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Item Type	Book chapter
Authors	Adogame, Afe
Publisher	Regnum Books International
Rights	With permission of the license/copyright holder
Download date	2026-11-04 22:09:56
Link to Item	http://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12424/166266

(13) AFRICAN CHRISTIANITY AND AFRICAN DIASPORA CHRISTIANITIES OUTSIDE THE CONTINENT

Afe Adogame

Introduction

On 20th May 2015, Nicolas Haque anchored the pathetic story of the 16-year-old Senegalese, Abdou, as he prepares for his perilous journey to Europe.[1] This was part of a prolonged Al Jazeera TV documentary *Desperate Journeys,* chronicling a series of woes, misery and catastrophe in which hundreds of thousands of Africans and other immigrants, hopeless but with sanguine expectations, were fleeing economic hardship, poverty, natural disasters, ethnic clashes, political oppression and unwarranted civil strife partly orchestrated by failing governments. By raising a loan of over US$3.000 to facilitate the journey organised by such agents within the migration industry, including people smugglers or human traffickers, Abdou's parents perceive their son's voyage to Europe as the only option left to salvaging family life and survival. On the fateful day that Abdou prepared to leave home, his father gave him his final words of advice and blessing with a rather brisk emotion: 'Throw your passport into the sea. Who you are doesn't matter in Europe. You are going there to work. Have faith in God. We love you.' With these brief admonitions and amid flowing tears of his parents, Abdou set out on his journey undaunted. His parent's counsel no doubt evokes some controversy arising from his sheer ignorance of life and work in Europe, his father's contentious disavowal of identity claims and dignity, an unbridled faith in God in the face of illegality and amorality, and the licentious display of desperation laced with equivocal tone of love.

Hardly a week now goes by without a 'breaking news story' of migrants, refugees, asylum-seekers from Africa or Asia drowned or rescued while trying to arrive on European shores. While it was reported that over 170,000 successfully landed in Italy in 2014 alone, at least 2,500 Africans are reported to have drowned in the Mediterranean Sea, January-April 2015. In actual fact, the numbers involved in the ongoing tragedy is staggering as no-one really knows how many people have drowned in the sea or died under harsh desert conditions. Within one week, 1,141 deaths were recorded.[2] So far, 2015 was increasingly marked by a horrific toll of hundreds of thousands of deaths by drowning in the Mediterranean Sea.[3] Historically, the Mediterranean, where Europe meets Africa and East meets West, has represented the theatre of encounters between peoples, cultures and systems. During the first decades of the 21st century, we increasingly witnessed in the Mediterranean a new encounter, both profound and dramatic, in the form of people on the move. Thus, the Mediterranean Sea has come to represent one major frontline in the

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[1] For a full video transcript of the Al Jazeera news story, 'Desperate Journeys: Senegal Migrant Seeks better life in Europe' see: http://video.aljazeera.com/channels/eng/videos/senegal-migrant-seeks-better-life-in-europe/4246430493001.

[2] See for instance: Joe Mills, 'More than 400 people drown in Mediterranean Sea as ship carrying African migrants from Libya to Italy capsizes', April 14, 2015. Available online at: www.ibtimes.co.uk/more-400-people-drown-mediterranean-sea-ship-carrying-african-migrants-libya-italy-capsizes-1496416; Tom Kington, 'Another 41 African migrants drown making perilous crossing to Italy', April, 16, 2015; story available online at: www.latimes.com/world/europe/la-fg-italy-migrants-drowned-20150416-story.html and Patrick Kingsley, Alessandra Bonomolo and Stephanie Kirchgaessner, '700 migrants feared dead in Mediterranean shipwreck', Sunday 19 April 2015. Available online at: www.theguardian.com/world/2015/apr/19/700-migrants-feared-dead-mediterranean-shipwreck-worst-yet.

[3] See Dara Lind, '1,600 migrants have drowned in the Mediterranean this year. Europe refuses to fix the crisis', *Vox World*, 20 April, 2015. Available online at: www.vox.com/2015/4/20/8457719/mediterranean-migrant-shipwreck.

battlefield of irregular migration, where many poor, youthful, vulnerable and desperate migrants, including women and children, launch themselves on the path of tragic death in their struggle between life, survival and death. In most recent times, migrants and refugees fleeing Libya, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Somalia, Nigeria, Ghana, Mali and Senegal predominate.

