ENGAGING THE RHETORIC OF SPIRITUAL WARFARE:
THE PUBLIC FACE OF ALADURA IN DIASPORA

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ABSTRACT

One of the most striking examples of African indigenous religious creativity is the Aladura, a group of churches that emerged in Western Nigeria from the 1920s and 1930s. They are so called because of their penchant for prayer, healing, prophecy, exorcism, trances, visions and dreams. The Aladura made inroads into the European religious landscape in the late 1960s and have continued to grow in numbers. This paper examines their historical development, belief patterns and their appropriation of rituals in diaspora. Aladura’s public image, particularly in the European media, has been somewhat controversial. Drawing insights from Great Britain, Italy and Germany, especially relating to the recent ‘Thames Torso’ ritual murder in Great Britain, the transnational sexual labour trafficking in Italy and Germany and their alleged connections with some Aladura churches, the paper shows how media sensationalizing of such allegations further serves to heighten public apprehension of Aladura. An insufficient grasp of Aladura religious worldview and their strong emphasis on ritual re-enactments may often continue to attract public misrepresentation and diabolization.

The emergence of Aladura and the politics of terminology

The Aladura phenomenon forms a significant segment of the new indigenous religious movements that first emerged in the 1920s and 1930s, mainly in western Nigeria. This includes the Christ Apostolic Church (CAC), Cherubim and Seraphim (C&S), Church of the Lord-Aladura (CLA), Celestial Church of Christ (CCC), Evangelical Church of Yahweh (ECY) and their various appendages and splinter formations. This shade of new religious movements (NRMs) partly represents the second wave of Christian independency in Africa, a development that has reshaped the religious demography of Africa significantly.1 Aladura derives from Yoruba, al adua literally translated as ‘the praying people’ or ‘owners of prayer’. They are so described because of their appropriation of, and the strong ritual emphasis associated with, prayer,
healing, prophecy, visions and dreams, and other charismatic gifts and activities. A charismatic, prophetic figure often appears in their emergent histories. Although these churches emerged specifically within the Yoruba geo-cultural ambience, they have witnessed remarkable proliferation, spreading to other parts of Nigeria, Africa, Europe, Asia, North and South America. Their current total membership is estimated at several millions. The Yoruba still account for a large portion of the movement but it is increasingly becoming multi-ethnic and multi-racial.

The Aladura fall under the genus of African Independent—Initiated/Instituted/Indigenous—churches (AICs), a wider religious phenomenon that benefits from an array of descriptive labels such as separatist, protest, syncretistic, prophetic, nativistic, neo-pagan, sects, cults, primal religions and so on. The enthusiasm of pioneering scholars and researchers during the formative years of the AICs in the colonial and post-colonial era produced a very rich literature on the phenomenon. Several scholars employed these categories in describing and interpreting this new religious formation, particularly as its emergence coincided with an era of anti-colonial and nationalistic feelings (Turner 1967; Peel 1968; Mitchell 1970; Omoyajowo 1982).

There is a tendency by some scholars to treat the Aladura phenomenon as if its wide variety can simply be pigeonholed. It should not be assumed that all Aladura churches are alike. Their uniqueness should be seen in terms of the affinity and differences that characterize their belief system and ritual structures. They share many features, the reason for their common typology, but each Aladura has its own religious dynamic. There are also significant differences, especially in specific doctrines and details of ritual acts and performance, the charismatic personality of the founders, their organizational policies and foundation histories. For instance, two basic patterns can be traced in Aladura’s emergence. The first category emerged from within existing mainline churches for religious, cultural, economic and political reasons while the second strand encompasses churches that neither severed voluntarily from an existing church nor faced any form of institutional ejection (Adogame 2002a: 74-75; Omoyajowo 1982; Mitchell 1970: 2-20).

A common feature of Aladura is that most of the nucleus and later membership were drawn from the existing mission churches. Peel (1968: 205) has shown through an earlier survey in the 1960s that 63 percent and 66 percent of converts into CAC and C&S branches in Ibadan were from the Anglican Church alone. People left the mission churches in their droves to populate Aladura churches. It is within this context
that the relationship between the churches can be better understood. In the heyday of colonialism, those attracted were mainly the underprivileged and downtrodden in society. The impression was that, while the mission-connected and African churches captured the cream of society like top civil servants, engineers, lawyers, doctors, skilled workers, university teachers and wealthy businessmen, Aladura sought out the types of people beyond the attention of mere churches—those who were the least socially and materially privileged (Ayandele 1969: 16). The scenario changed in post-colonial Nigeria as Aladura social composition gradually underwent transformation. People with high social and economic status gradually joined the movement. ‘The psychological fear of belonging to a church that was “not recognized” by the government because it was not under “proper control” disappeared. Those government officials and members of other churches who had nursed a secret interest in the movement began to manifest adherence openly’ (Omoyajowo 1978: 98). One new feature that developed in post-independence Nigeria was the frequent clandestine patronization of Aladura prophets by politicians and top government functionaries. Generally, Aladura churches attracted members from mission churches because of their pragmatic approach to Christianity. These churches dealt squarely with existential questions of life that were neglected in the mission churches.

