Many of the African migrants living in Germany are Christians. Because of experiences of rejection and exclusion by German national churches, they established own religious communities since the 1960ies. Most of them are charismatic respectively Pentecostal and have regional, national and transnational networks with African, German and other churches. Today there are over 40 different African Initiated Churches (AIC’s) in Berlin, most founded by Ghanaians and Nigerians.

Focal point of my talk will be one of this churches, which I named “International Church of Berlin”, or ICB. The ICB is led by a Ghanaian pastor, who is supported by a female co-pastor since 2000.

Since 1997 the ICB is located in a former workersdistrict where the percentage of Muslim migrants is very high (most of them are Turks).

Since 2001 the ICB used, like the most migrant Christian communities in Germany, the rooms of a German church, but according to their website they rented own rooms in the same district recently (since 2006). To be located in a so to say “muslim district” was very important for the ICB because one of their missionary aims was to reach the Muslims and to convert them to Christianity.

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1 I did research in the ICB from August to December 2004 for my M.A. thesis.
2 In Berlin there is just one Church, the CCOMI which rented an old factoryfloor in an industrial park in Berlin Tempelhof. To my knowledge all other AIC’s are subtenants in German Churches.
During my research the ICB had about 150 members. The *Family Worship Service* on Sundays was visited by 40 to 100 people. All meetings except the children’s service, namely the *Family Worship Service*, the *Prayer Meeting* and the *Bible study*, were held bilingual, in English and German.

Most specific for the ICB is the “truly” international membership, which is – from what the pastor told me - unique in Berlin. In fact, besides members from different African countries, there are also members from Eastern and Southern Europe as well as Germans\(^3\). Some of them came to study in Berlin, some came as refugees of war, some came because in their home country they were persecuted as Christians.

In the following I will give you a brief outline on the history of the ICB. The pastor of the ICB established a home group for African migrants in the 1980ies which grew quickly\(^4\). For the pastor the official founding took place in 1991, because in this year God gave him the name of the Church, “International Church of Berlin”. In a vision\(^5\) God told the pastor to build bridges and serve not only Africans, but all human beings., So the ICB aims “to be ONE in Christ”. The first German – who now is an elder in the church - joined in 1994 and the ICB began to translate the services to German. With time the ICB transformed to a “truly” international church. “Internationality” is the figurehead of the ICB, even so the “International” is in its name. This internationality was often compared with heaven. Next to the guest pastor, who is cited in the beginning, also the German elder I mentioned before alluded to heaven concerning the ICB, “like in heaven, but on earth, because so many different people and nations come together but you don’t notice the different nations.” At times also the pastor made this comparison and emphasised that his church is the first and the only in Berlin which is “truly” international.

To be stranger and through the experiences of “displacement” – to speak in Rijk van Dijk words – they created an own identity, the identity of (banished) Christians in a non Christian society.

Today the pastor of the ICB is pastor by profession which is a huge exception, because almost all pastors or leaders of AIC’s in Berlin are lay persons and have no theological education.

\(^3\) On the homepage of the ICB you can find a list of following nations: Ghana, Nigeria, Cameroon, Togo, Germany, Trinidad, Jamaica, Zambia, Sierra Leone, Romania, Jugoslavia, Serbia, Mazedonia, Sinti and Roma, Croatia, Ivory Coast, Poland, Russia, South Africa, Georgia, Brasil, Sri Lanka, Equador, Eritrea, Kenya, Bosnia, etc.....

\(^4\) The pastor himself came in 1975 to Germany for studies.

\(^5\) Jesaja 58,12: Those who shall be of you shall build the old waste places; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; and you shall be called The repairer of the breach, The restorer of paths to dwell in. (Isaiah 58:12)
The pastor gets paid by the tithe which the church members pay every month and offerings which are given in the services and meetings.

**Transnational, national and regional networks**

The ICB is networked on different levels with other Christians and churches.

In 1998 the pastor of the ICB established a branch in Accra, the capital of Ghana because:

> „...many people leave Germany and when they go back to Ghana they fall off the way of God, you know. They come back home and they [...] have a bit of a car, they have a bit of Deutsche Marks, and then very soon, the way of God is gone. And by a time they realize they are rock bottom. So the idea is that there is a place to receive them to continue to be in [...] a Christian way of living“ (pastor interview, 9.9.2004).

