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The notion that disenchantment is an inevitable by-product of modernisation has occupied a central place in the thinking not only of European social scientists, but also of policy-makers and large parts of the general public. It is therefore with some surprise that Europeans have noted evidence of what appears to be a partial re-enchantment of their societies. This process is most closely associated with the adoption of religious rhetoric, religious practice and displays of religious affiliation in public space by groups of immigrant origin, especially Muslims. European countries have responded in distinctive ways to this trend, according to their specific traditions of separating church and state, or the realms of religion and politics. The rapid politicisation of Islam in every part of Europe has highlighted the continuing importance of religion for many people in the world, adding new complexities to the considerations of government policy-makers and academic analysts.

The present article deals with the dynamism of religious belief and practice not among Muslims, but among Christian immigrants, in this case of African origin.¹ In brief, I will argue that their religious dynamism has nothing to do with a process of re-enchantment among the people concerned, since they were never *dis*-enchanted in the first place. Any analysis in those terms diverts attention from the pivotal role that religion has always played, and continues to play, in Africa. In the case of those particular communities that I studied in some detail over ten years ago—namely Africans living in the Netherlands, especially Amsterdam—I further argue that the salience of their Christian commitment is not related to an attempt to preserve their African identities. On the contrary, I argue, the notion that African Christians represent a specifically ethnic form of religious community is, in the case of the Netherlands, more accurately seen as an attempt of Dutch society to preserve *its own* original identity. The argument may be extended to other countries in Europe with substantial numbers

1. Christian migrant communities have so far been largely overlooked in the debates concerning the public role of religion.

of African immigrant Christians, as part of a more widespread negotiation concerning the inclusion or exclusion of groups of immigrant origin.

Why Africa is not re-enchanted

The people who most readily perceive large areas of the world to be undergoing a process of re-enchantment appear to be observers who are themselves from societies that have become secularised, notably in Western Europe. This provides them with a very particular perspective from which to view the world, but not one that is generally representative. In regard to Africa, a more fruitful approach to matters of religion should start with considering Africa's religious dynamics in the context of the continent's own history. I have argued elsewhere (Ellis, Ter Haar, 2004)² that the historically entrenched relationship between politics, society and religion in Africa was marked by colonial rule. At that time, European administrators adopted a secular approach to matters of public policy that they thought to be an appropriate means of governing societies in Africa, as well as in other parts of the world, neglecting the fact that religion played traditionally a role in the governance of these societies. In retrospect, the separation of religion and politics that was characteristic of the colonial approach to governance may be seen never to have been much more than superficial. Recent manifestations of apparent religious revival in Africa are therefore not to be interpreted as evidence that Africa is re-enchanting (never having been disenchanting in the first place), but rather that it is re-connecting with its pre-colonial past. The perceived revival of religion may also reflect a reaction to modernisation and development as these were experienced in Africa in the decades after 1945—an observation that is quite often made regarding Islamic movements in the Middle East. The processes of modernisation and development that dominated government policy from the late colonial period through the first years of independence effected enormous changes in people's lives in the space of just one or two generations—including as a result of huge demographic growth, migration from the country to the city, the decline of agrarian economies and the disruption of agrarian patterns of life and religious culture. Yet, the changes subsumed under the terms “modernisation” and “development” did not bring the type of progress and prosperity that many people in Africa had expected (Ter Haar, Ellis, 2006). Ironically, this is one of the main reasons why so many Africans have left their country in recent years to try their economic luck in Europe, bringing their religion with them. It is mostly migrants of this sort, overwhelmingly young, that are responsible for the large number of new Christian congregations that have sprung up in all the countries where they have settled.

2. Notably chap. 9. See also Ter Haar (2007: 19-27).

Hence, the idea of re-enchantment does not provide a suitable analytical tool for understanding the religious dynamics in Africa as well as the new religious dynamics in Europe associated with African immigrants. The concept of re-enchantment has been propagated notably by anthropologists lacking a historical approach to the concept of religion itself. In the following paragraphs, therefore, I will first discuss the concept of religion, both in a general sense and with specific reference to (sub-Saharan) Africa. I will then continue to discuss the dynamics of religious change in Africa, and how these affect other parts of the world, notably Europe. In doing so, I will make extensive use of my earlier research concerning the so-called African religious diaspora,³ as notably recorded in my book *Halfway to Paradise* (Ter Haar, 1998). I will argue that reference to *African* religion(s), as a separate category, is increasingly losing significance in a globalising world and may serve political aims. This is clearly manifested in the case of African Christians in contemporary Europe, who tend to identify themselves first and foremost as *global* Christians.

