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Gerrie ter Haar, *Halfway to Paradise: African Christians in Europe*. Cardiff: Cardiff Academic Press, 1998, vi + 220 pp., ISBN 1-899025-03-0, £ 16,95.

In the early 1980s, Ghana was hit by severe droughts. At the same time, the political and economic situation in Ghana was in a poor shape and Nigeria expelled huge numbers of Ghanaians (81, 133-134, 150). In response young Ghanaians began to travel to Europe and Northern America in numbers, following a tradition, well established all over Africa but especially in Southern Ghana, of migration for the purpose of seeking employment and economic success elsewhere (4, 73-76, 87, 132-133, 135ff.). On the continent of Europe, Germany and The Netherlands have proved main destinations. The Netherlands now has slightly over 15,000 Ghanaians with permits and a few, perhaps several, thousands more without documents (126). Their presence is generally not a conspicuous one (126-127). The undocumented especially manage to survive only with great difficulty by menial jobs which often require them to work at ungodly hours, and by relying on their informal networks to survive when all other means fail (126). One trait has, however, become noticeable: the great number of AICs, 'African Initiated Churches', that have sprung up among them. In Amsterdam, some forty existed in 1997, most of them founded by Ghanaians. These churches are the main subject of study of Ter Haar's book, and more in particular The True Teachings of Christ's Temple church in the Bijlmer, the oldest and largest of these congregations in Amsterdam with some 600 regular members.

Ter Haar's book has ten chapters. Chapter 1 is a methodological introduction in which she critically discusses the concepts scholars use in their description of African Christianity. She highlights the subtle mechanisms of exclusion operating in *e.g.* an emphasis on its 'Africanness'. Against symbolist anthropologists, she insists that their theologies need also be studied for properly understanding the important social functions they have for their members (6-7, 10-12). In chapters 2, she looks at 'the Bijlmer' – the multi-ethnic part of Amsterdam to which many Ghanaians have flocked –, its religious communities and their social functions. She contends that 'religious faith can also constitute a successful social strategy' (45). It creates a sense of belonging, and a place to be at home for many migrants. How precisely their bible-centred approach creates a supportive, inclusive community is analysed in chapter 3, in which Ter Haar also examines their notions of 'spirit', 'power' and 'prosperity', and the role of ritual in obtaining one's share in them in the liminality of the diaspora. In chapter 4, she surveys the history, past and present, of that 'dispersal' of Africans outside Africa. She also takes a critical look at the mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion inherent in the uses of the concept of diaspora. They may serve to exclude especially when its three key notions of dispersal (forced or voluntary), cultivation of an 'African' identity, and the wish to return 'home' (80) are attributed to the migrants, but not cultivated by the migrants themselves, as is the case with many migrants in Europe. This concept, and other attributions, then become the subtle but effective instruments of

separation and exclusion used against them by the 'native' residents and churches of Europe (82-88, 159-167). The history and present distribution of the AICs in Europe is examined in chapter 5. Chapter 6 discusses the attempts of 'fortress Europe' to stem what it perceives as the 'flood' of immigrants, particularly the so called 'economic refugees' without permits, often smuggled in by human trafficking. The 'exodus' from Africa to Europe is discussed in greater detail in chapter 7 with an emphasis on the migrants from Ghana and their cultural organisations in the Netherlands. The reactions of the mainline churches in the Netherlands and in Ghana to this phenomenon are studied in chapter 8, as is that of a Ghanaian pentecostal church, the Resurrection Power and Living Bread Ministries, which established a branch in Amsterdam and is now one of the larger AICs there. The Dutch mainline churches have emphasised the Africanness of the AICs. By that label, they have provided 'themselves with an opportunity to distance themselves' from the AICs in Europe by 'othering' them. That is, says Ter Haar, the more prevalent mode of modern racism (161-167). In chapter 9, Ter Haar surveys the history of Christianity in Ghana, including its bewildering variety of AICs, the major influence in the religious developments among Ghanaians in Europe. She points out that 'fundamentalism' is another of the several dubious categories and labels that have bedevilled the study of AICs (185-188). In chapter 10, she concludes the book by showing from the example of the Bijlmer that AICs do have an important social function for migrants from Africa in the modern cities of Europe.

This is a well-written and excellently documented book with a sure grasp of both long range historical developments and the baffling complexities of the present day situation, religious and political. I have two reservations. One is that the 'reverse mission' (1-3) seems, so far, to be for internal use only. It seems to serve as one of several optional means of identity construction by which a 'community of elect' may separate itself ideologically from 'immoral' Western society into which it fervently wishes to integrate economically. The other reservation respects Ter Haar's somewhat indiscriminate polemics against the social-scientific studies of AICs in Africa and Europe by 'secular' anthropologists who adopt a symbolist approach in the study of religions. In her view, they 'consider religious belief and religious practice as mere representations of the secular' (5, 6; also 7, 9, 10, 164). Though she is correct to emphasise with Horton (8-12) that their religious notions and rituals need to be studied both for their own sake and for the social functions they serve, I feel more at ease with her admission that 'the study of religious phenomena in Africa [as] a branch of scientific inquiry [...] has been revolutionised by the insights of anthropology' (8). That includes, in my view, those of several 'symbolists'.

All in all, however, this is a lucid book on an important development in the history of both African and European religiosity. It lays bare some of the well-hidden mechanisms of identity construction as a means for survival as well as for 'othering' in order to separate, exclude and expulse. It is important for the academic study of religions both for its substance and the methodology it advocates.

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