**Negotiating new geo-cultural landscapes**

One of the earliest AICs that took root in Europe was the Aladura. The planting overseas of this brand of Christianity, influenced by African culture, emerged from the 1960s first in the United Kingdom and afterwards in continental Europe. Nigerians, who represented one of the largest African immigrant groups into the UK, established Aladura churches. African migration to Europe has tended to follow the historical and linguistic trails of colonialism, so that Britain and France are the preferred destinations of migrants from the former British and French colonies (Zeleza 2002: 10). Before 1962, Nigerians could enter Britain freely for either work or study. In response to shortage of manpower, the voucher system enabled many would-be students to enter Britain for gainful employment (Harris 2002: 33-39). However, the dynamics and official attitude to migration changed in 1965, partly with the scrapping of the voucher system. Britain’s economy also experienced a downturn. The sudden twist in its immigration policies led to a temporary decline in the flow of Nigerians and other migrants into
Britain. Some of the worker-students who resided in Britain during the 1960s initiated the first Aladura churches.

In spite of the changing socio-economic and political climate, the Aladura started to spread first across cities in Britain. They have increasingly made their footprints more visible on the European religious landscape since the establishment in London of the first branches of the CLA in 1964, C&S in 1965 and CCC two years later in 1967. There is at present a large Aladura concentration in the London area, with satellite branches in other British cities including Birmingham, Liverpool, Glasgow and Manchester. Branches of these churches as well as splinter formations also abound in different parts of Europe. Aladura physical presence has come to represent a significant factor in the contemporary life of the African diaspora. From the first decade of its inception in Europe, branches were established through individual or group initiatives of students, entrepreneurs and diplomatic staff who did not at that point intend to reside abroad permanently. Those who identified themselves within a local community as having similar religious background created ‘house groups’ with a fixed venue at a member’s house or on a rota system. These temporary venues served as both residential homes and sacred spaces where worship services and other programmes took place. It was these groups in private homes that were later transformed into branches scattered all over Europe. When a new group emerged, they often sought official recognition from headquarters in Africa. Thus, branches of these churches were established in the United Kingdom, Germany, Austria, the Netherlands, Italy, France, Belgium and Spain. Students of Nigerian origin introduced CCC through Switzerland into Germany. In 1974, the first German parish was planted in Munich, followed by Stuttgart, Frankfurt, Aachen, Bremen and Wuppertal (Adogame 1998a: 141-160). The first CLA branch in Germany was established in Langen in 1994.

Aladura’s formative years in Europe witnessed a fluctuating membership just as the West African immigrant community was itself largely transient. Some members who came to Europe before the 1960s returned to their home countries at the end of their studies or official assignments in the diplomatic service. Many returned to their home countries to participate in nation building, to set up individual businesses or simply be reunited with their families. However, this earlier demographic composition has altered especially in the last three decades. The arrival of migrant families and the birth of children (first and second generation) led to a major shift from transient to long-term migrants or settlers. Many migrants and returnees exploited the immigration policy regarding
‘family reunion’. Many of these erstwhile worker-students returned to Europe with their siblings, family relatives and even friends, especially when the Nigerian economic crisis intensified. Europe also witnessed an increasing influx of African immigrants in the 1970s and 1980s. Increasing diversification, in both the number of countries sending and the number receiving the immigrants, marked African immigration to Europe. A huge contingent of migrants from several African countries began flocking to European countries with which they had no colonial ties (Zeleza 2002: 11-12). The cultural polyphony of Africans has become a noticeable aspect of the urban landscape of major metropolitan centres across European cities such as London, Paris, Berlin, Amsterdam and Hamburg. This no doubt has had far-reaching implications on the stature and demography of Aladura religious communities.

The increase in migrant population provoked an anti-migrant backlash. As the number of illegal immigrants has escalated, so has the level of anti-immigration fervour. Europe’s receding economy led to a growing stigmatization of African and other migrants from the so-called Third World. As Zeleza (2002: 12) remarked: ‘Stigmatizing immigrants in this way promoted a discourse that racialized, marginalized, pathologized, even criminalized immigrants, which in turn, bred political antagonism, institutional discrimination, and sometimes racist violence.’ Thus, the racialization and criminalization of immigrants, particularly from Africa, and the cultural denigration of the African continent and its peoples were constitutive factors in the heightening of xenophobic tendencies towards them in Europe. Africans became more vulnerable to unemployment and stigmatization than European nationals and other immigrants. It dawned on many Africans that, no matter what they did, they were never totally able to insulate themselves from white racial stereotypes and discrimination. Caught within these socio-economic and cultural throes, many Africans sought consolation in the African migrant churches such as Aladura where they took their petitions and supplications to a non-racial God.