I do not suggest that all immigrants are implicated in this dismal picture as that would mean simplifying the complex trajectories of African migration. Nor do African immigrants experience this precarious state only in the 'exodus from African shores'. Such contradictions are evident in internal migration within the continent itself. It is not only Europe that needs immigrants but does not want them,[4] the recurring politics of Afrophobia, xenophobic violence and hate-related incidences in South Africa[5] in April 2015, and earlier in 2008, vividly underscore the quandary immigrants now face within the theatre of international migration.

At the same time, the majority of Africans who migrate within the continent and to Europe are regular, skilled, legal, documented migrants arriving mostly through the airports and recruited into the labour force as nurses, doctors, engineers, IT specialists, sportsmen and women – or as students, diplomats, artists but also tourists. Through family reunions, many Africans have migrated to Europe. Most recently, some Africans have a mission task and have migrated or been sent by their home churches to Europe as missionaries.[6] However, we cannot deny that the African immigrant populations and African-led churches consist of those who also made it to Europe through irregular means. Migrants' travel can be clandestine through the travails of crossing the desert, sneaking onto boats and canoes, or concealment in trucks and lorries to beat the eagle-eyed surveillance of police border patrols and immigration officials. Other migrants have travelled by air and sea using other people's travel documents or using fake travel documents to exploit the ignorance of immigration entrepreneurs.

The causes and courses of the new migration are legion: economic, social, political, religious, historical, technological and more. The outcomes of a migration decision are often positive but too frequently disturbing and sometimes tragic. Zeleza[7] vividly demonstrates how the dynamics and direction of global mobility, and African participation in international migration, particularly in Western Europe and North America, has become more pronounced, notwithstanding the imposition of stringent immigration controls by these countries. The adoption of restrictive immigration policies and the regional policy harmonization has partially impeded the flow of legal immigrants and asylum-seekers, but also indirectly transformed illegal immigration.

The migration systems theory and the trans-national theory have become the preferred new analytical frameworks for understanding and contextualizing international migratory trends and processes.[8] Both theories, encapsulating several levels of analysis, account for the direction and texture of international migration as well as their complex dynamics. The basic principle of the migration systems theory is that any migratory movement can be seen as a result of interacting and intertwined macro-, meso- and micro-

[4] Andrew F. Walls, 'Mission and Migration: The Diaspora Factor in Christian History', *Journal of African Christian Thought*, Vol. 5/2 (December 2002), p. 10; and Adogame, Afe, *The African Christian Diaspora: New Currents and Emerging Trends in World Christianity*. London, New Delhi, New York and Sydney: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013, 182.

[5] See Cornish, Jean-Jacques. (2015). 'South Africa: Xenophobic Attacks Erupt in South Africa's Limpopo Province'. Available at: allafrica.com/stories/201503051136.html (accessed 14 April 2015); Wicks, J. (2015). 'KZN xenophobic violence spreads to KwaMashu'. Available at: www.news24.com/SouthAfrica/News/KZN-xenophobic-violence-spreads-to-KwaMashu-20150413 (accessed 14 April 2015); and Hans, B. (2015). 'King's anti-foreigner speech causes alarm'. Available at:www.iol.co.za/news/politics/king-s-anti-foreigner-speech-causes-alarm-1.1835602#.VSzaLPCROYM (accessed 14 April 2015).

[6] Adogame, Afe, *The African Christian Diaspora*, 2013.

[7] Paul Zeleza, 'Contemporary African Migrations in a Global Context', *African Issues*, XXX (1) 2002: 13.

[8] Adogame, *The African Christian Diaspora*, 2013, 6.

structures.[9] Crucial to our understanding of regular and irregular migration are the macro-structures – that is, the political economy of the world market, inter-state relationships, and the laws, structures and practices established by the states of sending and receiving countries to control migration settlement; the micro-structures embracing the networks, practices and beliefs of the migrants themselves; and the intermediate meso-structures, certain individuals, groups or institutions that take up a mediating role between migrants and political or economic institutions. The 'migration industry', including recruitment organizations, lawyers, agents, smugglers, NGOs, charitable bodies and other intermediaries that emerge, can be both helpers and exploiters of migrants. A further consideration of a new, emerging migrant population whose networks, activities and life-patterns encompass and transcend their home and host societies has produced a new body of theory on 'trans-nationalism' and 'trans-national communities'.[10] The trans-national theory in this regard captures migrants, their lives, experiences and consciousness as one that cuts across national boundaries and brings two (or more) societies into a single social field. Alejandro Portes[11] defines trans-national activities as those that take place on a recurrent basis across national borders and require a regular and significant commitment of time by participants.