Up to now he established three more branches, two of them in Ghana, in Akropong and in Abiriw and one in Lomé, Togo. These branches are visited periodically by the pastor (and the co-pastor) to train the local pastors, who did not have any theological education before.

Some years ago the pastor took some church members to the branches in Ghana. A lot of non-african members participated in this missiontrip.

In 2005 the pastor wanted to take a “missionteam” of the ICB to his branches in Ghana again, what he considered a good possibility for every single person to “grow in the Spirit”

> „...And one of the things God spoke to my heart this, eh, year, is that our church here [knocks on the table] some [knocks] people [knocks] need [knocks] an experience [knocks] in missions. They have heard what mission is about, they have read about mission reports, but they need an experience. It helps us also to grow in spirit, also to help us to come into our areas of calling...“ (pastor in PS, 1.11.2004).

At the homepage, where every activity of the ICB is documented, there was no information, if this journey actually took place. But this year in June the pastor travelled in company of an German elder of the ICB to the branch in Accra. Unfortunatly I have no further information about this journey.

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6 It was not possible for me to find out when exactly this journey took place.
Besides travelling to the branches in Ghana, the pastor is doing “apostolic work” in Kenia, where he mediates and instructs the pastors and preaches on so called “Crusades”, for which all local churches come to worship together.

The ICB also collaborates with pastors from different churches in different countries. So there was an active exchange of pastors. Often guest pastors from other German churches preached in the ICB and the pastor of the ICB preached in other German churches. I would like to take you on a short excursus about one of the guest pastors who came from Nigeria. George – what is not his real name – was present during my research in the ICB, where he stayed for three months. There he led the choir, played the keyboard and sang solos in the services but led no single sermon. He told me that God wants him to be in Germany to work as a pastor and evangelise the lost souls of the Germans. Due to the fact that he had no permanent residency permit he had to go back to Nigeria and could only return on a three months tourist visa. So he comes as often as possible to Germany. Back in Nigeria he keeps close contact to Germany and organises big prayer meetings on which is prayed especially for Germany.

Besides the exchange of pastors and transnational networks with other pastors, churches and own branches, the ICB is member in the “Council of African Christians in Berlin”. It is a network of African churches respectively Christian communities from different denominations who are located in Berlin. The pastor of the ICB who is the chairman of the council emphasised:

„It is not churches coming together, but it is Christians coming together. [...] because when you talk about churches coming together there could be complications because the doctrines and the believes are very different. [...] So because it is Christians coming together it is easier for the pastors to let their members know: look, when you have problems, this is the place to go.” (pastor in interview, 9.9.2004)

In addition to the council in Berlin there are other councils in Hamburg and Ruhr which all together are organised in the “Council of African Churches in Germany”. The “Council of African Churches in Germany” was founded within the “Council of Christian Communities of

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7 .....apostolic work is supervising churches. Providing spiritual leadership to the pastors, encouraging churchworkers to continue their work, offering more impetus and energy to the leaders not to give up.” (Pastor in interview, 9.9.2004)
African Approach in Europe” (established in 2001), which should act as a platform for networks and partnerships in the African Diaspora in Europe.

Furthermore the networks have been built up, to stand together against prejudices and discriminating behaviour of German and other European churches and to build up a dialogue to the national churches and other corporations. The members of the single councils meet regulary on different conferences (one of them took place in Berlin in 2004).

In the beginning of 2004 the “Council of African Christians in Berlin” founded the meeting point for Africans ("Anlaufstelle für Afrikaner”) led by the pastor of the ICB. Aim of the meeting point is to help Africans living in Berlin (who are nor member of a church) with familiar, social, cultural, emotional and material daily problems to afford a balanced life in the Diaspora.

„So the idea was to form a council to help this Africans, you see, they come here, and they have lost almost their identity, they have language difficulties, they come and have a cultural shock here, the way of life, the fastness of things here and the German “Pünktlichkeit and Ordnung” [punctuality and order (R.K.)] was all too much overwhelming for this Africans.” (pastor in interview, 9.9.2004)

The field of activity embraces visits of the help seeking families, accompaniment to public authorities and hearings refering residency permits, visitation in hospital, visits in custody pending deportation, but also interpretations and mediation of - respectively company to – advocates.