What is religion?

Our common understanding of religion is largely defined by a Western perception of the world and coloured by the intellectual traditions of Europe and North America. Hence, a modern interpretation of religion that has become popular in the West is religion as “ultimate concern”. This is a term coined in the 1960s by the German-American theologian Paul Tillich—and also elaborated by the American anthropologist Clifford Geertz—by which religion is explained and defined in terms of an ultimate system of meaning (Tillich, 1959; Geertz, 1973). Through religion, it is suggested, human beings create a cosmos, a universe that is not a chaos but an orderly system that gives meaning and direction to people’s lives. Such a view represents the latest trend in the academic endeavour of defining religion that started with the nineteenth-century British anthropologist E. B. Tylor, who defined religion simply and succinctly as a “belief in spiritual beings” (1958: 8). Central to Tylor’s definition is the communicative relationship between believers and the invisible beings in whose existence they believe. “Beings” are like persons: they are approachable and they can be addressed. Communication and interaction with them is presupposed not only in Tylor’s definition, but also those of the many scholars who have defined religion in similar terms, namely with the emphasis on the *relationship* between human beings and spiritual beings (Platvoet, 1999).⁴ It is this type of definition—rather

3. I am critical of the use of the word “diaspora” in connection with Africans in Europe. I have discussed this at length in Ter Haar (1996, 2004).

4. Platvoet stresses the communication aspect of “religion”. The importance of relationships as an analytical concept is also emphasised by the British historian Terence O. Ranger in a short article entitled “African traditional religion” (1991: 106-14).

than the historically more recent Tillich/Geertz type—that speaks to the reality of religion in Africa (as well as many other parts of the world, for that matter).

Religion, thus, is a concept open to different interpretations that are dependent on local context and specific history. In the case of Africa, religion refers to a belief in the existence of an invisible world, *distinct* but not separate from the visible one, which is home to spirit(ual) beings with effective powers over the material world (Ellis, Ter Haar, 2004: 14). It implies that active communication is possible between the human and the spirit worlds, in a form of dialogical exchange. Other than in most Western-Christian ideas of religion, there is no perceived relation of dependency between the human and the spirit worlds. Human beings can influence the attitude of spirit beings through their own behaviour, in such a way as to further their material interests. This is important because the spirit world is the locus of power. Spiritual power is real and effective power for those who believe in it. For many Africans, power in the material world cannot be separated from its source in the spiritual world (Ellis, Ter Haar, 2004 chap. 5). This provides a major reason, for example, for African politicians to meddle in the spirit world, an observation that is not relevant to Africa only, but appears of much wider application. Religion and politics are both ways of thinking about, organising, and accessing power. Both are always in competition to some extent, since they have rather similar functions in the deployment of power, itself an invisible and elusive entity.

Religion—in the defined sense—has never been absent from Africa. It may be considered to be undergoing a “revival” only in the sense that religion is occupying public space in Africa in a manner that is historically unprecedented, but that does show some interesting continuities with pre-colonial times. Africa’s formal institutions of government were almost without exception originally colonial creations. In colonial times, they corresponded to Western ideas about how institutions of government should function, about the need for secular states and the separation of politics and religion in national government. Such a view was continued by the first generation of African nationalists. What we have been seeing, basically since the end of the cold war in 1989, is religion re-entering public space as people search for new sources of legitimacy and power, including politicians themselves.

The democratisation movement of the 1990s was very important in projecting religion in the public realm. It was associated with the collapse of political ideologies that had previously been dominant and had divided Africa basically into two ideological power blocks, associated with either the liberal Western world or the Communist world. The loss of these secular ideologies created space for the emergence of religious ideologies and the emergence of spiritual movements into political space, as people sought alternative sources of authority and at the same time were freed from the institutional constraints that were previously imposed on them by single-party governments. The important point

in this regard is that many forms of what is often seen from the outside as religious revival challenge the very basis of legitimacy of states that operate through institutions and norms of governance originally created in colonial times. Not only do these colonial institutions lack legitimacy because they have become increasingly ineffective, but also because in the view of those concerned they are seen as having little or no spiritual basis. Today this has become notably visible in the various Islamic movements that contest the authority of the secular state.