The morality and politics of migration are among the most contested issues globally. However, the ethics of international migration is a relatively recent field of study in the robust literature on migration.[12] A burgeoning of the discourse on migration and ethics was witnessed in the 1970s, parallel to the globalization of migration and the increase in irregular migration during the period. Since the 1980s, following the pioneering works by Walzer[13] and Carens,[14] there has been an impressive development in ethical thinking in relation to international migration. Carens[15] illuminates one of the most pressing issues of our time: immigration poses practical problems for western democracies and also challenges the ways in which people in democracies think about citizenship and belonging, about rights and privileges, and about freedom and equality. The discourse about the ethics and morality of migration engender a realistic perspective that dwells on what is possible in the face of existing realities – and an idealistic approach that requires policy-makers to assess current reality in the light of a nation's highest ideals.[16] The investigation of ethics applied to migration concerns three areas: the right to migrate, the treatment of migrants, and the norms for a peaceful co-existence in increasingly pluralistic societies.[17] While borders are a fixed line of geography and sovereignty, they also connote ethical values. Immigration and admission do raise fundamental ethical questions. This is all the more the case at a time when restrictive migration policies lead to outcomes that are ethically or morally questionable.[18]

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[9] Castles, Stephen and Mark Miller. *The Age of Migration: International Population Movements in the Modern World* (3rd ed.). New York: Guilford Press, 1993, 27-28.
[10] Basch, Linda, Glick-Schiller Nina and Blanc-Szanton Cristina (eds). *Nations Unbound. Transnational Projects, Postcolonial Predicaments, and Deterritorialized Nation-States*. New York: Gordon & Breach, 1994.
[11] Portes, Alejandro. 'Towards a New World – the Origins and Effects of Transnational Activities', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 22 (2) 1999. 464.
[12] Ricard Zapata-Barrero and Antoine Pécoud, 'New Perspectives on the Ethics of International Migration', *American Behavioral Scientist*, 56(9), 2012: 1159-1164; Zapata-Barrero, R., 'Theorizing state behaviour in international migrations: An evaluative ethical framework', *Social Research*, 77, 2010: 325-352; Christine Straehle and Patti T. Lenard, 'The Ethics of Migration: Introduction', *Journal of International Political Theory*, 8(1-2), 2012: 118-120.
[13] Walzer, M., *Spheres of Justice: A defense of pluralism and equality*. Oxford, UK: Robertson, 1983.
[14] Carens, J., 'Aliens and Citizens: The case for open borders. *Review of Politics*, 49, 1987: 251-273.
[15] Joseph H. Carens, *The Ethics of Migration*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.
[16] Ilse van Liempt and Veronica Bilger (eds) *The Ethics of Migration Research Methodology: Dealing with Vulnerable Immigrants*. Sussex: Sussex Academic Press, 2009.
[17] Graziano Battistella, 'The contributions of ethics to the management of migration', *Ciberteologia: Journal of Theology and Culture*, Issue 37, Year VIII, 2012.
[18] Parker, O., and Brassett, J., 'Contingent borders, ambiguous ethics: Migrants in (international) political theory', *International Studies Quarterly*, 49, 2005: 233-253.

The ethical discourse of migration is closely related to the theology of migration. Theologies of migration are emerging from and built around the lengthy duration of migration[19] – the home of origin as a point of departure, the transitory journey to El Dorado, the arrival at temporary and final destinations, the circumstances shaping their lived experiences of adaptation or resistance to integration, and even the imagination, illusory thoughts of return migration. William O'Neill draws biblical insights underlying the ethics of migration, focusing on three themes: the primacy of the love command, justice as covenant fidelity, and the virtue of hospitality.[20] He translates and interprets these themes for citizens of faith in a religiously pluralist polity. According to Donald Senior, 'The Christian gospel unfolds against the backdrop of exile and redemption – of Israel in Egypt and the infant Jesus in Egypt. Sharing this history of migration, the people of God, then and now, are called to particular care for the most vulnerable members of society, especially the immigrants.'[21] Christian hospitality to 'strangers and aliens' shaped the earliest understanding of disciples as fellow 'citizens with the saints' in the 'household of God' (Eph. 2:19). Hospitality is offered not only to kith and kin, but also to those whose only claim is vulnerability and need (Matt. 8:11; 22:1-14; Luke 14: 12-24). For citizens of faith, then, the urgency of basic human rights establishes the relative priority of migrants' rights as the touchstone of policy.[22]

