

# Chapter Nineteen

## African Christian Communities in Diaspora

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### INTRODUCTION

Migration and diaspora discourses have engaged scholarly focus and analysis in various fields, and literature on the phenomena is steadily burgeoning. In an increasingly globalizing age where these discourses are assuming centre-stage in both academic and public domains, the public tone and flavor on immigration issues often take on a controversial posture especially with the growing politicization of migration. Although scholarly debates on transmigration and diaspora are no longer new, the privileging of political and socio-economic considerations have largely hijacked such discourses in a way that often glosses over religious and other factors that stimulate and impact on such processes. In the prevailing circumstances of “space-time compression”, demographic influxes and shifts have far-reaching implications on the interconnectedness of local-global spaces. In fact, migration is both an ingredient and consequence of globalization. On the template of religion, such demographic considerations help to reconfigure the interdependence between religious praxis in the communities of the migrants’ homelands and in the diaspora. Population mobility serves as a viable instrument of religious and cultural expansion, transmission and renegotiation. People’s religious belonging is not merely part of their cultural heritage retained at the high point of emigration. Religious conviction can, on the one hand, be a central motive for migration or a support for organizing refuge in exile. Religious identity can be a crucial resource for decision-making processes in the home countries; for vitalizing culture of origin; and of action within the integration processes in a host context. Religious institutions provide migrants with

opportunities of vital import for mixing with people from different cultural backgrounds under the umbrella of a common religion.

The trans-cultural encounter and exchange between Africa, Europe, the Americas and the Arab world has a long history that predates the fifteenth century and the era of the obnoxious human trafficking. Contacts between Europe and Africa in particular were constant throughout Europe's Antiquity, Middle Ages and the so-called Modern Age.<sup>763</sup> European presence and interest in Africa through these periods have been largely mixed and split along the contours of commerce, politics and religion. The imperial expansionist agenda generated new situations, circumstances and posed as a catalyst towards diaspora formation. One of the inherent consequences of these exploits and distension was that it later created several situations that brought Africans at varied times to other continental shores such as of Europe and the New World, thus also resulting in the formation of enclaves and communities. African diaspora is one theoretical construct to describe this global dispersal of indigenous African populations at different phases of world history. By employing "Black Atlantic" Gilroy contextualizes the voluntary and involuntary migration of Africans to Europe, Latin America and North America since the Age of Discovery.<sup>764</sup> The breadth of African diaspora even transcends the popular geographical fixation to Europe and the New World, and includes the Mediterranean and Arab worlds as well as the cross-migration within the African shore itself. Zeleza notes:<sup>765</sup>

"The flow of people at the global level has lagged behind the flows of capital and commodities ... African migrations are as much a part of the complex mosaic of transnational cultural flows as they are of labor and other economic flows ... Between 1965 and 1990 Africa's migrant population grew at a faster rate than any other region in the world. The continent increased its share of international migrants from 10.6 percent to 13.1 percent ... By 1995 African countries were second only to European countries in the numbers of economically active migrants they hosted, excluding refugees and asylum seekers ... Clearly, many Africans

<sup>763</sup> Hans W. DEBRUNNER, *Presence and Prestige: Africans in Europe. A History of Africans in Europe before 1918* (Basel: Basler Afrika Bibliographien, 1997).

<sup>764</sup> Paul GILROY, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1993).

<sup>765</sup> Paul Tiyambe ZELEZA, "Contemporary African Migrations in a Global Context", in *African Issues*, XXX, 1 (2002), 9.

who migrate go to other African countries.”

Exploration, slave trade, colonialism, poverty, cultural exchange and ecological disasters all contributed to an African diaspora that has scattered Africans to Europe, the Americas and elsewhere. The emergence of enclaves and communities can be pinned down to the different waves of emigration. The earliest strata aggregated young, virile, able-bodied Africans, mopped up in the obnoxious web of human trafficking, and catapulted them involuntarily to various metropolises in Europe, the Americas, and the Mediterranean and Arab geo-spaces. The fortunate survivors of this excruciating ordeal, their descendants, and slave remnants in the post-nineteenth century abolition scheme constituted the first African diaspora enclaves.

Physical contact between Africa and the West increased in frequency in the nineteenth century. Decades-long agitation for overseas colonies as settlement areas, sources of raw materials, and markets for the manufactured goods preceded the colonial politics of the 1880s and the subsequent bisecting of Africa. Thus, a second coterie of African diaspora communities may be located in the wave of migrants that swelled as a consequence of the Berlin-Congo 1884/5 Conference's official partition of the African continent into spheres of artificial geographical zones of European influence, exploitation and expropriation. The Inter-war years (1914-1945) and its aftermath also experienced a reasonable degree of demographic shifts within and beyond Africa. Some uprooted Africans, commissioned as pawns in the European war game, either stayed back or charted for themselves new destinies, pathways and family relationships in the desolate battle fields. Debrunner notes that Africans present in Europe before 1918 were always numerically few, but their very presence and the prestige they enjoyed or suffered makes an interesting tale, often a story of adaptation and survival of individuals trying to find their own identity between Africa and Europe.<sup>766</sup>

An unprecedented upsurge, especially in the last decades, in the number of African migrants into Western Europe, North America and elsewhere heralds a new phase in the history of African diaspora.<sup>767</sup> Remarkable changes are evident in the composition and direction of

<sup>766</sup> DEBRUNNER, *Presence and Prestige*, 7.