Hence, the perceived “re-enchantment of the world” may be better described as a reconfiguration of available resources—both material *and* spiritual—for a successful life today. The enhanced public and political importance of religion should not be confused with a return to the past, nor considered as an anachronism, not even when it takes forms that have historical roots extending to pre-colonial times. Contemporary religious revivals mark a re-ordering of religion and politics, sometimes—or even quite often—recalling older indigenous patterns. It is therefore important not to look at religion in Africa in isolation, but to insist instead on paying due regard to religious ideologies in relation to political practice in Africa today (Ellis, Ter Haar, 2004).

Religious Change in Africa

The concept of re-enchantment also obscures the fact that the religious traditions of Africa have always been characterised by dynamics of change that have allowed them throughout the ages to incorporate and absorb new ideas and practices, along with new human and spirit beings. This can be seen not only in the ways in which Islam and Christianity have become part of the religious heritage of Africa, but also in the creative acceptance and re-creation of new religious movements, such as oriental ones. In particular, this creative dynamic has led to the continuing strength of what is generally known—academically and in popular speech—as African traditional religions, a term that has contributed strongly to the perception of African religions as basically static—or at the best of times open to micro-change—and a-historical, and for the bearers of these religions to be seen as passive recipients of any “modern” impulses that happen to come their way. Conventional academic discourse regarding Africa helps to maintain the myth that Africa is a continent that has been left virtually untouched by meaningful historical change of the sort acknowledged in respect of most other parts of the world. Hence, in conformity with general images of traditional society, African indigenous religions—or community religions as I prefer to call them, following others in my discipline—have long been seen as more or less self-contained units, which can be studied in isolation. This frequently creates the impression that historical influence on such societies and their religions has occurred only in modern times and as a result of contact with the

Western world (Ter Haar, 2000). Among many other things, this denies what is often referred to today as Africans' own "agency".

The developments described and discussed below provide a telling example of the point I am trying to make. On the basis of extensive research conducted in Nigeria, Rosalind Hackett speaks of a process of revitalisation of traditional religion in twentieth-century Africa (Hackett, 1991; Ter Haar, 2000: 15ff). She identifies the following five key tendencies in the process: a tendency to universalisation, to modernisation, to commercialisation, to politicisation, and to individualisation. The tendency towards universalisation is tantamount to an effort to enhance the attractiveness of African community religions and to increase their reach outside the particular group where a specific religion first came into existence. The tendency to modernisation takes various forms, for example that of a reform movement which propagates elements such as peace, stability and justice. The tendency to politicisation can often be encountered among government and political leaders in search of means of buttressing their power and authority. The tendency to commercialisation is apparent as part of a process whereby particular elements of traditional religions are, as it were, manufactured—developed into products and offered for sale on the market. The tendency to individualisation marks a shift from a public-oriented approach to a more person-centred one.

One might also see these tendencies, as I would be inclined to do, as various expressions of what others have called "modernity". We may even consider such tendencies as "instances of secularisation" (Droogers, 1981: 144) within the sphere of African traditional religions, provided we are prepared to use the term "secularisation" as a concept of family resemblance only and bearing in mind that the term can only be used meaningfully if one accepts that a clear distinction can be made between the "religious" and the "secular", which is questionable in many cases concerning Africa. Yet, if with this in mind we compare Hackett's five tendencies with the five conceptions of secularisation distinguished by the American philosopher Larry Shiner, we can see that at least two of the five tendencies fit the model. In short, secularisation, in Shiner's view, is conceived as (i) the decline of religion, (ii) "conformity with the world" (that is, a preoccupation with the material world), (iii) the desacralisation of the world, (iv) the disengagement of society from religion, and (v) the transposition of beliefs and patterns of behaviour from the "religious" to the "secular" sphere (Dekker, Tennekes, 1981: 10-11). If we apply this to the specific context of Africa, we may find some analytical meaning in the distinction between the religious and the secular, which is otherwise of little importance. Conformity with the world (ii) and the transposition of beliefs and patterns of behaviour from the religious to the secular sphere (v) are both implied in the tendencies to commercialisation and politicisation especially. Thus we see once again the inappropriateness of the term re-enchantment in regard to Africa, where there is no historical divide between the religious and the secular.

