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The role of religion in development: towards a new relationship between the European Union and Africa

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Citation

Ellis, S., & Haar, G. ter. (2006). The role of religion in development: towards a new relationship between the European Union and Africa. *European Journal Of Development Research*, 18(3), 351-367. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/12909>

Version: Not Applicable (or Unknown)

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Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

RELIGION AND DEVELOPMENT IN AFRICA

Stephen Ellis & Gerrie ter Haar¹

The modern idea of developing Africa essentially dates to the years after 1945. From the start, ideas about development generally overlooked the role of religion, or assumed that religion would be relegated to a matter of private belief in Africa as secular states gained strength and confidence, or even saw religion as an obstacle to development. Yet it is now apparent that religion is a growing force in public life in Africa, as in many other parts of the world. In all parts of Africa, mosques, churches and other religious sites are multiplying, and religious rituals are often to be seen in public space. Moreover, there are heads of state or other senior politicians who make extravagant public proclamations or gestures of their religious allegiance. We have described and analysed these phenomena at length in a book, *Worlds of Power: Religious Thought and Political Practice in Africa*, published by C. Hurst and Co., London, in 2004.

Africa's development in the twenty-first century will be shaped largely by religion. It is therefore important for any analysis or recommendations to take account of this.

Aims

This paper aims to provide a brief analysis of the role of religion in Africa's development. It warns of the difficulties in attempting to add religion to a list of instruments that can be used in development policy; several factors lead to the conclusion that some fundamentally new approaches are necessary on the part of donors themselves. The paper mentions sectors in which religion may play a positive role in development, relating to the specific areas identified as priorities by the Commission for Africa, such as measures to stimulate economic growth, management of natural resources, conflict prevention and peacebuilding, health and education, and governance. We discuss briefly how these points may translate into specific policy ideas at different levels of government, illustrating these with brief examples where possible.

A conclusion attempts to draw out some of the most important points.

Preliminary remarks

In its heyday, development was seen as an integrated approach in which all aspects of society would have their role in the strategic aim of making people more productive and able to live longer and healthier lives. For several decades, both liberal and Marxist experts saw states as playing the central role in the process of development through their commanding position in the governance of society.

In the modern practice of governance, strategic aims are implemented through specific policies. Problems to be solved or aims to be realised are first stated in technical terms. Trained administrators then produce quasi-legal documents ordaining procedures or

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actions to be adopted in pursuit of the stated policy. A budget is attached. Crucially, a complex network of officials is then expected to implement the policy, guided by the statements that have been produced, and using the budget that has been provided.

Throughout its first three or four decades, development was largely conceived of in economic terms primarily, in other words as economic development. More recently the concept of human development has come into vogue, emphasising aspects of people's lives that go beyond the economic dimension, such as health and education. In our view, human development should be understood as including the spiritual dimension of life. Yet in many plans human development remains essentially an adjunct to the central aim of generating economic growth and the distribution of wealth. In short, development workers need to make the idea of human development a reality.

The above remarks lead us to make three specific observations that we believe must govern future debates on development in Africa:

First, that neither economic growth nor even state-building should be thought of as goals in themselves, although both are crucial aspects of a better future for Africans. Any development enterprise must begin by considering how people's full range of resources, including their spiritual or religious resources, can be used for their general well-being. Religious resources do not consist only of networks of people who relate to each other through religious practice or adherence. Religious resources can be considered under four headings: ideas; practices; organisations or institutions; and experiences.² It is quite feasible to think of development in the future in terms of spiritual empowerment, in a similar sense as has been considered in regard, for example, to women's empowerment.

Second, it has become clear that much development thinking has been far too short-term. Projects are often intended to last for four or five years, and judged to be successes or failures after that time. It has become apparent that in many cases a much longer timeframe is needed, and that a specific development project may need 20 years or more for its realisation. Development planning is generally oriented towards specific outcomes, and individual projects are judged by their success in producing results, obscuring the fact that in many cases the process of development is at least as important as the end-product of a particular scheme or operation.