The unwarranted waste of human bodies, mostly African immigrants desperate to cross the sea to Europe, marks an unprecedented watershed in the history and politics of regular or irregular migration to Europe. Most appalling is the somewhat international stolidity, lassitude and apathy of policy-makers and several stakeholders that has suffered many ignominies; an indifference that has perhaps encouraged the self-martyrdom and devaluing of human bodies on the Mediterranean Sea. African national governments, the African Union (AU),[23] the New Partnership for Africa's development (NEPAD), African religious institutions, the European Union (EU), European national governments, European churches and African-led churches in Europe to a greater or lesser degree, have conspired in a feat of political and socio-religious inaction, negligence and indifference that seem to further exacerbate the celerity of wasting human bodies both in desert lands and on the seas. Speaking from St Peter's Square, Pope Francis, an outspoken advocate for greater European-wide participation in rescue efforts, reiterated his call for action during mass one Sunday after learning of the latest disaster. He said, 'They are men and women like us – our brothers seeking a better life, starving, persecuted, wounded, exploited, victims of war.'[24] Besides the Vatican's voice, what is the role and position of the church in all these scenarios? It is scandalous that African and European churches are not seen to make significant public outcry and condemnation of this disaster nor call for rescue efforts.

The rest of the chapter will tease out whether, how and to what extent African-led churches in Europe are engaging (or not) in the politics of wasting bodies and unwanted migration and responding to the ethical dilemma that shapes EU immigration policies vis-à-vis their social relevance in Europe.

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[19] Adogame, *The African Christian Diaspora*, 2013, 15.
[20] O'Neill, W., "No Longer Strangers" (Ephesians 2:19): The Ethics of Migration, *Word and World*, 29, 3, 2009: 227-233.
[21] Senior, D., "Beloved Aliens and Exiles" in Daniel G. Groody and Gioacchino Campese (eds) *A Promised Land, A Perilous Journey: Theological Perspectives on Migration*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2009, 23.
[22] O'Neill, "No Longer Strangers" (Ephesians 2:19): The Ethics of Migration, 231.
[23] It is beyond any imagination that the African Union waited for the loss of over 2,500 lives before tabling the issues of migration and xenophobia at their recent summit in June 2015. See: 'Migration and Xenophobia top AU Agenda at summit': http://ewn.co.za/2015/06/11/Migration-and-xenophobia-on-the-agenda-for-African-Executive-Council-meeting.
[24] See story at: www.theguardian.com/world/2015/apr/19/700-migrants-feared-dead-mediterranean-shipwreck-worst-yet.

The historiography of the new African Christian diaspora is located within recent trajectories of international migration, a dynamic process in which Africans are largely implicated as both actors and benefactors. They are not just passive recipients but active participants.

The literature of African-led churches in Europe has burgeoned since the 1980s.[25] However, not much attention has been given by scholars to the ethics and politics of African migration in Europe. How do churches in Africa and African-led churches in Europe encourage regular migration and discourage irregular ones? In what ways does regular or irregular migration impact on African Christians? How do African-led churches respond to the dehumanization, the unethical posture and policies of the EU towards African migrants? How do the religious communities engage in the discourses of identity, inclusion, exclusion and citizenship against the backlash of harsh anti-immigrant debates within the dwindling welfare economies of EU states? What methodological issues and ethical questions arise in research of irregular migration in Europe? We need a critical assessment and analysis of EU policies on irregular migration and how this may affect the place and status of African-led churches in Europe.