Religious change in Africa has taken on yet another dimension in recent years with the emergence of African-initiated churches worldwide, including in Europe. This may be seen as another expression of the tendency to universalisation that was described above regarding Africa's indigenous religions. This time it is related to one of the most remarkable trends of our time, the scope and size of international migration. This includes migration from sub-Saharan Africa.

African Christians in Europe: religion and identity

In the last two decades, African immigrants have spread over virtually all industrialised countries of western and northern Europe. One unexpected result of Africans' migration to Europe has been the foundation of new Christian congregations in all the places where they have settled, thus adding a new (and unexpected) dimension to Europe's multicultural society (Ter Haar, 1998). In view of contemporary discussions on multiculturalism and the recognition of religion, the question emerges of how relevant the issue of African identity is to African Christians in Europe and how this relates to their religious—that is, Christian—identity.

Today, churches founded by Africans—or African-initiated churches—exist all over Europe. Many of these—if not most—have been founded as independent congregations, that is, independent from the mainline churches in the host country. The most common way for outsiders to refer to these new churches in Europe is as “African churches”, a label often rejected by the churches themselves on the grounds that it marks a restriction of their task and mission in Europe since, as far as they are concerned, they aim to minister to both Africans and non-Africans, to black and white people. In fact, most churches label themselves as “international churches”, expressing their aspiration to be part of the international world in which they believe themselves to have a universal task.⁵ Just as European missionaries once believed in their divine task of bringing the gospel to Africa, African church leaders in Europe are today convinced of their mission to bring the gospel back to those who originally provided them with it. For many African Christians, therefore, migration to Europe is not just an economic necessity, but also seen as a God-given opportunity to evangelise among those whom they believe to have gone astray. To them, Europe is as the “valley of dry bones” described in the vision of the prophet Ezekiel,⁶ and will be dependent on Africa for its renewed vitality.

5. Ter Haar (1998) provides various examples. In recent years, some well-known churches with headquarters in Africa have truly internationalised, with branches containing thousands of members in all parts of the world, including in Europe. One pertinent example of such “mega-churches” is the Redeemed Christian Church of God, which is represented in many European countries.

6. Book of Ezekiel, chap. 37, vs. 1-15.

The emergence of African congregations in Europe marks a new phase in the history of African independent churches, commonly known in the literature as AIC's. Since their emergence on the African continent, the term "African Independent Churches" has been widely used to describe a type of church whose main characteristic is that they are founded and led by black Africans. Their origin dates from the late nineteenth century and is related to the conditions of that time. They range in size from some tens of people in small local congregations to thousands or even millions of members in large well-established institutions such as the Zion Christian Church (ZCC) in South Africa and neighbouring countries, or the Church of Jesus Christ on Earth through the prophet Simon Kimbangu, commonly known as the Kimbanguist Church, that has also spread to Europe. The same is true, for example, of some Nigerian churches, such as the Church of the Lord (Aladura), commonly known as the Aladura Church, and the Celestial Church of Christ.

However, the name "African Independent Churches" is not a self-chosen name but a label originally imposed by outsiders, namely representatives of the historic mainline churches. These are the former European mission churches that, until a century or so ago, held a monopoly in the field of church development in Africa. "The 'I' for 'independent'" originally reflected the viewpoint of these traditional mainline churches, that considered the independent churches as having broken away from the mother churches. In more recent times, a shift in influence from the traditional mainline churches to the so-called independent churches expressed itself in the new, self-chosen name of African *indigenous* churches. This is not just a question of words. The change of name reflects a change of emphasis from the outsider's position to that of the insider. From the insider's point of view, the aspect of separation from a mother church is not relevant. What counts is establishing a self-image, in this case as an indigenous church, creating one's own identity in the process.

In the course of time new appellations have emerged from within the AICs themselves, altering the meaning of the letter "I". Thus AIC's are also known as African-instituted churches, and as African-initiated churches, representing different historical angles from which the phenomenon can be viewed, while in all cases retaining the same acronym of AIC. This shows to the outside world that most—if not all—churches in Africa are today under the leadership of Africans, including the former mission churches in Africa. By using the same acronym and interpreting the letter "I" with different words, one may see how the status of these churches has changed throughout the century. The changes of name are an eloquent statement of the dynamics of this particular history.⁷ The new African-initiated churches in Europe, I have suggested in my book *Halfway to Paradise*, represent a new type of AIC's in this history (Ter Haar,

7. These are discussed at length in Ter Haar (1995: 159-70).

1998: 21-6). To do justice to the historic change implied in the worldwide spread of African-initiated churches, I have proposed to invest the initials "AIC" with a new meaning, namely that of African International Churches. To refer to them in this way takes account of their African origin while at the same time recognising the continuity of these churches with the universal Christian tradition. In any event, this outlook accords with that of members of the churches themselves, who are conscious of having entered the international field.