Third, the development enterprise has become complicated by the emergence of weak and so-called 'failing' or 'failed' states in Africa and in some other parts of the world. Although we find the phrase 'failed states' to be somewhat misleading (they could more accurately be described as imploded states), it has become widespread in discourses on Africa and we will continue to use it here for that reason. 'Failed states' are ones that exist in international law but where the apparatus of government is unable to carry out many of its core tasks, including upholding a monopoly of violence, enforcing the rule of law, and ensuring a minimum level of welfare for its population. One of the features of weak states in Africa is that power-holders tend to resort to socially-based movements or networks to articulate their power, including religious networks.

² Cf. Gerrie ter Haar, 'Religion: Source of Conflict or Resource for Peace?', in Gerrie ter Haar and James J. Busuttil (eds), *Bridge or Barrier: Religion, Violence and Visions for Peace* (Brill, Leiden, 2005), pp.3-34. This book is already available from the publisher.

Concerning these three observations, it is important to note that a policy in the sense that the word is normally used by administrators, including in the development field, becomes unworkable in a 'failed' state, if only because the country in question lacks networks of competent bureaucrats able to implement an agreed approach in the requisite way. Although in theory a 'failed' state could be transformed into a model working apparatus by a sufficient input of money and manpower over a substantial period of time - long enough to train an entire new generation of people - in practice this is most unlikely to happen in the case of many of Africa's weakest states. A realistic assumption is therefore that other means must be found for Africa to develop by circumventing the problem of weak states or by discovering new techniques for making such states workable.

The fact that many African states - possibly even the majority - are conventionally judged to be weak or failing (and one or two are generally considered to have failed), means that policy in the conventional sense can no longer be applied in such a vast and all-embracing field as development. This does not, however, mean that progress and development are impossible. The idea that development is a technical process, pioneered in the West and in East Asia, that can be learned by Africans, has been shown to be incorrect. Would-be developers in rich countries or employed by multinational institutions need to take more seriously the world of ideas of Africans if the development of Africa is to proceed, including religious ideas, in matters that we will discuss at more length shortly.

Religion in Africa

The last 60 years have witnessed the accession to sovereign status of dozens of former colonial territories and the birth of the modern development enterprise, but also a rapid secularisation of Western European societies especially. Yet, at the start of a new century, religion seems set to be a major force in international affairs in the world for the foreseeable future. Its public role can no longer be ignored.

Religion is of great importance in Africa in that most people engage in some form of religious practice from time to time, and many profess membership of some formal religious organisation, traditional, Muslim, Christian or otherwise.³ Many Africans voluntarily associate themselves with religious networks, which they use for a variety of purposes - social, economic and even political - that go beyond the strictly religious aspect. But what does 'religion' mean in the context of Africa? The evidence suggests that most of the continent's people are religious inasmuch as they believe in the existence of an invisible world, distinct but not separate from the visible world, that is inhabited by spiritual beings or forces with which they can communicate and which they perceive to have an influence on their daily lives. Religious ideas typically govern relationships of people with a perceived spirit world. In effect, this idiom can govern relations both of one person to another, or of one person to a community, but also of people to the land they cultivate.

Donor agencies could certainly make greater efforts to consider the role of religion in Africa through relatively simple means. It has sometimes been suggested, for example,

³ Reliable statistics on religious affiliation in Africa are notoriously difficult to find. On world Christianity, the most authoritative source is generally recognised to be David B. Barrett. See e.g. the statistical tables published annually by David B. Barrett and Todd M. Johnson in the *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*.

that foreign embassies in Africa may be well advised to appoint religion attachés charged with the task of observing religious life, much as they have defence attachés at present. This does not in any way imply that observers must themselves be religious practitioners or believers, but suggests only that they should have proper knowledge of religious organisations and networks in Africa of all descriptions and inform themselves of the type of thinking that underlies them. They need to monitor and understand processes of religious change, such as those that have given rise to evangelical Christian communities, the development of reformed Islamist organisations, and the revival of neo-traditional groups such as initiation societies.