<sup>767</sup> See ZELEZA, “Contemporary African Migrations”, pp. 9-14. He cautions that although the number of international migrants has grown significantly in absolute numbers since the 1960s, the percentage of people who have left and remained outside their countries of origin has been remarkably steady and small.

international migration, features that make contemporary migration different from the historical African diaspora in several respects. In 1990 there was estimated to be 30 million voluntary international migrants in sub-Saharan Africa, about three and a half percent of the total population.<sup>768</sup> Hitherto, African migration to Europe had followed the historical and linguistic trails of colonialism with Great Britain<sup>769</sup> and France<sup>770</sup> as preferred destinations of migrants. In more recent times, African migration assumed a more diffused dimension with noticeable numbers of immigrants from several African countries flocking to countries with which they had no colonial ties, mainly in Western Europe, North America, and the Arab world. African immigration was thus marked by increasing diversification, in both the number of countries sending and receiving the immigrants. The emigrants increasingly included both highly and less-educated labor migrants, thus resulting in a loss of scarce manpower in their home countries. This demographic mobility forms an integral part of the global phenomenon of international migration. The upsurge in migration is due to rapid processes of economic, demographic, social, political, cultural and environmental change, which arise from decolonization, modernization and uneven development.<sup>771</sup> Incessant crises and upheavals in some parts of Africa have exacerbated immigration and exodus, thus generating the

<sup>768</sup> Stephen CASTLES & Mark MILLER, *The Age of Migration: International Population Movements in the Modern World* (New York: The Guilford Press, 2003 [3<sup>rd</sup> Ed.]), 139.

<sup>769</sup> Despite Britain's massive export of migrants, its immigrant population has historically been lower than that of France. Foreigners made up 3.2 % of its total population between 1986 and 1990, and 3.4 % between 1994 and 1996. Immigrants from Western and Eastern Africa increased from 79,000 in 1984 to 127,000 in 1995; 69,000 were women. In the 1990s migrants from Africa and the Indian subcontinent accounted for the largest group undertaking naturalization. Between 1993 and 1996, 32,400 Africans were granted citizenship in the United Kingdom, out of a total of 173,400 citizenship grants. As for the labor force, in 1996 African immigrants composed 10 % of the total foreign labor force, estimated at a little over 2 million, as compared with 23 % for those from Asia and 40 % for migrants from the European Union (ZELEZA 2002: 11); *OECD, Trends in International Migration - Annual Report*. 1998 Edition (Paris: OECD 1998), p. 175.

<sup>770</sup> In the 1990s more than half of the immigrants into France from non-European Economic Area (EEA) countries came from Africa. Similarly, in 1996, a quarter of the 109,800 foreigners who acquired French citizenship were African nationals and another quarter were Europeans (See Zeleza, "Contemporary African Migrations", 11) and also *OECD, Trends in International Migration - Annual Report*. 1998 Edition (Paris: OECD 1998), 101-107.

<sup>771</sup> CASTLES & MILLER, *The Age of Migration*, p. 152.

economic pool of mostly able-bodied youths particularly to Western Europe and North America.<sup>772</sup> The 1990s witnessed a major increase in involuntary or forced migration and, by the middle of the decade, refugees and internally displaced persons in some countries outnumbered voluntary international migrants by a ratio of more than two to one. By 1997, there were almost 17 million forced migrants, inclusive of nearly 4 million refugees.<sup>773</sup>

Many Africans who undergo these complex forms of migration have largely carried traits of their religious and cultural identity with them. As a matter of fact, their sojourn in new geo-cultural contexts has enlivened these migrants to identify, organize, and reconstruct “their religion” both for themselves and their host societies. The last three decades has witnessed a rapid proliferation of African Christian communities in diaspora, thus resulting in the remapping of old religious landscapes. This migratory trend and development bring to the fore the crucial role, functions and import of religious symbolic systems in new geo-cultural contexts. While religion has remained a constant identity variable in African diaspora communities, the historiography of African diaspora and migration has often largely neglected this religious ferment. The African American community has been integral to the shaping of the American religious mosaic. The obvious dehumanization process and the racial discrimination witnessed by the historical African diaspora in late eighteenth and early nineteenth century America gave birth to a number of African-American denominations from the Methodist, Baptist and Presbyterian backgrounds.<sup>774</sup> The Pentecostal Movement is by far the

<sup>772</sup> Zeleza aptly argues that the complex maelstrom of rapidly changing international migration that African migrants, including the intellectual elites (Brain drain syndrome) found themselves has led to what he calls “the racialization of immigrants” in the North. Immigrants become an alibi for national failings; their presence serves as both threads that tie together and threats that tear asunder the cherished but increasingly troubled marriage between nation and state. See ZELEZA, “Contemporary African Migrations”, p. 10. See also the special issue of *African Issues*, XXX, 1 (2002), devoted to the highly contentious—*brain drain-brain gain* discourse—under the theme “The African ‘Brain Drain’ to the North: Pitfalls and Possibilities”.

<sup>773</sup> S. FINDLAY, “Compelled to Move: the Rise of Forced Migration in Sub-Saharan Africa”, in M. SIDDIQUE (ed.), *International Migration into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (Cheltenham/Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar, 2001), 275-278.