It remains striking that the conventional way of writing about African-initiated churches outside Africa is to refer to them in ethnic terms, even though ethnic labels are commonly not indicated in the names of the churches concerned. The interesting question is why this is so. With specific reference to the situation in the Netherlands, I have argued that the discussion regarding the need for African Christians in Europe to develop their "own" identity as African Christians is being led by their European counterparts and serves European rather than African interests (Ter Haar, 1998: 83-85). African Christians in the Netherlands identify themselves first and foremost as Christians and only in the second instance as Africans or African Christians. In their own view, their adherence to Christianity constitutes the most important element of their public identity. Yet there is a general tendency in the Netherlands to separate African Christians from their Dutch counterparts by insisting on their perceived African identity, while ignoring their shared Christian identity. In effect, this tendency leads to the segregation of Africans in Dutch society and as such is in striking contrast to the general demand for the integration of foreigners.

In the Netherlands, this practice conforms to a long tradition in Dutch society where the development of specific group identities has been the mainstay of the country's social and political system. This system has served the Netherlands well in the past by providing political stability and a high degree of legal tolerance, but it is also worth noting that it provided some of the intellectual basis for the South African system of apartheid. In the latter case—and unlike the Netherlands—a specific identity was imposed on, and not defined by, the people concerned. It takes us back to the vital question of whether an identity is self-imposed or imposed by others, and whose interests are served in respective cases. In other words, my research findings concerning African Christians in the Netherlands support the thesis proposed by Charles Taylor that identity is often shaped by the misrecognition of others (Taylor, 1994). It would be interesting to compare the Dutch attitude in response to the challenge posed by Africans' religious initiatives with the situation in other countries of Europe, where different social mechanisms exist for the integration of foreigners, due to differences of context. France, with its unique tradition of *laïcité*, is a case in point.

The difference between the ascribed ethnic identity of African Christians, on the one hand, and their religious self-definition, on the other, is too important to ignore and leads one to suspect underlying motives, of either a religious or a

political nature. The insistence by many non-Africans on the existence of a specific *African* identity may be inspired by a concern for religious orthodoxy, or it may respond to a need of white Christian communities to distinguish themselves from the black Christian communities in their midst, whom they believe to be different. Politically, the concept of African identity appears to be employed mainly as a way of emphasising the perceived existence of “alterity”, or the difference between self and the other, by ascribing to Africans in Europe a “unique” ethnic identity (Ter Haar, 2003: 261-74). One of the most striking features of European politics today is the attempt to erect walls—even literally⁸—between Europe and Africa, and between Europeans and Africans, with the objective of preventing the latter from settling permanently in the West. Even more striking is the emergence of a Europe-wide official policy based on a consensus that the proper place for Africans is in Africa, and not in Europe. To legitimise such a view, it is essential to have a theory which justifies the fundamental difference between the European “Self” and the African “Other”. Such a theory is advanced, mostly unintentionally, by the tendency of intellectuals of various sorts to ascribe a special identity to African Christians in Europe derived from their ethnic background, due to a long intellectual attachment to the notion of multiculturalism. Hence, academic specialists tend to emphasise migrants’ African roots, in preference to seeking the meaning of their lives in Europe, where they now live. This contributes to the segregation of Africans and non-Africans in this part of the world, and also ignores the religious element in their current identity. In a different way, this has been furthered by a wide-spread public insistence that Africans in Europe should develop their “own” —meaning “African”—identity.⁹ This is not to deny that Africans in Europe have such a right; my argument is simply that the necessity to promote this should not be imposed on them.

The insistence of many non-Africans on the existence of a specific African identity, whether inspired by religious orthodoxy or by intellectual liberalism, is in effect a continuation of the old colonial and early missionary discourse and praxis regarding the perceived “otherness” of Africans. I would like to argue not only that the definition of identity should result from a process of negotiation in which the people concerned participate (as Taylor also argues), but also that the development of an ethnic identity can take place only if one’s personal identity, that is the integrity of the individual, has been secured. Obviously, the

8. This notably concerns the Spanish enclaves on the North African coast, Ceuta and Melilla, which are both considered weak spots in the defence of Fortress Europe. In Ceuta a barbed wire wall was erected around the enclave financed by the European Union (Carr, 1997: 61-6). Since then, new and higher walls have been erected to try and put a halt to migration from Africa to Europe. Similar solutions to “illegal” immigration can now be observed all over the world.

