Kenyan diaspora. Participants reported opportunities to network with other Kenyan immigrants in various social spaces, including meetings at clubs, weddings, and funerals. For example, Stella shared that in her city there was a "club where Kenyans meet mostly on Sundays. You just meet to drink or chat" (Stella, 2024). These communal ties functioned as informal support systems, allowing participants to process their racialized experiences in a more affirming and culturally familiar environment.

From the perspective of diaspora studies, such gatherings exemplify what Adogame (2013, p. 124) terms "contextual factors," which function as dynamic spaces of cultural negotiation rather than fixed identities. Within these diasporic networks, participants were not only finding solace but also actively engaging in processes of cultural translation and identity reconstruction. These networks provided early arenas in which participants could begin to reinterpret and integrate their Kenyan identities within the broader American context, navigating a complex duality of belonging.

In summary, while participants viewed the American context as challenging, especially in relation to economic pressures and racial discrimination, they actively sought ways to navigate those difficulties. Through bi-vocationalism and diasporic solidarity, they forged new hybrid identities, blending professional roles with reaffirmed ethnic and cultural belonging. This process reflects Hall's (1990, p. 222) notion of identity as a "production," always developing and shaped through ongoing engagement with both home and host cultures.

### Ecclesial context

The key issue in the ecclesial context was the diversity of Anglicanism in the United States. Participants reported encountering a wide range of Anglican traditions. While the Anglican Church in Kenya is predominantly evangelical, the U.S. context presented a more complex and pluralistic landscape. Brittain and McKinnon (2018, pp. 12-13) note that within the Anglican Communion there are diverse traditions, each characterized by "particular emphases, which distinguish it from the others: Anglo-Catholics emphasize the church's traditions; Evangelicals prioritize scripture and the Reformation; Liberals tend to emphasize reason and adaptation to modern society." This diversity was particularly evident in the coexistence of The Episcopal Church (TEC), the Anglican Church in North America (ACNA), and other Anglican bodies in the U.S.

Participants generally described the ACNA as conservative, whereas TEC was understood as liberal but internally divided. Stella described this complexity by noting, "Conservative dioceses can have progressive churches and a progressive diocese can also have churches that are very conservative. So, it's a very complicated thing" (Stella, 2024). This complexity reflects what ecclesiologists have described as ecclesial hybridity, the coexistence of multiple, sometimes conflicting, theological paradigms within a single denominational structure (Avis, 1989, pp. 18-20; Muñoz, 2018, p. 101). As noted previously, three of the participants were serving in TEC whose theological tradition differs from that in Kenya which entailed adaptation. Thus, migrant clergy arriving from more theologically cohesive contexts must negotiate this hybridity as part of their ministerial adaptation (Hock, 2008, p. 244).

Navigating the Ecclesial Context

Within migration theology, faith leaders may be seen as both bearers of tradition and agents of contextual adaptation (Adogame, 2013, p. 86). This dual role was evident in how participants navigated the U.S. ecclesial context. In order to minister effectively, they often found themselves modifying or reinterpreting their theological commitments. This adjustment was especially true for those working with TEC, whose theological orientation differs from the more conservative stance of the Anglican Church of Kenya.

For example, Stella recalled a warning from her bishop prior to departure: "When you get to U.S., remember, we only associate with the Anglican Church of North America" (Stella, 2024). Initially placed in an ACNA church upon arrival, Stella was later compelled to transition to TEC after that ACNA congregation indicated it did not accommodate ordained women in ministry roles. This decision illustrates not merely pragmatic adjustment but also theological negotiation, a hallmark of what Ekué (2009, p. 398) describes as the "ability to use religious resources creatively to cope with adversity challenges," wherein African migrant Christians resourcefully respond to new sociocultural and ecclesial environments.

In essence, by accepting ministry roles in more theologically liberal settings, participants transitioned from the conservative frameworks of their home churches to more pluralistic and, at times, progressive expressions in the host context. Such transitions underscore the dynamic nature of migrant identity formation and ministerial vocation, shaped by both attention to tradition and responsiveness to context.

### **Hustler-Ecclesial Identity**

In this section, the study explores how a hustler-ecclesial identity emerges in response to the challenging societal and ecclesial context of the United States. The term "hustler-ecclesial" as used here signifies a fusion of two distinct but interrelated concepts. The term "hustler" commonly refers to someone who works tirelessly, is entrepreneurial, and employs creative or unconventional methods to achieve success. In migratory contexts, "hustling extends to wider acts of navigating precarious urban environments, invoking light-footed, quick-minded, everadaptive rhythms of urban life" (Hall, 2021, p. 89).

The term "ecclesial" pertains to the church, particularly the institutional, communal, and spiritual dimensions of Christian worship and ministry. As ordained ministers, the participants projected an ecclesial identity particularly in their status and work within the Anglican institution. In this context, the "hustler-ecclesial" concept refers not merely to socioeconomic striving but to a broader existential and ministerial struggle experienced by the participants during their time in the U.S.