<sup>774</sup> Some of the earliest initiatives by people of African descent and heritage include the African Methodist Episcopal Church, the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, the National Baptist Convention of America, and the Presbyterian Church of USA. One of the few remarkable efforts at documenting the histories of these churches was by

largest and most widespread religious movement to originate in the United States. Although the Wesleyan-Holiness tradition fuelled the quest of the Pentecostal movement prior to 1901, its origins are mostly traced to the Topeka-Kansas religious revival.<sup>775</sup> Some of the earliest groups included the predominantly African-American Church of God in Christ (1897), the Pentecostal Holiness Church (1898), the Church of God with headquarters in Cleveland, Tennessee (1906), and other smaller groups. The modern Pentecostal movement in the US began in 1906 with William J. Seymour, a black holiness preacher.<sup>776</sup> This chapter will, however, limit its scope and focus on the “new” African migrants and their religious communities. Why has and is religion so important for the African diaspora? From a historical perspective, the chapter shall examine the place of religion as a “motor” of African diaspora formation using the incipience and proliferation of new African Churches as a case example. It demonstrates how and to what extent religious, social, cultural, political and economic realities of specific host contexts impact and shape the *raison d'être*, *modus operandi* and worldviews of African churches in diaspora.

## I. TYPOLOGY OF AFRICAN CHURCHES IN DIASPORA

African churches in the new diaspora reveal a complex variety in terms of their historical origins and development, social composition, geographical distribution, polity, ethics, and liturgical orientations. This religious repertoire can be distinguished under two broad categories, that is, religious communities that exist solely as branches, parishes or mission posts of their mother churches headquartered in Africa; and those which were established independently by Africans living in diaspora. Through their headquarters and branches in Europe and North America, the latter category is expanding to Africa and other parts of the world. In terms of their histories of emergence, belief systems and ritual traditions, a working typology that aggregates the characteristic features of these genres can be

Carter WOODSON, *The History of the Negro Church* (Washington D.C: The Associated Publishers, 1921 [2<sup>nd</sup> ed.]).

<sup>775</sup> See Eric C. LINCOLN & Lawrence H. MAMIYA, *The Black Church in the African American Experience* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1990); Cheryl J. SANDERS, *Saints in Exile: The Holiness-Pentecostal Experience in African American Religion and Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996); Anne H. PINN & Anthony B. PINN, *Fortress Introduction to Black Church History* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003).

<sup>776</sup> See Larry MARTIN, *The Life and Ministry of William J. Seymour and a History of the Azusa Street Revival* (Joplin: Christian Life Books, 1999).

outlined as: Mission churches (Methodist, Catholic, Coptic, Orthodox); African Instituted Churches (AIC type such as the Aladura, Kimbanguism); Charismatic/Pentecostal (Classical and Neo-Pentecostals), groups existing within foreign-led churches (such as the African Christian Church, Hamburg under the *Nordelbian Kirche* in Germany). There is also an increasing number of African clergy within or outside mainstream churches ministering solely to African groups. Supportive ministries, fellowship groups and house cells (Inter-denominational) is a common feature of the new African religious diaspora. For illustrative purposes, this section presents a sketchy historical trajectory of new African religious communities in diaspora.

## II. THE AFRICAN CHURCHES MISSION IN LIVERPOOL, 1931-1964

One of the earliest African churches that took root in Europe in the early twentieth century was the African Churches Mission (ACM), founded in 1931 by the Nigerian-born Daniels Ekarte in Toxteth, one of the slums in Liverpool (UK).<sup>777</sup> The socio-political and economic milieu of Liverpool is important in order to understand the circumstances under which the ACM was born, and how the environment impacted on its growth and development. Liverpool's prosperity in the mid-nineteenth century depended largely on slave economy. The black (African) resident population in Liverpool increased considerably during and after the First European War. One of the fall-outs of this war on Liverpool was the rapid upsurge of unemployment and the abysmal, squalid conditions in which the poor and unemployed lived, coupled with an escalation of racial tensions. Another highly volatile issue with which the Liverpool society had to contend during the war interregnum was that of bi-racial marriages between Africans, African-American seamen, soldiers with English women and the "resultant population of half-caste children." Such a development heightened the already existing racial hostility by the public. This was the socio-cultural, economic and political scenery into and within which the ACM emerged.

Following a spiritual experience in 1922, Ekarte (raised originally under the Scottish Mission in Nigeria) commenced services in private rooms, open-air services with mixed audiences of different cultural persuasions. This practice often brought him into the harsh gaze of local authorities (police). Ekarte also undertook frequent visits to Africans on

<sup>777</sup> Marika SHERWOOD, *Pastor Daniels Ekarte and the African Churches Mission* (London: The Savannah Press, 1994).

ships, in lodging houses and hospitals. After switching between several temporary religious spaces, he became concerned with establishing a permanent mission home for his steadily growing group. Through local financial support, a permanent space was acquired through a three-year lease agreement, and Ekarte officially assumed the office of Pastor of the ACM in July 1931. In the 1930s and 1940s, Ekarte became a popular and well-respected figure within both black and white communities, and the ACM grew larger and rapidly assumed a social centre catering to the multifarious needs of many in the immediate community.<sup>778</sup> His activities went beyond the Mission house as he also visited the poor and the needy in their homes, in hospital and in police cells.<sup>779</sup> In defense of the course of Africans living in Liverpool, he often engaged in spirited correspondence with many anonymous, racial letter-writers who expressed ill-feeling about the growing influx of “Negro men, women and children” and inter-marriages. Ekarte took on both religious and extra-religious roles as he became involved in social, philanthropic, humanitarian as well as overtly political activities in both local and international circles.