There are very active debates within religious communities of all types in Africa including, for example, in those Muslim groups and Islamic networks that cause concern to Western countries on security grounds, concerning the proper interpretations of their religious duty. Calls are often heard for inter-religious dialogue, and it is hard to dispute the usefulness of this, but at the same time we doubt whether inter-religious dialogue is sufficient to diffuse religious tensions where such exist. First, people who are inclined to inter-religious dialogue are probably also those individuals who are the least inclined to take up weapons in support of their faith, and therefore are the least in need of persuasion towards the way of peace and coexistence. Second, many of the religious debates that are most threatening to peace or human rights actually take place *within* religious communities. Hence, we argue that inter-religious dialogue may be less urgent than *intra*-religious dialogue. Such intra-religious dialogues are worthy of far more attention than they actually receive from development experts. As in other aspects of religion, people or institutions interested in development need in the first instance to inform themselves of the debates that are taking place in particular contexts or in individual countries and to acquaint themselves with some of the key actors. Only then may they be able, in consultation with local partners, to find ways of encouraging dialogue in the interests of human development.

Using religion for development

We would emphasise that an appreciation that religion is a resource for development does not mean that policy-makers can simply add religion or religious institutions to the range of policy instruments at their disposal, other than in rather exceptional cases. However, given that proviso, it is certainly possible to identify specific sectors in which religion could play a positive role in development. Below, we briefly consider a number of such fields, providing brief examples:

a. Conflict prevention and peacebuilding

Peace is a precondition for human development. Religious ideas of various provenance - indigenous religions as well as world religions - play an important role in legitimising or discouraging violence. Increasingly, large-scale violence in Africa is associated with social conflicts. In many such conflicts fighters seek medicines or various objects or substances that they believe will make them effective in battle or will defend them against injury, and the persons who dispense such medicines exercise influence over the fighters. In some cases, this can take on a clear institutional form. In Sierra Leone, for example, the *kamajor* militia was organised along the lines of an initiation society and was associated with the most influential traditional initiation society in the country, Poro. Similar developments have been witnessed in Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia, Nigeria and elsewhere.

Our argument here is not that quasi-military movements such as these - often responsible for appalling human rights abuses - are to be encouraged. Rather, the argument we are making is that the spiritual aspects of such movements must be understood if the movements themselves are to be understood. Moreover, the institutional affiliations of such movements could provide a means of helping to regulate such movements in future.

Regarding the establishment of unofficial militias such as the *kamajors* (although the latter eventually received a degree of official licence), it is notable that there are now many African countries where state security forces have lost any realistic claim to a national monopoly of violence, and where locally organised vigilantes or similar groups proliferate and sometimes receive a degree of official sanction. Such local groups almost invariably have a religious dimension (in the sense that we have defined religion: see above), like the *kamajors* who are thought to be protected by powerful spiritual forces. It seems quite likely that in time, locally-established forces will come to be considered in some shape or form as a substitute for fully effective centrally organised police and military forces, that are unable to fulfil their formal mandate in so many African countries. The *kamajors*, for example, were part of an officially-recognised Civil Defence Force that was instituted by the Sierra Leonean government in 1997: indeed, the recognition of this new force was one of the factors that led to a coup by sections of the armed forces in May of that year. Another example is the Bakassi Boys, a vigilante group originally established by market-traders in south-eastern Nigeria in the late 1990s to protect themselves and their communities against the bands of armed robbers that were then terrorising their areas. The Bakassi Boys were subsequently adopted as part of the official security forces, notably in Anambra State, with the result that they soon degenerated into a personal militia at the service of local politicians, and were responsible for a series of political murders.