Moreover since the mid 90ies the ICB is a member of the BFP (Bund freikirchlicher Pfingstgemeinden; engl.: Union of Pentecostal churches), an umbrella oragnisation for several autonomous Pentecostal churches in Germany, as well as evangelical “freechurch” (Freikirche) itself. Today there are about 540 churches with 35.000 members in the BFP. Amongst others the BFP offers an education on its theological Seminar “BERÖA” where the pastor of the ICB and also the co-pastor got theologically educated. The leader of the region “Berlin Brandenburg” became the “spiritual father” of the pastor who he could talk to about specific problems and where he could find help. Until today there is a close relationship between them and the regional leader held the sermon on the 13 years jubilee of the ICB.

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8 Berôa is a greek city in Act of the Apostles 17,11
Conflicts
Within the ICB emerged smaller and bigger disputes and crises, which the pastor called “children’s diseases”. One conflict emerged during the creation of an “international” identity of the ICB:

“...like every church when it starts [...] you should be able to know that not everybody understands your vision in the beginning [...] at that time many Africans where looking for an identity [...] they were looking for a national identity. And they sought a church, they will use a church, Africans, for their identity, but I, this is not the Auftrag [engl.: mission] I have received from God. I have received an Auftrag to [...] to help people to find God. The fact that I’m African doesn’t make me, is no reason to make African nationality out of a church, it should be a place where people would have rest, there is a lot of hurt outside, it should be a place where people can receive encouragement, help and [...] a relationship to God.” (pastor in interview, 9.9.2004)

Some African members wanted to point specifically to African oppression and African agony. But the pastor didn’t want his church to be an African forum, respectively an African lobby. Thereupon some members left the ICB and founded own congregations in Berlin. Other churchmembers wanted to bring in African cultural things, what the pastor prevented because in his opinion these things did not fit into the biblical principals and orders. Again some members left the ICB to establish an own church. The pastor remembered four persons who left each with a small group of adherents to found an own congregation. He underlined that these communies are not much established and that he wouldn’t call them “churches”, rather “communities”

After a while some of these “rebellious people” came back to the ICB the pastor stated. In the 13-years-jubilee of the ICB the pastor asserted the church to have left the “children’s diseases” behind now.

The co-pastor explained the separations and new foundations to me as follows:

“...once it was a big group, then again people left and established an own thing, that is also pretty often with blacks, that they just do their tribe, only Ghanaians, only Nigerians, this internationality we have right now with 21 nations, black, white, German, English, they don’t
like. They want their native language, their slang and because of that there was a lot of slump…” (co-pastor in interview, 13.9.2004; translated by R.K.)

I would like to briefly introduce another conflict to you, which was present during my research. Most of the members of the ICB didn’t come constantly to the meetings of the church, if at all they came to the Sunday services. Of the members who participated in all meetings (prayer meeting, biblestudy and service) I figured a core group of about 15 people. The pastor addressed this issue to the congregation over and over again. He stated that it is not enough just to come on Sundays or to special occasions or when one feels like. Again and again he emphasised that some members have not understood that “church” is “family” where one should be there for each other. Also the co-pastor stated:

“...I like to do all my ministrations very, very much, I like to be pastor very much, although sometimes it’s really hard, because sometimes you get the feeling that the people exhaust you, and at the bottom line it doesn’t comes out what you wished for…” (in interview, 13.9.2004; translated by R.K.)

**Conclusion**

Despite all conflicts and the high fluctuation, the ICB exists for over 15 years and still attracts new members and keeps members for a long time. Besides the mutual spiritual respectively religious action which provides a “home”, a family, certainly also socio-economic reasons offer an incentive to visit the ICB. Because there people get helped by the pastors and church members in various things concerning everyday life, like help to find a job or an accomodation, attendance to civil services, doing translations, or financial help for example for burials or a childbirth and so on.

And certainly the pastor himself has an interest to commit many members to the ICB who deliver the tith whereby they ensure the existence of the ICB.