His engagement in the brawl for equal wages and better working conditions for African seamen in Liverpool put him ostensibly on a collision course with the local authorities and the city’s shipping companies, and visited dire consequences on Ekarte and the ACM. The ACM and its activities under Ekarte came to further limelight in the post-Second European War as it struggled to deal with one of its attendant consequences, that is, the “illegitimate” children resulting from the presence of thousands of allied troops in the United Kingdom and their illicit relationships with English women. His interest in transforming the Mission into a Children’s Home as well as rehabilitating women with colored illegitimate babies was largely hampered by financial constraints. The distrust and suspicion by the local authorities of an African who believed fervently in “racial equality, self-help and who openly castigated those responsible for the rape of Africa,” led to a dismal failure in his long-

<sup>778</sup> In 1934, 380 men and women were “registered” with the Mission and 148 children were on the Sunday School list. By 1936 membership had risen to 558 (see, SHERWOOD, *Pastor Daniels Ekarte*, pp. 32ff.). Apart from the Sunday morning and evening services, the Mission embarked on other activities such as Scouting, music and secondary school classes for the black children. Free meals and temporary accommodation was provided for the poor and homeless (both Black and White) at the expense of the Mission. The Mission became the local centre for the needy.

<sup>779</sup> Sherwood notes that one of the Mission’s report for 1936 lists 427 hospital visits and 4,213 house calls as well as 430 visits to ships. See, SHERWOOD, *Pastor Daniels Ekarte*, p. 40.

term objectives of providing better educational facilities for Black youngsters, a permanent home and a better equipped social centre for abandoned children and the down-trodden in British society. On June 3, 1949, the Mission house was ordered closed, the children forcefully transferred to the city's children home and Ekarte barred from any further contacts with them. Ekarte became and remained a hero in the eyes of many Africans and a suspect in the eyes of many others. The life of the Mission continued as a struggle for survival, until the building housing it was demolished on the order of the local authorities in 1964. Even though Ekarte was moved to a new home, this devastation was too much for him to bear. He survived only a few weeks, and he met his death on 12 July 1964. The Mission did not die with Ekarte, services continued to be held under new leadership until the late 1970s when it gradually fizzled out.

### III. AFRICAN CHURCHES IN THE 1960S AND BEYOND

The 1960s was the period when many African countries attained selfhood and political independence from European colonial hegemony. During this time, a new crop of African migrants charted new routes into the diaspora. These were no longer enslaved Africans, seamen, domestic workers or soldiers as experienced in the inter-wars era or during the immediate aftermath of the war. This new stream of migrants largely comprised African students sent or commissioned to pursue further studies abroad, civil servants, businessmen, and diplomats deployed to newly-established African embassies and consulates in foreign countries. As they settled in the new contexts, many became involved in religious activities that either led to the establishment of new branches of their home churches back in Africa or even the founding of new ones. The most popular of the churches established in Europe in the 60s and 70s was what has been popularly referred to as African Instituted Churches (AICs). AICs, such as the Aladura, have come to represent a very significant factor in the contemporary life situation of the African diaspora. The planting overseas of this brand of Christianity, influenced by African culture, could be said to have emerged only from the 1960s, first in Great Britain (UK),<sup>780</sup> and afterwards in continental Europe. They have increasingly made their footprints more visible on the European religious landscape since the establishment in London of the first branches of the Church of the Lord-

<sup>780</sup> As Nigerians represent one of the largest African immigrants into the UK, the most visible indigenous religious initiative that characterizes their community was the Aladura movement.

Aladura (1964), Cherubim & Seraphim (1965), and the Celestial Church of Christ (1967). It was from here that other branches, as well as their new splinter formations, spread to other parts of Europe and North America. Another Aladura category in diaspora is those that have emerged in Europe, either by severing from an already existing one, or that which emanates from the charismatic quality of a leader. An example of the latter is the Aladura International Church founded in London by Olu Abiola.

Another variant of African Christianity which had its foothold in diaspora was the Coptic Orthodox Church planted by migrants from Egypt.<sup>781</sup> A tenth of the over 10 million Copts migrated from the mid-1950s and 1970s to North America, Europe, Canada, Australia and the Arab world as an escape from religious discrimination and persecution in Egypt during the last half of the twentieth century. They established churches, cultural centers that became places of worship, retreat and social gatherings. The earliest Coptic churches established in the North American diaspora were in Toronto (1964), Los Angeles (1969) and in Jersey City (1970). The monasteries built by the Copts in the USA, Germany and Australia are also serving as pilgrimage sites in the diaspora. Coptic Orthodox theological seminaries have been established in the USA and Australia. Bishops and priests were consecrated by Pope Shenouda III in Cairo for specific religious services in the diaspora. About 60 Coptic Bishops have been assigned to govern dioceses within and outside Egypt such as in Israel, Sudan, western Africa, Europe and the United States.

The religious geography of African churches in diaspora is most spectacular in the 1980s and 1990s. The increasing emigration of Africans has occasioned a concomitant proliferation of new religious communities in diaspora. The religious landscape is increasingly undergoing transformation and diversification with the most recent entry of African-led Pentecostal/Charismatic movements. What started with a few groups in the late 1970s is now characterized by a complex plurality. It is with the Pentecostal/Charismatic variety that African churches have witnessed the most remarkable geographical spread and multiplication in diaspora. This includes large groups with headquarters in Africa, such as the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG), the Deeper Christian Life Ministry (DCLM), both with their headquarters in Nigeria, and the Church of

<sup>781</sup> See El MASRI & Iris HABIB, *The Story of the Copts, The True Story of Christianity in Egypt*, 3 Volumes (End-Time Handmaidens, 1982); B. IBRAHIM & F.N. IBRAHIM, "Zuwanderer nach Deutschland: Das Beispiel der ägyptischen Kopten", in H. KOSCHYK & R. STOLZ, R. (eds), *30 Jahre Zuwanderung. Eine kritische Bilanz* (Landsberg am Lech: Olzog Verlag, 1998), 129-161.