African Christian communities in the diaspora present a robust religious demography as they continue to mushroom across Europe. The explanations for their emergence, expansion and visibility are quintessential in understanding their spiritual worldviews and emerging theologies. As most of these religious communities are relatively new in Europe, having started within the last three decades, their evolving theologies emerge out of ongoing contestation between resilience, transformation and change. The very fluidity, insecurity and vulnerability of irregular and transit immigration affects the life, demography and mobility of African-led churches in Europe. The status of migrants are always in limbo, and susceptible to abuse, exploitation, xenophobia, deportation, incarceration, clandestine existence, and 'doing the jobs that many Europeans would normally not do'. Right-wing politics heightens the vulnerability of immigrants. The appalling experiences of African migrants in Europe shape their spirituality and theology. Before examining some of the ways in which the ethics and politics of migration affect African-led churches in Europe and how they respond, it is important to give a little flavour of EU immigration policies and the ethical dilemma it embodies.

EU Immigration Policies: An Ethical Dilemma

During the formative years of the EU in the 1950s and 1960s, immigrants were primarily an extra workforce in most Western European countries. Countries like France, Germany and the Netherlands used a permissive migration policy motivated by the need for extra labour.[26] By the late 1960s and 1970s, immigration was increasingly assuming a subject of public concern, thus marking a radical shift from the permissive immigration policy to a more control-oriented, restrictive policy. Political rhetoric increasingly linked migration with the destabilization of public order. Restrained immigration was beginning to take root all over Western Europe by the end of 1973, when labour recruiting was halted abruptly in the face of increasing social tensions and the fear of economic recession. In fact, the 'fortressization' of European immigration policy is linked with the 1973 economic recession.

A significant Europeanization of migration policy took off in the 1980s, when policy co-ordination became institutionalized in European inter-state co-operation. Since 1993, with the ratification of the Treaty of Maastricht, the European Community took a new turn. The Schengen Agreement which came into being in 1995 was a definite attempt towards harmonizing their immigration procedures and regulating flows of people. The EU set out the elements for a common EU immigration policy at the 1999 European

[25] For an extensive historiography of African-led churches in Europe and North America, see Adogame, *The African Christian Diaspora*, 2013.

[26] See Jef Huysmans, 'The European Union and the Securitization of Migration', *Journal of Common Market Studies*, vol. 38, Issue 5, 2000, 751-777.

Council in Tampere, Finland. Its adoption was confirmed by The Hague Programme in 2004. In the past three decades, EU member states moved towards further co-operation at the supranational level and introduced increasing numbers of regulations at the EU level on migration-related matters. The Europeanization of migration laws and policies is tied to wider social, political, economic and strategic dynamics. Thus, European integration process is implicated in the development of a restrictive migration and the social construction of migration into a security question.[27]

Over the past two decades, the EU not only developed a joint and coherent approach to migration but also increasingly integrated source and transit countries in its neighbourhood and beyond into its efforts. This policy is sometimes dubbed the internationalization, or externalization, of the EU's migration policy.[28] The EU and respective national governments are struggling to define attitudes and policies towards immigrants and immigration for the 21st century. This national, continental and global debate revolves surreptitiously around economic impacts and the legal status of individual or groups of immigrants more than the very welfare and well-being of migrants. EU immigration policies and strategies are hardly static or fixed. They mutate depending on the prevailing socio-political problems, national security questions, and most importantly economic needs and emergencies, especially the quest for sustained high-skilled manpower from foreign countries to complement an ageing, dwindling work force. As refugees are integral to international migration processes, legal rules on refugees constitute a significant part in the regulation of international migration.

Thus, the EU is vigorously protecting its external borders, notably against unwanted and irregular immigration. Considerable efforts are made and significant funds invested to enforce this goal.[29] Fences are erected, as in the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla. Blue borders are patrolled by air and sea by coastguards and the navy, as in Spain, Italy, Malta and Greece. These operations are enforced by national forces but increasingly co-ordinated by the EU's border agency Frontex.[30] This focus on the external borders comes despite the fact that irregular migrants overwhelmingly enter EU territory legally and then overstay or work in breach of employment regulation.[31] Thus, the meaning attached to the security of external borders goes beyond the material. Indeed, it involves political principles, the integrity of borders, symbols, the sovereignty of the state, and the emotions and fears surrounding uncontrolled population movements.[32]