9. Although due to recent political developments the public outlook on this has changed in most European countries, it seems not to have altered the public perception that Africa has basically a “unique” identity associated with ethnicity.

mechanisms for that are influenced by the size of a particular minority group vis-à-vis the majority population. Africans in Europe are a relatively small minority and have little or no power as a group. For many of them, their (Christian) religion helps them to achieve a degree of security and inner strength which may well encourage them in future to reconsider their self-identity specifically in terms of being “African” Christians. Or, alternatively, the experience of exclusion, inspired by racism or other mechanisms, may have a similar effect. This is the case, for example, in the United Kingdom where, due to the circumstances of an entirely different context, African and Afro-Caribbean church leaders tend to insist on their African identity in the experience of their faith (Kalilombe, 1998: 173-93).

Concepts of otherness, like all ideas, have a history, and in the case of Europe it is one which not only includes the experiences of colonialism and nineteenth-century missionary enterprise, but also ideas generated by media reports of more recent events, including famines and wars. All of this provides part of the ideological baggage which many Europeans carry with them and which they may deploy when they read a description of somebody or something as “African”. This baggage is a legacy of the past, which cannot simply be wished away. But in applying labels and descriptions today it seems important to be aware of the great speed with which Africa itself is changing and with which its links with other parts of the world are being re-forged, sometimes in surprising ways.

Race and ethnicity: spot the difference

In studying African communities, in or out of Africa, the scholarly focus is often on ethnicity and ethnic adherence, often at the expense of the religious factor. Why is this so? Or, in our case, why do Western scholars prefer to single out ethnicity in their efforts to understand the development of the African diaspora in Europe? The focus on ethnicity rather than on religion is no doubt partly due to the fact that analysts who themselves view the world in secular terms tend to regard religion either as a form of false consciousness or at best as a symbol of some other force, such as an expression of ethnicity. In a broader sense, it may also be a consequence of the fact that African communities, wherever they manifest themselves, are seen as belonging largely to the domain of anthropology. So prevalent is the study of ethnicity in modern anthropology that a leading American anthropologist, Sally Falk Moore, has wondered if, in terms of anthropological theory, ethnicity has become the *avatar* of tribe (Moore, 1994: 129). Anthropologists, like other Western observers, were—until quite recent times—accustomed to think of Africans as forming political and social groups called “tribes”, and to consider that such groups were a phenomenon characteristic of Africa and other parts of what would later be called the developing world. The idea, prevalent until the mid-twentieth century, that Africans

lived in “tribes” which were the vehicle of their ethnic identity, was also a racial one, combined with notions of hierarchy and evolution. While the concept of race is no longer scientifically respectable, and that of “tribe” is also avoided by many social scientists, the concept of ethnicity has come to enjoy wide currency.

The concept of ethnicity, in other words, has tended to replace the concept of race in the study of African communities in modern times, while the content has remained substantially the same. Ethnicity, like race, is an elusive concept. Both are essentially modern notions generated by the global expansion of European societies since the late fifteenth century when the gradual shrinking of the world brought Europeans into contact with human societies that seemed strikingly different, and whose difference was most obviously noticeable in the colour of their skin (Mason, 1995: 5).¹⁰ In its modern form, the concept of race developed in the eighteenth century as one of the products of the Enlightenment and further developed into a science of race during the nineteenth century when scientific theories came to replace religious beliefs in some respects. Thereafter, the process has been well described by the British historian Mark Mazower in his book about twentieth-century Europe (1998). The attack on scientific racism, Mazower shows, was particularly strong in Britain, where some researchers recommended already in the 1930s to use the term “ethnic group” rather than “race” to avoid the latter’s misleading biological associations (1998: 103-4).