Pentecost International (CPI) with headquarters in Ghana. There are also several African-led churches that started in various parts of Europe, such as the Christian Church Outreach Mission International (CCOMI) led by Bishop Dr. Abraham Bediako (Hamburg), the Kingsway International Christian Centre (KICC) led by Matthew Ashimolowo (London). In recent times, African churches have extended their domains into Eastern Europe (former USSR). An example is the Embassy of the Blessed Kingdom of God for All Nations (formerly known as the Word of Faith Bible Church), founded by Sunday Odulaja in Kiev, Ukraine.<sup>782</sup>

This religious mosaic of the African diaspora is further characterized by African groups, clergy and laity existing within foreign churches. Examples include the African Christian Church, Hamburg under the *Nordelbian Kirche* in Germany, African groups within the American and European mainstream churches such as the Episcopal, Anglican, Methodist, Lutheran and Catholic. There are growing numbers of Nigerian Roman Catholic and Anglican priests in the USA, Tanzanian Lutheran and Ghanaian Methodist priests in Germany. African priests and ministers in these churches are sometimes employed by the host churches, but have the African congregations as their primary constituency. This exportation of clergy and missionaries on “reverse-mission” from Africa to the diaspora demonstrates the stature of Africa as an emerging global theatre of Christianity. Another growing feature within the African religious diaspora is the proliferation of para-churches, supportive or inter-denominational ministries. Freelance evangelists and short-term missionaries from Africa embark on frequent visits to a network of churches overseas. Such Ministries associated with Abubakar Bako, Omo Okpai are characterized by somewhat loose, flexible and non-formalized organizational hierarchies and administrative structures. Such freelancing is carried out within and between African and other Pentecostal/Charismatic church circles under the rubric of evangelism and intra-religious networks. The conscious missionary strategy by mother churches in Africa of evangelizing the diaspora is a relatively recent one. Diaspora has been a key aspect to their response to European mission. The “reverse flow” initiative which entails sending African missionaries abroad came as a backdrop of the moratorium by the Lutheran World Foundation. The moratorium call was designed, among other things, to awaken the Third World peoples to their responsibility, creating new goals and of formulating a viable evangelical

<sup>782</sup> See <http://www.godembassy.org>. This is one of the exceptional African churches in Europe, which has a majority non-African membership. More than half of the membership is Ukrainians and Russians.

strategy towards Europe.<sup>783</sup> In the early 1980s, Tanzanian Lutheran pastors were sponsored to serve in various parishes in Germany. The reverse-mission agenda is becoming a very popular feature among African churches, with pastors and missionaries commissioned to head already existing branches or establish new ones in diaspora.

#### IV. SOCIAL-ETHNIC CONFIGURATION

Most African churches that came to be established in diaspora from the 1960s were the initiative of a few individual students, or people on business and official assignments who had no intention of residing permanently abroad. This group, made up of few members met and worshiped together in “house cells or fellowships” and later transformed into full-fledged branches with acquired or leased properties as religious buildings. In some cases, a new branch sought official recognition or affiliation with headquarters in Africa. The demographic change of the migrant communities has slightly altered this original composition in the last two decades. The arrival of migrant families and the birth of children (first and second generation) has led to a major shift to long-term migrants or settlers. This no doubt has far-reaching implications on the status and growth of some African religious communities.

African churches have demonstrated determination to make global links and make non-Africans targets in their membership drives. A majority of the migrant churches lack a cross-cultural appeal, thus leaving their membership predominantly African. The socialization process of African migrants, whereby they mix and interact mainly with fellow Africans, is another barrier towards the realization of a multi-racial group. In fact, some of them are simply labeled as ethnic or national churches. However, there are a few others that have transcended racial-ethnic precincts to include non-Africans in their membership. The existing non-African element is largely owing to bi-racial couples, friendship and sometimes as a dividend of personal/impersonal evangelism. This membership structure is likely to be transformed and altered in the future if the churches continue to gain inroads more and more into the new religious landscape. The social anatomy of the churches is complex and variegated. The majority of these are not illiterates, but elites of their countries, or those who have ventured out in search for the “golden fleece”. In most recent times, the membership

<sup>783</sup> See Ogbu KALU, “Church, Mission and Moratorium”, in O. KALU (ed.), *The History of Christianity in West Africa* (London & New York: Longman, 1980), 365-374.

of these churches has been characterized by skilled and unskilled factory workers, the unemployed, asylum seekers and refugees. With such a socio-ethnic structure, African churches in diaspora largely remain the locus of identity, community and security primarily for African immigrants.

## V. PARADIGMS OF PROLIFERATION

The expansion of African churches in diaspora can be attributed to both remote and immediate factors. The implications of the globalization process, prevailing political and socio-economic conditions of home countries and the economic push in search of “greener pastures”, transformations in the technology of communication and transportation, liberalization of immigration laws, immigrants’ development of networks and activities have stimulated demographic shifts to Europe and North America. The perceived affluence that magnetizes people from poorer settings, the quest for global connections and representations, the acute need for soul care of immigrant communities in the face of escalating xenophobic tensions and discrimination, migrants’ quest for identity, security and spiritual satisfaction in a hostile environment, the niche for material enhancement are explanations for this growing trend. Owing to the ongoing secularization and decline of Christianity, African churches are now targeting what they call the “Dark Europe” to re-evangelize and annex it “for Christ”. Some of these groups have also burgeoned owing to the insensitivity of host foreign churches. Many African migrants had assumed that Europeans and Americans would perceive them in the first place as Christians. Upon arrival, they identify with mainstream churches or denominations similar or related to their home churches. The disaffection with drab liturgies, the disappointment and “pastoral” neglect faced in the mainstream churches, resulted in churches with African initiatives and under African leadership. As Olu Abiola, the founder of the Aladura International Church describes his experience:<sup>784</sup>

“As an ordained minister of the Church Missionary Society of Nigeria (Anglican), I attended and worshipped at one of the Church of England near my home the very first Sunday after my arrival in London. But to my surprise, I was told at the end of the

<sup>784</sup> See O.U. ABIOLA, “The History of the Aladura International Church”, in O.U. ABIOLA, *An Introduction to Aladuraism* (London: n.d), cited in Frieder LUDWIG, “Die Entdeckung der schwarzen Kirchen. Afrikanische und Afro-karibische Gemeinden in England während der Nachkriegszeit”, in *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte*, 32 (1992), 136.

service by the officiating minister that I will be much at home with my own kind and he directed me to a Black Pentecostal Church.”