The theme of "hustle" was an underlying narrative in all the interviews. But the concept is also culturally resonant in Kenya, where it denotes a mode of resilience and striving amid socioeconomic uncertainty (Thieme, 2017, p. 6). When carried over to the migratory context of the West, this interpretation aligns with Adogame's (2013, p. 99) observation that "the immigrant is not concerned primarily with adaptation and integration but with economic, social, cultural and psychological survival."

Accordingly, the participants' experiences, grappling with the high cost of living, encounters with racism, and navigating Anglican expressions can be framed as a struggle for survival, or "hustle" expressed through bi-vocational ministry, the reaffirmation of ethnic identity, and theological adaptation. In doing so, they forged a "hustler-ecclesial identity" shaped by their engagement with the complex realities of American society and church life.

### **Implications**

This study reveals significant missiological implications arising from the experiences of Kenyan Anglican clergy ministering in the United States. These implications challenge traditional paradigms of mission, ecclesial identity, and theological engagement, offering new insights into how mission is practiced and embodied in migratory contexts.

### Mission as Adaptive and Contextual

The participants demonstrate that mission is not a fixed enterprise but a dynamic and adaptive process. Their responses to economic hardship, theological diversity, and ecclesial exclusion reveal that mission is locally negotiated and shaped by lived realities. Rather than following a single theological blueprint, these ministers engage in what Stephen Bevans (2002, pp. 71–79) calls a "contextual theology," wherein theology is shaped through interaction with a specific sociocultural context. Their bi-vocational practices, ecclesial realignments, and theological adjustments embody a missiology rooted in praxis, improvisation, and embodied reflection.

### Diaspora as a Space of Theological Production

The study confirms the diaspora as a vital locus of theological innovation. In navigating host ecclesial contexts and cultural dislocation, African clergy do not merely preserve inherited theology but reinterpret it in light of new social and ecclesial challenges. This reinterpretation supports Kwiyani's (2020, pp. 109–124) notion of "multicultural ecclesiology," where migrant pastors serve as agents of mission and theological reimagination in their host societies. Diaspora, in this sense, is not merely a condition of marginality but a site for theological creativity and ecclesial transformation.

### Bi-vocational Ministry as Missional Modality

The widespread adoption of bi-vocationalism among participants reflects more than economic necessity: it constitutes a strategic missional model. This dual engagement with secular employment and church ministry mirrors the tentmaking approach of early Christian missionaries. By embedding themselves in both church and society, clergy foster incarnational ministry while also sustaining themselves materially. This dual involvement aligns with emerging missiological thought that affirms bi-vocationalism as an effective approach to mission in economically constrained and culturally complex environments (Bentley, 2022, p. 2).

### Race and Power as Missiological Realities

The participants' encounters with racism in American society and within church structures underscore the need to place issues of race and power at the heart of missiological reflection. The marginalization of African clergy within predominantly white ecclesial contexts—particularly in conservative Anglican expressions—reveals ongoing asymmetries in church leadership and inclusion. This situation supports Adogame's (2013, p. 86) argument that African migrants must often navigate structural and symbolic exclusions. A robust missiology must therefore engage questions of racial justice, ecclesial equity, and the deconstruction of whiteness in mission.

## Rethinking Ecclesial Belonging

The diversity within American Anglicanism, spanning ACNA, TEC, and other expressions, compelled participants to make difficult ecclesial choices. Gender inclusion, theological liberalism, and ecclesial polity became points of discernment. These experiences challenge static notions of denominational belonging and demand a flexible ecclesiology capable of navigating pluralism. African clergy, often formed in more conservative ecclesial settings, must

recalibrate their theological frameworks to engage meaningfully within host traditions. This need to adapt reaffirms that ecclesiology, like mission, is relational, negotiated, and lived (Muñoz, 2018, p. 101).

#### Conclusion

This study's research had set out to understand how the societal and Anglican ecclesial context affected the diaspora Kenyan Anglican clergy in their efforts to reach the white American society. The case of four clergy serving white congregations reveals a shift in global missional paradigms. Their ministry is marked by struggle, resilience, and innovation, what might be fittingly termed a "hustler-ecclesial missiology." These clergy emerge as "hustler-ecclesial missionaries," a non-traditional type of missionary birthed in the ministry experiences of contemporary African migrant clergy in the West.

Unlike classical missionary models shaped by institutional sending and theological stability, these missionaries are self-propelled, contextually adaptive, and engaged in both economic survival and spiritual service. Their witness is forged in the crucible of economic inequality, ecclesial complexity, and racialized social landscapes. As such, these clergy exemplify a form of mission that is both incarnational and improvisational, embodying the gospel through fluid identities, hybrid ecclesiology, and bi-vocational commitment. This tapestry calls for a missiology that recognizes hybridity, economic hardship, racial injustice, and theological fluidity not as threats, but as realities through which mission takes new and contextual forms.

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