Given the scientific discrediting of the concept of race, the concept of ethnicity provides in principle an alternative way of thinking about human diversity as it introduces other categories for defining differences between human populations. There appears to be no consensus as to how to define ethnicity, but most commentators tend to stress the cultural element. In other words, they tend to refer to some sort of cultural distinctiveness as the mark of an ethnic group. As always, there are different schools of thought in this matter, but an important one seems to adhere to the idea that ethnicity is most of all a matter of the processes by which boundaries are created and maintained between different groups. That makes it an interesting and relevant question as to by whom and how these boundaries are delineated. In modern Europe, when the identity of certain social groups thought to be ethnically distinct is brought into debate, the delineation is usually ascribed to the wish of a particular ethnic or religious minority to preserve or define its specific identity. This is usually considered in terms of a specific cultural identity, of which religion forms a part. The argument I have advanced in the case of African Christian communities in the Netherlands suggests the opposite, namely that the drawing of boundaries is a conscious or unconscious act on the part of the host society and as such the social and intellectual concomitant of the current political process of segregating human societies (Ter Haar, 1996, 2004).

10. The whole argument of this author concerning race and ethnicity is based on the assumption that these are relational concepts.

The term “ethnic” is often used as synonymous with people who are thought of as culturally different, almost as if “naturally” culturally different. This is conceived in the absence of clear standards, and either ignores or underestimates the importance of non-biological elements or mechanisms which are central to defining humans’ ability to create culture.¹¹ Its main attraction lies in its usefulness in distinguishing between “us” and “them”, thus furthering the process of “othering”. In practice, as the British sociologist David Mason has pointed out, the essential characteristic for membership of a so-called ethnic minority often appears to be the possession of a skin which is not “white”. In this way, the equation of cultural difference and ethnicity may become an instrument of social and political power, as with the designation of race. Or, in sociological terms, the attribution of ethnicity to others can thus become part of a process of denying the legitimacy of claims on resources by those concerned (Mason, 1995: 14). This, it seems to me, is eminently the case in present-day Europe whose main occupation today is the exclusion of all who try to come and share in its wealth.

An unforeseen future

Few people would have foreseen the religious changes that are taking place in Europe as a result of worldwide immigration. While secularisation has become a hallmark of modern Western society, there has been at the same time an influx of non-Western people for whom religion remains a major factor in private and public life. This includes Christians from all parts of the world, among whom African Christians are the most numerous and visible ones. It also includes African Muslims and African adherents of other so-called “world religions”, as well as adherents of so-called African traditional religions. In view of the modern developments described above, the distinction between “world” religions and “traditional” religions has become increasingly irrelevant.¹² Any objective analysis of the religious situation today points to the fact that they should be considered as belonging to one and the same category, namely that of the *world’s* religions. Rather than becoming weaker or otherwise declining in importance the religious traditions of Africa have emerged strong and vital in the encounter with the outside world. They may, in fact, contribute to the “re-enchantment” of Europe, where secularisation has been a hallmark of many societies for the last few decades.

11. Note that “culture” is also a much-debated concept and that there is no overall consensus as to its precise meaning. Today it is often taken among anthropologists to refer to “a class of phenomena, conceptualised for the purpose of serving their methodological and scientific needs”. On the basis of that, culture is seen as “composed of patterned and interrelated traditions, which are transmitted over time and space by non-biological mechanisms based on man’s uniquely developed linguistic and non-linguistic symbolising capacity” (Seymour-Smith, 1986: 65).

12. The uncritical use of the term “world religions” has been historically examined in a recent study by Masuzawa (2005).

It may be useful in this respect to recall some Durkheimian insights regarding religion. Durkheim, as is well known, regards religion—as an element of culture—as a social fact, which he believes to share the three same basic characteristics with all social facts.¹³ Thus, religion, like other social facts, is general, that is, common to many individuals; it is transmissible, that is, it can be transmitted both vertically—from one generation to the other—and horizontally—from one contemporary group to the other; and it is compulsory, that is, human beings have to take account of religion, whether they like it or not: religion is a fact that cannot be ignored (Shorter, 1988: 32). In view of this Durkheimian perspective, the idea of disenchantment of the world that many observers believed to take place in the second half of the twentieth century becomes less plausible. Disenchantment has often been seen as a natural process, an inevitable outcome of historical evolution. As suggested above, in the case of Africa (as well as other parts of the non-Western world) this appears to be a wrong assumption, entirely based on an analysis of processes as they have unfolded in European history. It is increasingly apparent that in Africa (and elsewhere) the separation of religion from other spheres of life was never more than superficial. Not only is Africa reconnecting with its pre-colonial past as regards the role of religion in public life, but it is also extending its religious influence throughout the world. As a result of the scattering of Africans around the globe, its spirit-oriented religious traditions can today be found everywhere and in all their spiritual diversity. In Europe, they manifest themselves primarily in the form of Christianity and Islam, both proselytising religions, but also in the transformation of African “traditional” religions into aspiring “world” religions.