John Adegoke, the Spiritual Leader of the Cherubim and Seraphim in Birmingham, had been a member of the Anglican Church back home in Nigeria and even when he came to London in 1964. He had attended the services of the Church of England for about a year. When the first meetings of the Cherubim and Seraphim Church were held, he experienced this as a break-through. Contrasting his experience with his expectation, he remarks:<sup>785</sup>

“Any Nigerian will find the church here different from what he expected. The missionaries came to Nigeria, faking people to live like Christians. But here in England people do not live like Christians, many things are contrary to Christian principles. Sunday is not literally taken as the Christian Sabbath. Nobody has time for the Sunday service, whereas in Nigeria the services are long. You begin to wonder. After suffering for one year, I found people who were interested. I found myself there.”

One consequence of such experiences was a greater identity of the African Christians with churches that were more likely to express their interests and sentiments. African churches in diaspora have come to fill a spiritual vacuum and offer “a home away from home” for many disenchanting Africans. The churches also became avenues where people could go and feel important, feel valued. Irrespective of members’ cultural backgrounds, a sense of belonging and community was rekindled in the church and a kind of religious and ethnic identity was also engendered through the process.

## VI. SOCIAL RELEVANCE AND EXTRA-RELIGIOUS PRISMS

With the proliferation of African churches in virtually all parts of the world, Africa has become fully part of a global cosmos in religious terms. The salience of Christianity has been assisted by African migrant churches in Western societies, particularly Europe, where the insignificance of religion is prevalent. The relevance of African churches is not only located

<sup>785</sup> Interview with John Adegoke (18.10.1991) quoted in LUDWIG, “Die Entdeckung der schwarzen Kirchen”, p. 136.

in the unique expression of African Christianity they exhibit, they also constitute international ministries and groups that have implications on a global scale. The impact and import of the “exportation” of African churches, driven by a vision of winning converts, is that it offers a unique opportunity to analyze its impact at local levels such as in diaspora. African churches are yet to make remarkable incursions into the white populations. This lack of a cross-cultural appeal and wherewithal, coupled with a myriad of contextual factors such as accommodation problems, language barriers, hostility of neighbors, poor economic base, fluid membership, status of churches in host contexts, immigration regulations, are largely responsible for this trend. The changing face and character of contemporary migration has occasioned new problems and challenges for African churches in diaspora. However, African churches in diaspora have gained some inroads into the religious life of local mainstream churches. The influence exerted has resulted in joint worship services and programs as well as the “exchange of pulpits”. The liturgical revolution of the African churches and their display of charismatic propensities draw some attraction from the local publics.

Many African churches are increasingly taking up extra-religious functions, such as social welfare programs within the diaspora context. Thus, their focus is not only the spiritual wealth of members but their social, material and psychological well-being as well. Beyond their church vicinity, they have taken up functions, such as the regeneration and rehabilitation of drug-ridden youths in the society, the socially displaced, under-privileged, refugees, asylum seekers. African churches in diaspora today display a significant model of African Christianity in the way they organize themselves, with features emanating from both their new contexts as well as their African heritage. Their character and maturity are evident as they have grown to acquire immense properties and real estate. For instance, the Embassy of God Church acquired between 15 and 51 hectares of land (total area: 140,000 square meters) in Kiev to erect a magnificent edifice for multi-religious purposes.<sup>786</sup> The Redeemed Christian Church of God, North America, recently acquired a multimillion dollar property of over 250 hectares of land in Dallas, Texas, for the construction of a Redemption Camp in the US similar to the Nigerian camp located on the Lagos-Ibadan Expressway.<sup>787</sup> The KICC plans “to build a 5,000-seater church building and a four floor office—a state-of-the-art facility to

<sup>786</sup> See full details at the church website:

[www.godembassy.org/eng/projnewbuild\\_e.shtm](http://www.godembassy.org/eng/projnewbuild_e.shtm) .

<sup>787</sup> See RCCG North America web site at <http://www.rccgna.org/news.htm>.

provide: 5,000 seats for worship, 1,000 place children's church, 600 place teenage church, a counseling and prayer centre, class rooms for Bible School, 100 place nursery, 400 seater restaurant, a fully equipped gym, a place for the total healing of the total man and the total nation."<sup>788</sup> In many large cities, such as London, New York, Hamburg, Paris, Köln, Amsterdam, Berlin, erstwhile warehouses,<sup>789</sup> abandoned church buildings, cinemas, disco halls and pub houses have been acquired at huge financial costs. Some were procured out-rightly, while others were leased or rented for several years.