Some European national governments, such as the UK, seem to suggest that the best way to deal with the proliferation of irregular, unwanted migrants is to ignore their travails on the new frontline of migration, not to do anything by way of rescue amid the increasing loss of life on the seas and in the desert, nor accept any refugee quota – so as to serve as a natural deterrent and an acceptable way to discourage immigration. Thus, Britain has been reluctant to support a sustained EU search-and-rescue operation to preventing further mass drowning of migrants and refugees in the Mediterranean, claiming that it would contribute to more people dying needlessly on Europe's doorstep, and that it would simply encourage more people to attempt the dangerous sea crossing.[33] Ironically, the UK government stated, 'We do not support planned search-and-rescue operations in the Mediterranean; the government believed there was an unintended "pull factor", encouraging more migrants to attempt the dangerous sea crossing and thereby

[27] Ibid.
[28] Franck Düvell and Bastian Vollmer, 'Irregular Migration in and from the Neighbourhood of the EU. A comparison of Morocco, Turkey and Ukraine'. *European Commission, Clandestino*, September 2009. 5.
[29] Franck Düvell and Bastian Vollmer, 5.
[30] See Frontex, *Interceptions at EU land and sea borders during 2008*. Warsaw: Frontex, 2009.
[31] Franck Düvell, 'Paths into irregularity. The Legal and Political construction of irregular migration', *European Journal of Migration and Law*, 13, 2011, 275-295.
[32] Franck Düvell and Bastian Vollmer, 5.
[33] See Alan Travis, 'UK axes support for Mediterranean migrant rescue operation'. The *Guardian*, Monday 27 October 2014.

leading to more tragic and unnecessary deaths. The government believes the most effective way to prevent refugees and migrants attempting this dangerous crossing is to focus our attention on countries of origin and transit, as well as taking steps to fight the people smugglers who wilfully put lives at risk by packing migrants into unseaworthy boats.'[34] The British refusal came to light as the official Italian search-and-rescue operation, Mare Nostrum, was due to come to an end after contributing for over twelve months to the rescue of an estimated 150,000 people since the Lampedusa tragedies in which 500 migrants died in October 2013. Despite these efforts, more than 2,500 people are known to have drowned or gone missing in the Mediterranean in 2014 alone.

Africa appears to be the continent that matters most to EU policy-makers working on migration. The prevailing perspective of the EU concerning African migration is still focussed mainly on security and prevention. The politicization of immigration has attained an alarming proportion in which immigrants and asylum-seekers are portrayed as a challenge to the protection of national identity and welfare provisions. Thus, one main focus of the European Commission and of European Council policies and meetings has been to counter the entry of illegal migrants through EU's southern and eastern borders. The security shift in EU migration policy contradicts the so-called global approach to migration. Also witnessed is the externalisation of border controls, in which countries close to European coastlines (Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya and Turkey) have been encouraged to co-operate on specific security issues, including border management and readmission agreements. The adoption of rigid and uniform EU immigration laws has turned the coasts of southern Italy and Spain into important points of entry into continental Europe, notwithstanding the 'securitization' of migration and externalization of border controls. One consequence is that it is increasingly transforming and translating Europe into a 'fortress'.

Ethical Politics of Migration and African-led Churches in Europe

The uncertainty described above no doubt has implications for immigrants, the migratory process but also for religious communities such as African-led churches that are dominated by both regular and irregular migrants. It is within these ecologies of migration that we better understand the relevance and resilience of religion within the African immigrant and diaspora communities. These developments raise the ethics and theology of migration, both in the unethical posture of the EU towards vulnerable regular or irregular and transit immigrants, their sometimes inhuman treatment at the hands of security operatives and immigration personnel, and their maltreatment and exploitation at the hands of people smugglers, sex traffickers and all those who profit from the booming migration industry in human bodies – men, women and children. The attitude of EU countries has varied from silence, ignoring them as they drown and die, to debates of how to rescue them and give them temporary shelter, and how to deal with the people smugglers.

The 'august' visit of British Prime Minister, David Cameron to the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG) Festival of Life event in April 2015, on the eve of the UK parliamentary election, best epitomizes the ambivalent stance of Tory politicians on immigration. Cameron seems to have turned into a temporary pastor-prophet while giving a disguised manifesto speech at the event. Cameron enthused and I will quote generously here:

> I want to thank you, Pastor Agu, and I'd like to thank Pastor Adeboye too – thank you, Daddy G.O. (General Overseer). It is an honour to be here, and I'm proud of this festival which started as a camp just off the Lagos expressway and set the world alight. It is now a permanent fixture here in London and I'm delighted it's getting bigger and it's getting better every year. Now, I have to say I don't envy the organisers of tonight: it must be like

[34] Lady Anelay, former Foreign Office Minister spelled out British policy in the House of Lords. See: The *Guardian*, Monday 27 October 2014.