Conclusion

In conclusion, let me restate my argument in a nutshell. Many European scholars of Africa have tended to apply Eurocentric analyses of Africa that have obscured the vitality of religion as a constitutive element of African societies in past and present. Africa is not in any way re-enchanting, in my view, nor are most other parts of the non-Western world. Any semblance of “disenchantment” in those parts of the world appears now to have been a temporary phenomenon connected with colonial rule. It is increasingly apparent, for example, that the separation of religion and politics was never more than superficial. As a result, non-Western countries, including African ones, are not only reconnecting with their pre-colonial past as regards the role of religion in public life, but also extending their religious influence throughout the world. This is, among others, demonstrated in the internationalisation of African-initiated churches, many of

13. Or, in the original French: *des choses*.

which have been founded in Europe in the last few decades. It seems too soon to say what lasting influence they may have, but surely they will somehow contribute to what, from an African perspective, may be called the re-enchantment of Europe.

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Résumé

Cet article, basé sur l'étude des chrétiens africains en Europe, soutient que les communautés d'origine migrante ne sont pas dans un processus de ré-enchantement ni dans un recours à la religion comme moyen de préservation d'une « authentique » identité africaine. Une perspective alternative est proposée, avec une discussion théorique du concept de religion. Ce qui apparaît à certains comme ré-enchantement, est en fait l'expression récente de dynamiques de changement qui ont toujours caractérisé les diverses traditions religieuses africaines. Ce processus peut être observé aujourd'hui dans l'émergence, en Europe, d'Églises initiées par des Africains. Alors que la majorité des Européens tend à souligner l'ethnicité comme marqueur important de l'identité chrétienne africaine, pour les chrétiens africains, leur identité religieuse prédomine par rapport à leur supposée « africanité ». La différence de perception peut être expliquée en termes d'altérité. Par la migration internationale, les Africains étendent leur influence religieuse dans le monde et contribuent – de façon plutôt inattendue – au ré-enchantement de ses régions les plus sécularisées, notamment de l'Europe.

Mots-clés : Afrique, christianisme, diaspora, identité.

Abstract

This article, based on the study of African Christians in Europe, argues that these particular communities of immigrant origin are neither undergoing a process of re-enchantment nor using religion as a means of preserving an “authentic” African identity. An alternative perspective is proposed, starting with a theoretical discussion of the concept of religion. What appears to some as re-enchantment is in fact a recent expression of the dynamics of change that have always characterised Africa's various religious traditions. This process can be observed today in the emergence of African-initiated churches in Europe. Whereas most Europeans tend to emphasise ethnicity as an important marker of African Christians' identity, for African Christians their religious identity takes prominence over their supposed “African-ness”. The difference in perception may be explained in terms of “otherness”. Due to international migration, Africans are extending their religious influence around the world and contributing—rather unexpectedly—to the re-enchantment of its most secularised parts, notably Europe.

Key words: Africa, Christianity, diaspora, identity.

Resumen

Este artículo, basado en el estudio de los cristianos africanos en Europa, sostiene que las comunidades de origen migrante no están en un proceso de reencantamiento, ni recurren a la religión como medio de preservación de una “auténtica” identidad africana. Proponemos aquí una perspectiva alternativa, con una discusión teórica del concepto de religión. Lo que para algunos aparece como reencantamiento, es de hecho una expresión reciente de dinámicas de cambio que han caracterizado siempre las distintas tradiciones religiosas africanas. Este proceso puede ser hoy observado en la emergencia, en Europa, de Iglesias fundadas por africanos. Mientras que la mayoría de los Europeos tiende a destacar la etnicidad como marcador importante

de la identidad cristiana africana, para los cristianos africanos su identidad religiosa predomina sobre su supuesta "africanidad". La diferencia de percepción puede ser explicada en términos de alteridad. A través de la migración internacional, los Africanos extienden su influencia religiosa en el mundo y contribuyen, –de manera más bien inesperada–, al reencantamiento de las regiones más secularizadas, especialmente Europa.

Palabras clave: Africa, Cristianidad, diáspora, identidad.