There is a growing acquisition and renegotiation of space, whereby "desecrated space" is acquired and resacralized for ritual ends. There are further examples of African churches that have erected buildings<sup>790</sup> of their own or those who currently lease and use hotel premises as temporary ritual space pending the acquisition of a permanent place. Some churches have also acquired fleets of cars and buses, which are either used by members for church official purposes, or for commercial purposes as hire/rentals. Business centers, lodging and accommodation, religious book centers, guidance and counseling units, recreation and rehabilitation centers, cyber cafes and computer training centers, musical halls, video and audio cassette shops, and shopping malls are also owned by these churches. The KICC and the Embassy of God are examples of African churches that have even proposed religious banks to "empower God's people economically, and promote the Kingdom of God."<sup>791</sup> Such extra-religious activities no doubt have immense religious, social and economic import for the churches as well as for the immediate environment and communities in which they are located. This development suggests that some of these churches have come of age in this new cultural environment.

<sup>788</sup> See church website at: <http://www.kicc.org.uk/>.

<sup>789</sup> The huge building hosting the International headquarters of the Christian Church Outreach Mission located in the Bergedorf Industrial area in Hamburg is a former abandoned warehouse which the church procured at the cost of 1.5 million Deutsche marks in 1991.

<sup>790</sup> The Kingsway International Christian Centre was established in September 1992, and it describes itself as the fastest growing church in the UK and Europe. In August 1998 they relocated to 57 Waterden Road, now called the Miracle Centre, an eight acre-facility that has a 4,000-seater auditorium and parking for more than 1,000 cars. The church is about "to embark upon building a 10,000-Seater Arena that is to be the first of its kind in Europe."

<sup>791</sup> Cf. Christian Bank Project of the Embassy of God, [www.godembassy.org/eng/projsbank\\_e.shtm](http://www.godembassy.org/eng/projsbank_e.shtm) and KICC' Vision at <http://www.kicc.org.uk/>.

## VII. NEW MEDIA, CORPORATE PROFILING AND RECRUITMENT STRATEGY

African churches in diaspora are increasingly appropriating new communication technologies<sup>792</sup> in the transmission of their religious messages. Although the use of media is not at all a novel feature, what is new is their deliberate effort towards making their presence known and felt on the World Wide Web. While the church web sites act as a new and relatively effective means of outreach to the larger community, most of these groups who appropriate it do so in order to also draw potential clientele. Such intentions are clearly portrayed in their introductory statements. The Celestial Church of Christ (CCC)<sup>793</sup> seeks to create a global network through the use of Internet websites and electronic mail.<sup>794</sup> In a “web release” in 1997, announcing its (Riverdale, USA site) presence on the Internet, it stated *inter alia*,

“Halleluia!!! ... Celestial Church of Christ now has a dominant presence on the World Wide Web. The main focus of this page is to present a unified and cohesive communication vehicle for Celestial Church as a whole, world-wide ... As the web site evolves, we hope to use it as a vehicle to communicate news about Celestial Church of Christ on a global basis, both information geared toward Celestians and non-Celestians alike.”

The UK site complements this objective through her mission statement which partly states:

<sup>792</sup> Matthew Ashimolowo, Pastor of the Kingsway International Christian Centre, and his Winning Ways Program is aired daily on Premier Radio (London) and Spirit FM (Amsterdam) and viewed on television by a potential audience of over 200 million in Nigeria, Ghana, Zimbabwe, TV Africa and Europe on the Christian Channel and Inspirational Network.

<sup>793</sup> For details on the use of media by the CCC, see A. ADOGAME, *Celestial Church of Christ: The Politics of Cultural Identity in a West African Prophetic-Charismatic Movement* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1999), 82-89.

<sup>794</sup> See for instance the website addresses: <http://www.celestialchurch.com> (operated by a parish in Riverdale, USA); <http://www.celestialchurch.mcmail.com> (administered from the United Kingdom), and <http://mageos.ifrance.com> or <http://www.ChristianismCelest.com> (administered from France). Their electronic mail addresses are [webmaster@celestialchurch.com](mailto:webmaster@celestialchurch.com), [celestialchurchofchrist@mcmail.com](mailto:celestialchurchofchrist@mcmail.com), and [jl\\_degnde@hotmail.com](mailto:jl_degnde@hotmail.com) respectively.

“To introduce CCC to the whole world ... to bring all the parishes together by obtaining free e-mail addresses for interested parishes and contribute to the free flow of information in the church ... to use the medium of the Internet as a vehicle to recruit new members....”

In the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG)<sup>795</sup> Internet Outreach, the introductory statement on the Parish directory states *inter alia*:

“Over the years The Redeemed Christian Church of God has experienced an explosive growth with branches being planted all over the world. It has become pertinent to create a directory and online data base for all The Redeemed Christian Church of God parishes worldwide ... This will enable us to do a complete, relational online database that will be useful for the Body of Christ. Furthermore online database will help us in our evangelism, fellowship and interaction among member parishes. It will also serve to assist travelers in their efforts to find a place of worship wherever they find themselves.”

Members’ visions and goals, as expressed in the RCCG “Mission Statement”, includes:

“It is our goal to make heaven. It is our goal to take as many people as possible with us. In order to accomplish our goals, holiness will be our lifestyle. In order to take as many people with us as possible, *we will plant churches within five minutes walking distance in every city and town of developing countries; and within five minutes driving distance in every city and town of developed countries.* We will pursue these objectives until every nation in the world is reached for JESUS CHRIST OUR LORD.”