Neither the *kamajors* of Sierra Leone nor the Bakassi Boys of Nigeria, then, are examples to be emulated. But they are both instances of local militias that have at some point in their existence enjoyed a real popularity in some communities, with ties to local stakeholders. In both cases also their cooptation by powerful politicians has reduced their ability genuinely to defend local communities. Thinking is urgently required on whether or how local militias may be made responsible to local stakeholders and how they may coexist with national security institutions in a relationship strong enough to avoid the risk of creating a host of local fiefdoms.

By the same token, the end of armed conflict is often accompanied by ritual action to 'cleanse' fighters from the pollution of bloodshed. This is done through traditional rituals in many countries, but also takes the form of the experience of 'born-again' Christianity, for example. The South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, led by an Anglican archbishop and closely associated with the country's faith communities, was also based on the idea that long-term reconciliation depends crucially on religious notions of reconciliation and healing, even in the absence of formal justice. Although the TRC has been criticised in South Africa itself, its ultimate success or failure will only become apparent with the passage of time. In the meantime it has been widely imitated. Truth commissions based more or less on the South African model have been created in Nigeria, Ghana and Sierra Leone, where they had a mixed record, and have been mooted in many other African countries. These examples suggest that truth commissions are far from a panacea. First, the right political conditions have to

exist if they are to have any chance of genuinely helping to reconcile conflicts. Second, even if the conditions are ripe, each country needs to think out the form and style of its own commission rather than imitating the South African exemplar. In Sierra Leone, the establishment of a truth commission simultaneous with a special court posed considerable problems for the institutions of transitional justice. Finally, establishing a reasonably successful truth and reconciliation commission requires considerable finance and the maintenance of an efficient secretariat with real research capacity. In many cases these will require input from external sources.

b. Wealth creation and production

It is widely acknowledged that religious ideas played an important part in the development of capitalism in the history of Europe, not always directly, but in influencing people's thinking on the legitimacy of wealth and on the moral value of saving or investing, for example. Although it is by no means inevitable that other continents will develop along the same lines, this does suggest the significance of current religious ideas such as the widespread existence of the so-called 'prosperity gospel' in Africa, or the importance of certain religious networks, like the Mourides of Senegal, in creating wealth. Development workers would be advised to monitor such ideas and the groups espousing them closely, with a view to identifying opportunities for policies aimed at wealth creation or enhancement.

Control of land and the role of religion in expressing people's ideas about the proper use and ownership of land is closely connected to what remains Africa's most fundamental economic activity: agriculture. At present, some 66 per cent of people south of the Sahara live in rural areas, and many of these derive their living in part from agriculture, directly or indirectly. In many parts of the continent, traditional forms of landholding preclude women from ownership of land or even place taboos on the ownership of agricultural implements by women, despite the key role they often play in cultivation. There are also many examples of traditional chiefs having the power to grant land while retaining the right to recall its use – a power that is open to abuse. In some cases, particular ethnic groups may traditionally be forbidden from owning land but may enjoy usufruct rights only. (Such a principle has been associated with violent conflicts in Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire.) All of these are examples of traditional ideas concerning landholding that may offend against current ideas concerning universal human rights and also be in contradiction with Western-style systems of individual land tenure guaranteed by law. Hence it is no solution to argue for the preponderance of traditional forms over modern ones inspired by Western models. Rather, what is required is to consider what elements of traditional systems might usefully be adapted for current purposes in the light of contemporary ideas of justice and human rights as well as the demands of agricultural efficiency.

Although it is risky to generalise about a sub-continent as large and diverse as sub-Saharan Africa, it is clear that many countries will not emerge as industrial producers or with internationally competitive service sectors in the foreseeable future. It remains as important as ever that agriculture be encouraged. Enormous obstacles exist to the expansion of agriculture in Africa, ranging from the subsidies paid by governments in the European Union and the USA to their own farmers, making African products uncompetitive, to the phenomenon of 'urban bias' inherent in the policies of the many African governments that, for political reasons, prefer to favour urban sectors at the expense of rural-dwellers.