> the feeding of the five thousand, except I can see you – you are forty five thousand. You must be relieved that it's just spiritual food on the menu tonight.
>
> Now, I remember when my good friend Boris Johnson came here to the Festival of Life a few years ago, he made some comments on the subject of aspiration. He said he believed in aspiration, and he looked out into this huge crowd and he said he knew someone would now be out there who would follow in his footsteps. Someone who would one day become Mayor of this great city of London. Well, I would go further. I believe in aspiration; I believe the only limit to someone's potential is their own ambition and talent, and I look out into this crowd and I can see someone who will hold my role and become Prime Minister of this great country… Now, for me, tonight is about one thing. It's about family. You're here with your own family: parents and children, siblings and cousins, aunts and uncles. You're united with your spiritual family; old friends, dear friends, people you've known for many years, and together we are all part of one family. As Jesus said, with his arms outstretched to his disciples, 'Here are my mother and my brothers, for whoever does the will of my Father in heaven, is my brother, my sister and my mother' – and that is what we are. As God's children, we are all one big family. Now when I was a child, I had a very specific image of what a church was. I thought: to be a church, it had to be an old grey building with a slate roof and a big spire. That it had to have pews and a pulpit, and a graveyard where the naughty boys would play hide-and-seek; but I was wrong and you proved that. You proved that church is people, church is a family, and it doesn't matter what the roof is made of because, with your energy, your devotion, your love of Jesus Christ, you raised that roof every time. Now your dedication to family – your family in blood and your family in humanity – it goes way beyond this room. I think of how many ways you love your neighbour. With care for those who are sick and lonely, with mentoring for teenagers who think they have no hope, with fund-raising for hospices, for looked-after children, for those suffering unimaginable trauma overseas. Like Jesus turning water into wine, you turn loneliness into companionship, you turn deprivation into comfort, and you turn lost lives into lives with purpose.
>
> For years I have tried to explain to people what the 'Big Society' is. Some people were determined not to understand it. Well, I should have brought them here to the Festival of Life because this is the 'Big Society' in action, and it's as vibrant and as loud and as powerful as ever. Now, just think how great our country Britain could be if we built on that, if we had an even bigger 'Big Society' where even more people shared your family values. Values of prudence, of hard work, of looking out for those who fall on hard times. With these values, we can achieve the Britain we all want to live in. Where the oppressed are cared for, where the lonely are befriended, where it's not where you come from but it's the content of your character that really matters. Tonight, let us be proud that this is a Christian country where we stand for the freedom to practise your faith and where we stand up for Christians and all those who are persecuted anywhere in our world; they are family too. A year ago this week, 276 Nigerian schoolgirls were cruelly snatched by Boko Haram. I am a father of two young daughters, Florence and Nancy, and I have an understanding of what it's like to lose a child in tragic circumstances. So my prayer tonight is that those girls will be found soon and there will be peace in Nigeria. So thank you once again for having me here tonight with you. Thank you once again to the great Pastor Daddy G.O. Thank you to Pastor Agu and your team: thank you for what you do, thank you for making the Festival of Life such a great British tradition. So let us tonight join with our brothers and sisters here. Let us pledge to make this 'Big Society' bigger. Let us pledge to make our great country better. Let us make this Festival of Life even better, even louder and even prouder next year. Thank you and goodnight.[35]

I would need another essay to unpack the themes and threads that such a speech encumbers, yet it is ironic that the Prime Minister was speaking to a mixed audience of over 45,000 worshippers, many of whom are probably irregular or undocumented migrants. How is it that the same man who spoke very

[35] For a full transcript of Prime Minister Cameron's speech at the RCCG, Festival of Life, London, see: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nt-hB1ROjjg

passionately about building a 'Big Family' and 'Big Society' – including migrants, refugees in Britain – is the same one whose government prefers immigrants to drown on the seas with reckless abandon? He leads a government that refuses to take in refugees in the EU's temporary measure to provide shelter for immigrants and refugees rescued from the Mediterranean Sea. Is it a coincidence that Cameron visited an African church event on the eve of the UK parliamentary election? The General Overseer of RCCG, Enoch Adeboye, who was attending the event from Nigeria, seized the opportunity to offer prayers for the Prime Minister. He prayed:

> Will you please stretch your hands to our Prime Minister and together pray that the Almighty God will give him wisdom – the Wisdom of Solomon. God will give him the courage of David so that, in his days and in our days, Great Britain will be great again. Let's pray together. Pray that God will grant him divine wisdom, courage, strength and special anointing from heaven. So that, in his days and in our days, Great Britain will be great again. That the entire glory of this nation will be fully restored. That there be revival in this land. So, Father Almighty, we want to thank you for our Prime Minister. Your Word says that we are to pray for those who are in authority. So in obedience, Lord, to Your commandment, we pray that you will give our Prime Minister divine wisdom, divine enablement and divine courage. So that he will rule this nation aright. That during his time and during our own days, Great Britain will be great again. Father, you are the burden-bearer, help him to carry his burdens. Please bless him, bless his family and, Lord God Almighty, bless the United Kingdom. In Jesus' mighty name we have prayed. Amen.

Tactically, neither the Prime Minister nor the General Overseer made any mention of the election that was a few days ahead. One might guess that Cameron obviously recognized this religious community as a voting constituency at a time of uncertainty of his re-election as Prime Minister. The fact that he won the election could be reinterpreted by some church members as an answer to prayers rendered during the visit. Much more striking is the fact that the Prime Minister's visit is indicative of the potentially civic relevance that African-led churches have come to assume in the UK. Some churches are playing a civic role to cushion hardships, frustration and uncertainties faced by immigrants against the backdrop of public narratives of identity and belonging. The physical, emotional and psychological trauma that many African immigrants undergo under dastardly circumstances explains why African-led churches have assumed an abode of security and community. It is within these scenarios of uncertainty, insecurity, the shattered hopes and forlorn dreams of migrants that the church appears to fill a vacuum.

The role and place of African-led churches as spiritual vacuum-fillers, as areas for socialization, and as engines for social, religious (spiritual) and capital formation, are noteworthy. African-led churches in Europe, in a limited sense, help to cushion the pains and strains of unemployment by serving both as employers and as channels of information for job opportunities at both the formal and informal economic sub-sectors of society. Some are involved in the provision of spiritual and social services, thus transforming church premises as both religious (spiritual) and social centres, where both religious rituals and non-religious activities can take place contemporaneously.

Both regular and irregular migrants employ religious resources and appropriate religious rituals through the different stages of the migration process. The role of religious and spiritual specialists such as Christian pastors, prophets and prophetesses underscore the centrality of prophecy, divination and spiritual armament in the preparatory stages of the journey. Prospective migrants and their families patronize sacred and religious sites, shrines, prayer camps and religious events to fortify themselves against the machinations of witches, sorcerers, the evil eye, envious family relatives and friends. The religious impulse and experiences encountered in the preparation and take-off stage of the potential immigrant or traveller has consequences for the journey itself, but also implications for the latter stages of the immigration process as well as their settlement. 'The immigrant condition is riddled with hope, hardship, broken dreams, and measures of success. Immigrant Christianity serves as a balm in the entire process, ranging from why and how the

immigrants came to their new countries, to how they cope in the new homeland. The journey begins with prayers in Pentecostal churches and prayer camps for travel visas, to prayers in immigrant churches for everyday survival needs such as working permits, employment, and money for rent mortgage, health insurance and other bills. There is also the added pressure to accumulate money and goods to transfer home.'[36]

The lived experiences of African Christian immigrants and refugees shape their spiritual, religious lives, just as theologies are constructed from these experiences and the reservoir of indigenous religious worldviews retained by them in their 'new homes'. The ways in which immigrants' experiences shape their religious lives, and in which their spiritualities speak to and condition their day-to-day experiences and expressions, is illuminated by their narratives partly woven 'between and betwixt' themes of survival and security, adaptation and mobility. Such narratives are verbal contestations of a growing 'fortressization' of Europe characterized by the adoption of stringent, restrictive immigration policies. Immigrants' actions are to be understood in terms of their own goals, strategies established first in order to survive, and after that, to adapt or not to adapt to the new social milieu. There is a certain link between theology of hope and theology of empowerment in the diaspora.

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