Although, these goals may appear somewhat ambitious, idealistic and utopian to attain, yet one point of significance here is the fact that the church has demonstrated optimism and enthusiasm towards the realization

<sup>795</sup> See the official website of the RCCG in <http://www.rccg.org> created and maintained by the RCCG Internet Project, Houston Texas, USA. See also UK parish web sites <http://www.jesus-house.org.uk/> and <http://www.rccgarea4.org.uk/>.

of its global vision. The church is not only concerned with the local setting but what transpires beyond it, within so-called “developing” and “developed” countries. The recourse by African churches in diaspora to new, alternative evangelistic strategies is intricately tied to new, global socio-cultural realities. The somewhat individualistic nature of Western societies for instance has largely rendered some of the known conventional modes inept and far-less productive. Thus, the “personal” modes of communication (i.e. door to door, street to street, marketplace and bus evangelism) is giving way systematically to more “impersonal”, “neutral” modes (i.e. computer web sites, electronic mail, fax). The relevance and urgency which these alternative modes of communication demand in the western context, lends credence to why virtually all the web sites of these churches have been established, developed and maintained in Europe, USA or elsewhere outside Africa.

#### VIII. LOCAL-GLOBAL NETWORKS

The import of local and global networks among these churches in Africa and in diaspora cannot be over-emphasized. The trans-national linkages between them, in the “home” (African) and the “host” societies are assuming increasing importance for African migrants. The range and nature of these ties include intra-religious networks and new ecumenical affiliations, such as the Council of Christian Communities of an African Approach in Europe (CCCAAE).<sup>796</sup> The scope of these trans-relations and networks also include “pastoral exchanges”<sup>797</sup> between Africa and the diaspora, or through special religious events and conferences, prayer networks, Internet sites, International ministries, publications, video, tele-evangelism. African churches in diaspora frequently organize religious events that are local in nature but which have a global focus that links the local church with other churches globally. The increasing vigor geared towards charting and maintaining intra-religious networks is linked to religious, social, political as well as economic concerns. The motivations for joining or engaging in intra-religious networks are complex and vary.

<sup>796</sup> See details on the “Council of Christian Communities of an African Approach in Europe” at their website: <http://membres.lycos.fr/ccceae/>.

<sup>797</sup> The RCCG consciously send missionary pastors to Germany and other parts of Europe. A missionary is sent to head an already existing branch without a leader or to establish a new branch. In either case, the missionaries are given full financial backing (salary, honorarium and other related expenses) by the Directorate of Missions at the International headquarters or by any sponsoring parish of the RCCG.

Most African churches often locate this tendency as a vital strategy for global mission and evangelism. Others undertake such processes as a necessary way of acquiring status improvement within the host society.

## IX. NEGOTIATING IDENTITY

Demographic variables indicate that the Africans, who make up the majority membership of African churches in diaspora, often come from different socio-ethnic backgrounds and varied religious affiliations. Within the new religious space, they operate on new levels of organization where doctrinal differences and ethnic exigencies do not seem to serve as the most vital reference point. Rather, what is important for the Africans in this case is simply a place to share similar sentiments, “a place to feel at home” or “a home away from home”, thereby establishing a frame of reference for the preservation, transformation and transmission of their specific local religious traditions. As religious and ethnic identities are intricately intertwined, they may sometimes defy any clear-cut demarcation. The complex cultural diversities and historical specificities of the African continent renders the notions of “African identity” and “religious identity” too simplistic to be taken unilaterally. A collective identity “African” is undoubtedly not a fundamental issue among most Africans within their continental shores. However, beyond the continent, the urge for collective representation come to assume immense meaning and relevance thus coalescing the several, multiple identities (ethnic, religious, class, gender) into what may seem a complex whole—African identity.

Similar to the issue of African identity is the corollary of religious identity. The membership structure of most African churches in diaspora evinces an interpretation of varied levels of religious identity. Members emerge from wide-ranging religious backgrounds and orientations to form a new religious diaspora identity. One level of interpretation is that, while not undermining the factor of individual choice and preferences, the specific religious, political, socio-cultural circumstances and climatic factors in the host contexts are quintessential factors, which dictate and impact on the nature of identity—single or multiple—forged and desired by African migrants. Religious identities are not necessarily static and fixed, but susceptible to change and transformation depending on a legion of factors. People often engage in switching religious affiliation or (re)negotiating religious identities. Three levels of African diaspora Christians can be distinguished: those who became Christians for the first time while residing in diaspora; members who swap religious denominational affiliations; and those who consciously maintain dual or

multiple religious affiliations and identities. In the last category, for instance, a member remains a bona fide Catholic in the home context, but takes up membership of a Pentecostal or an Aladura-type church while residing temporarily or indefinitely in the diaspora. Such a member sees no problem with combining these two traditions, although occurring in different socio-cultural contexts. These various levels of religious action are largely occasioned by a multiplicity of factors, ranging from specific spiritual/visionary experiences, unavailability of their home church in the new context, and the spiritual quest for panacea to existential problems. Other explanations include exigent factors, insensitivity of host historical churches, xenophobia and other prevailing socio-economic, cultural and political circumstances.

#### CONCLUSION

This chapter describes the incipience and consolidation of African brand of Christianity in diaspora by locating it within different historical epochs. The incursion of African churches is significant as a major constituent of the religious mosaic of diaspora communities. African migrant churches have helped in the resuscitation and reconfiguration of Christianity, and contribute to the increasing religious diversification witnessed in the host Western societies. It demonstrates how African churches, through their developmental processes, have become more and more variegated in their social composition, membership structure, as well as in their modes of operation. The host socio-cultural, economic and political milieu largely impacts on and shapes the nature, course, and scope of African churches in diaspora. Thus, within the locus of changing, more complex migration trends and policies, these collective religious representations will continue to assume immense meaning and relevance particularly for African immigrants as the churches serve both as loci for identity, security, as well as avenues for adapting into the host socio-cultural and religious society.

## 10. Contemporary Africa