However, even if such issues are addressed, it is also important to integrate into agricultural policy crucial elements of culture and religion that are associated with the prosperity of agricultural societies. For example, in many places, policies aimed at encouraging individual legal title to ownership of land may need to be modified to take account of traditional ideas concerning land ownership, in which land is typically viewed as being owned by a community of people by virtue of their relation with ancestor spirits or with spirits of the earth, frequently clash with systems of individual title recognised by the state. Much more research is necessary on how land tenure can be protected by state law while also acknowledging the importance of traditional ideas concerning community or social rights to land that often have a reflection in religious ideas.

c. Governance

The possible role of religiously-based networks in Africa's future governance extends far beyond the fields of security and the law. It is striking, for example, that revenue collection is one of the main problems facing states in Africa, which typically have budget deficits and which are unduly reliant for their revenue on dues levied on import-export trade, or on external sources of funding, including aid. Most have a poor record in the collection of taxes from their own populations, making states unhealthily dependent on foreign sources of finance rather than on their own populations. The relationship between a state and its domestic tax-payers is an important element of real citizenship. Meanwhile, many religious networks in Africa survive largely or entirely from tithes or other monies donated by their members: in effect, their ability to tax their own members is testimony of the success of many religious organisations in developing a close bond with their adherents, and a degree of accountability to them, in contrast to the problems of citizenship faced by African states in general. The question may be asked whether, in the considerable number of African countries where the state exercises little real authority outside the main cities or a handful of nodal points, and where states have very little ability to tax their nominal citizens, religious networks will not assume some of the functions of government in future.

In short, in the considerable number of African states in which government through efficient, centrally-controlled bureaucracies is clearly inadequate to ensure the country's security, or to raise sufficient resources through taxation as to fund the reproduction of the state itself, or to ensure a minimum level of welfare for the country's people, non-state organisations are destined to play a much greater role in future. Many of the best-rooted non-state organisations have an explicit religious basis, whether it is in the form of educational establishments run by churches or by Muslim networks or in vigilante movements underpinned by traditional initiation societies. In future, state and religious organisations may be called upon to play a complementary role in the governance of society.

On closer inspection it is also apparent that many Africans in fact debate key political questions, including the fundamental legitimacy of their own governments, in religious or spiritual terms. This is apparent from the popular literature, videos and other published material that circulates all over the continent and that is consumed and discussed widely. Many such publications discuss current problems of governance, crime and morality, typically viewed as manifestations or conceptions of evil. In what might be termed a spirit idiom, they express concern with what in development jargon

is termed poor governance. Ultimately, this is having a great effect on governments whose fundamental institutions, having been founded in the colonial period by Europeans who had a view of the proper form of governance based on Europe's own history, risk being considered of dubious legitimacy.

d. health and education

Throughout Africa, there is a widespread supposition that people in need of feeling include those who are sick both physically and mentally, including those who are suffering from what in clinical medicine might be called stress or depression. Healing is generally viewed as a holistic activity, requiring attention to spiritual as well as physical aspects of a person. For this reason, religion plays an important role in health care generally, strongly suggesting the need to integrate spiritual ideas into health care policies.

Analysis of people's ideas about health may also reveal a great deal about popular perceptions of relations between donor countries and Africa. For example, although the means by which AIDS is transmitted are widely understood in Africa, people often suggest that the disease may have been deliberately exported to Africa by Western countries intent on depopulating the continent, or that 'aid' and 'AIDS' are related phenomena. While such ideas are clearly misguided, they do reveal a great deal about how many Africans perceive their relationship with the West. Policy-makers can learn from this.

