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## **African Christians in Europe: Introduction**

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The academic study of African Christian communities in Europe has proliferated since the groundbreaking work of people like Roswith Gerloff (1992), Gerrie ter Haar (1998, 1999) and Afe Adogame (1998). African churches, more than groups from Latin America or Asia, seem to draw the academic attention, especially within the disciplines of religious studies and cultural anthropology. The burgeoning of these churches as well as their liturgical exuberance might be the rationale for this focus on African churches.

Initial research was mainly ethnographical, focusing on thick descriptions of these new phenomena. In recent years the paradigms of transnationalism, of reverse mission, of recognition, and of geography locality and place have served as analytical foci in the study of these groups.

This issue consists of six contributions that focus on theoretical issues in the study of African Christian communities in Europe. Ramon Sarró and Joana Santos in their article on the Kimbanguist Church in Portugal show how the notion of ‘return’ characterizes the life of the Kimbanguists in Lisbon and demonstrate that there is a link between this notion of return and the growing respect for the contributions of the wife of Simon Kimbangu in the Kimbanguist Church. Nienke Pruiksma discusses the limited usefulness of territorial notions of context in situations of migration. Taking her starting point in a case-study of the Celestial Church of Christ in Amsterdam she argues that in circumstances of migration,

context should be understood as a network of relationships. Ruy Blanes, in his article on the Tokoist Church in Portugal reflects on the various implications of the notions of recognition and belonging and exemplifies their multifariousness by demonstrating the close connections that exist between the Tokoist Church in Lisbon and in Angola. Richard Burgess' study of Nigerian Pentecostal Churches in Britain shows that a reduction of the notion of reverse mission to evangelization fails to appreciate the broad societal involvement of Nigerian Pentecostals. Katrin Maier and Simon Coleman focus on the societal role of Nigerian Pentecostal Churches in the United Kingdom. In their article on the Redeemed Christian Church of God they explore the manifold ways in which the RCCG relates to the British state and argue that migrant churches' patterns of relating to the government should be understood against the background of church-state relations in the home country, i.e. Nigeria. In the issue's last article Kim Knibbe explores which theoretical frameworks are most suitable to analyze the aspirations of the Redeemed Christian Church of God to plant churches worldwide. The issue has a joint bibliography, compiled by Martha Frederiks.

All authors contributing to this issue participated in two research projects funded by the 2008–2010 Norface program "Religion as a Reemerging Force in Europe": "Transnational Nigerian-initiated Pentecostal churches, networks and believers in three northern countries" (Knibbe and Burgess) and "How African immigrants redefine the European religious heritage" (Sarró, Santos, Blanes, Pruiksma, Frederiks, Coleman and Maier). The articles present some of the research findings of these projects.