Generally speaking, health and education constitute a field in which the role of religious institutions has been widely noted by development experts, for example in the conspicuous role played by religious institutions in providing health and educational services in many countries, such as the Democratic Republic of Congo, where Catholic missions especially play a major role in maintaining educational and health services as well as, for example, postal facilities. The role of religious institutions in welfare provision could be considerably expanded, however, notably in view of the rapid expansion of the activity of Islamic non-governmental organisations (NGOs) throughout sub-Saharan Africa and the occasionally progressive role played by traditional imams, such as in Mali and elsewhere, where even conservative clerics have been prominent in the fight against AIDS. The total number of Islamic NGOs operating south of the Sahara, according to one leading source, increased from 138 out of a total of 1,854 NGOs in 1980, to 891 out of 5,896 twenty years later.⁴ Many of the most dynamic Muslim NGOs have adopted techniques introduced by Western NGOs. Some of these were pioneered by Christian missionary organisations, notably in associating the provision of welfare services and even a high standard of technical education with proselytisation. Some modern Islamic schools in West Africa, for example, offer business studies and computer courses as part of their curriculum, as do some modern Christian institutions, particularly in charismatic circles. In general, however, there is little reliable information on Islamic NGOs, although it is known that many do valuable work in education and welfare.

It must be said that the rise of Islamic NGOs often causes nervousness among Western governments due to the suspicion that any form of Muslim proselytisation may be tainted by association with terrorism. Development officials need to discriminate

⁴ M.A. Mohamed Salih, *Islamic NGOs in Africa: The Promise and Peril of Islamic Voluntarism* (Occasional Paper, Centre of African Studies, University of Copenhagen, 2002), p.11.

clearly between Islamic NGOs or other organisations that can play a constructive role in development and the small number that are inclined towards violence. A good way of doing this is by working with Islamic NGOs whenever this is possible, learning what they do, and gaining an ability to distinguish between those that are useful for development purposes from those that are not.

e. Management of natural resources

This is a field that is both internationally regarded as crucial to Africa's development and in which traditional African religious networks (rather than primarily Christian or Muslim ones) continue to play a substantial role. Typically, this is via the conviction that relationships between people and the land they live on or cultivate are governed by identifiable spirits, whose favour may be earned by maintaining a relationship with the land itself.

Examples of how this can be turned into positive results include the work of the Association of Zimbabwean Traditional Ecologists (AZTREC), associated with traditional cults of the land, that has been responsible for major campaigns of tree-planting.⁵ Another example is the work of Nobel laureate Wangari Maathai in Kenya, also responsible for large-scale tree-planting projects.

Concluding remarks

While we have argued that it is essential to integrate religion into thinking about development, it remains the case that there are few, if any, areas in which the use of religious or other cultural resources will result in a major breakthrough in Africa's development.

If Africa is to develop, basic changes are needed not so much in specific sectors or in the identification of new policy instruments as in the way in which both development and its implementation are considered. As we have noted, it is necessary to place the concept of human development at the top of the agenda and not to consider it, as is so often the case, as an adjunct to the real core of the work - that is, economic development. Moreover, the very concept of policy implementation needs to be rethought in the many cases where effective bureaucracies no longer exist. In such cases, policy in the conventional sense can not be applied at all.

It seems clear that a number of so-called 'failing' or 'failed' states in Africa cannot be revived by the techniques currently being used, for example in Liberia and the Democratic Republic of Congo, and that new thinking is urgently required. Although there is insufficient space to discuss the matter here, external powers both within and without the continent of Africa can play a vital role in securing such states against military aggression. The task of political reconstruction, however, has to be primarily internal and has to be a political process rather than being planned and implemented by technocrats.

The fact is that power in many African countries has been disaggregated and now lies in social networks that often take a religious form or that convey religious ideas in some sense. This suggests that development will in future need to be considered in

⁵M.L. Daneel, *African Earthkeepers* (2 vols., UNISA Press, Pretoria, 1998-99).

terms of networks rather than through formal bureaucracies. There is substantial intellectual support for such a proposition, for example from theorists of globalisation who argue that the most advanced societies are now becoming network societies rather than being organised along characteristically modernist lines,⁶ and also from experienced observers and participants who believe that restoring peace and order to some conflict-torn regions will require networks of governance that transcend the boundaries of sovereign states.⁷

Western policy-makers should refrain from seeing such networks as a simple substitute for an effective bureaucracy. They are not bureaucracies: they are religious networks. Approaching leading members of such networks with a policy plan, including the all-important budget, is unlikely to result in effective implementation and is most likely to result in corrupting a previously functioning network by providing key members with large amounts of money. It is most appropriate for external development experts to cultivate long-term relationships with members of religious or other networks and to discuss with them what is required for development. Ideas and plans will emerge over time and will have the overwhelming advantage of being based on a high degree of social trust.

There are at least two major characteristics of international development bureaucracies that militate against long-term approaches of the sort described. First, international development officers, like other bureaucrats, tend to derive prestige from the size of the budgets they administer. A senior official has a budget of millions at his or her disposal, and an administrator with a smaller budget is likely to derive correspondingly less prestige from the task at hand. However, in many African situations quite small amounts of money are preferable to large amounts, as fine-grained societies require fine-grained development projects. African societies have a different texture than Western ones and are not governable in the same manner or using the same techniques. Second, desk officers or unit directors based in Western capitals (or even in African capitals) may have little time and inclination to spend long periods getting to know key members of religious networks in Africa and developing a mutual trust that is necessary to develop ideas together. In short, if we are serious about Africa's development, it will require at least some categories of Western officials to change quite fundamentally their mode of operation.

Development will also require genuine long-term partnerships, and it is reassuring to note in this regard that the formation of long-term partnerships is one of the stated goals of the Commission on Africa. A starting-point for such relationships is in terms of representation. There is no doubt that many Africans resent being represented as the poorest part of humanity, even though such a description may be true in a purely economic sense. A good example concerns the controversy aroused in Ghana when the government applied for membership of the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative. Writing off a portion of Ghana's debt was certainly in the country's interest, but many Ghanaians resented the representation of their country primarily as both highly indebted and poor. From their perspective, Ghana is also rich in history and human potential. This is more than a mere matter of words, but of people's perceptions and even self-respect.

⁶Manuel Castells, *The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture* (three volumes, Blackwell Publishing, Oxford, 1998).

⁷Amos Sawyer, 'Violent Conflicts and Governance Challenges in West Africa: The Case of the Mano River Basin Area', *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 42, 3 (2004), pp.437-63.

Finally - and also perhaps uncomfortably for donor countries - development problems are clearly related to questions of international migration. These days substantial numbers of Africans live in Europe, North America and other developed regions. A striking aspect of many African religious networks is their global nature. Muslim and Christian networks, most obviously, are conscious of their status as world religions. Mainstream Christian churches have always had a close association with missionary organisations based outside Africa, and these days many churches created in Africa itself maintain missionary branches overseas.⁸ Muslim networks show similar tendencies, especially with the rise of Islamic NGO's funded from outside Africa. Some Africa-based Muslim networks (such as the Mouride brotherhood in Senegal) have shown themselves adept at maintaining links with members based overseas. Even traditional religious networks have expanded outside Africa, with an appreciable number of people in North America for example 'converting' to Yoruba religion. Religion, in fact, forms one of the principal channels linking African diasporas with the old continent. This too has an important economic aspect, as remittances sent by Africans abroad back to their families or home villages is often sent through religious networks, or at least through networks that have been formed in a religious context.

There is now a very strong link between the development of Africa, the position of African migrants in the West, and the ease of communication and movement between the two. African diasporas play a crucial part in the politics of many African countries, and also provide a backbone of their economies through the provision of remittances. African religious communities provide a common link between diaspora populations and the continent of origin. But substantial numbers of African migrants in the West are undocumented, living without resident permits and obliged to live and work underground. Many aspire to travel back and fro to their countries of origin, for trade or other purposes, but are unable to do so. Many African traders have responded by developing closer relations with alternative trading centres in the Middle East or Far East, where problems of immigration are less acute. The West will need to reconsider its immigration regimes if it is to use the African diasporas in the world to their full development potential.

9 December 2004

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⁸ Gerrie ter Haar, *Halfway to Paradise: African Christians in Europe* (Cardiff Academic Press, Cardiff, 1998).