A new dimension of mother churches in Africa is the conscious strategy for missionary expansion to Europe. Missionaries are now commissioned from international church headquarters to coordinate already existing branches or parishes in Europe or to establish new ones. According to Rufus Ositelu (1999: 169-176):

What seems at stake today is the ability of the Church to respond to the religious quest of people, which the African Instituted Churches are trying to do all over the world. What the African Churches in the Diaspora are doing now as regards mission can be termed to be re-missionization through the sending of their own
missionaries to the land of colonizers and missionaries. Mission is to spread the
good news of salvation around the world and to maintain solidarity with all the
people of this world. Mission is therefore a great commission to win souls for
Christ.

This ‘mission-reversed’ strategy is akin to the CCC’s image of itself as
the ‘last ship for salvation descended from heaven, charged with the
task of cleansing or purifying the world’, ‘the embassy of heaven on
earth’ (Adogame 1999: 147-150).

A new variety of Aladura churches in diaspora are those that have
emerged either by severing from an existing one or following a charis-
matic leader. Some of the older Aladura have experienced schisms in
their histories of emergence both in Nigeria and in Europe. Thus, for
a particular group, there exist several factions that are now represented
on the European religious scene. For instance, the process of fission
took early root in the C&S. The church witnessed its first split barely
four years after its formalization in 1925. Because of disagreement about
the female leadership role of Abiodun Akinsowon within the group, she
left in frustration and started her own branch in 1929. Thus, Orimolade
headed the Eternal Sacred Order of the C&S, while Akinsowon named
her new group Cherubim and Seraphim Society. Omoyajowo (1982:
65) noted that there were already fourteen C&S registered factions in
Lagos by 1968. There were several unregistered smaller groups oper-
ating independently under individual prophets but employing the name
C&S. The C&S in Europe is represented by these various shades such
as the Eternal Sacred Order of the Cherubim and Seraphim, Cherubim
and Seraphim Society, Cherubim and Seraphim Church Surulere Ayo
Nio, and the Brotherhood of the Cherubim and Seraphim.

An example of a new type of Aladura church in Europe is the
Aladura International Church in London founded by Olu Abiola in
1970. Abiola claims to have founded the church in the first place
‘because so many African Christians coming to Britain experienced a
sense of rejection in the mainstream churches, and, more positively,
because he wanted to offer pastoral support to African students in a
cultural and religious milieu with which they would be familiar’

The tendency to incorporate people from varying ethnic and socio-
cultural backgrounds is common as a religious movement develops and
expands. While Yoruba make up a large segment of their membership,
Aladura in Europe now include non-Yoruba groups such as Igbos, Edo
from Nigeria and other Africans from countries such as Benin Republic,
Ghana, Côte d’Ivoire, Togo and Senegal. Afro-Caribbeans, Afro-
Surinamese and Europeans have also been attracted to Aladura. The
extent of European membership varies from one country to another. Their membership can be linked primarily to intermarriage or friendly relationships with black (African) members. Aspects of their ritual such as their music and dancing have helped to attract others.

The majority of Africans in the Aladura in Europe are not illiterates, but elites of their countries who have been sent as diplomats, civil servants, businessmen and women, and students, or those who have come on their own to seek the ‘golden fleece’. Others include skilled and unskilled factory workers, the unemployed, asylum seekers and refugees. Since Aladura socio-ethnic configuration is still largely dominated by Africans, with white (non-African) members representing a negligible percentage, we contend that Aladura in Europe have largely remained the focus of identity, community and security primarily for African immigrants. Moreover, these Aladura ‘elite’ in Europe have contributed significantly in launching their churches into the global religious landscape by appropriating new media technologies as well as through their forging of and engagement in intra- and inter-religious networks. Aladura churches in Europe have engaged in ecumenical networks for religious motives, but also as a means of improving their status in a hostile context. Such networks also have their social and political dimensions, providing members with a collective voice for responding to government policies and public issues like race relations, immigration and refugee policies, xenophobia and social services. For instance, the Cherubim and Seraphim Council of Churches is a member of Churches Together in England (CTE), which serves both as machinery for closer cooperation among Christian churches in England and as a channel through which they join the public discourse on wide-ranging political, religious, social and economic issues.

In the face of economic downturn and failing welfare systems in Europe, Aladura churches are demonstrating increasing social relevance by redefining their public and extra-religious role in a way that complements basic religious and spiritual tasks. In the United Kingdom, they exist as ‘registered main charities’ with functions—in addition to the promotion of the Christian faith—including caring for drug and alcohol addicts, the poor, homeless and needy; provision of relief for the sick, handicapped and aged; assistance of children and youths. The Cherubim and Seraphim Church Movement Europe District declares its objectives as follows:

The advancement of the Christian faith, in particular the provision of services, religious education and evangelism in accordance with the Gospel of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ and the Tenet of Faith of the Cherubim and Seraphim Church Movement.
They provide material and spiritual assistance to the unemployed, refugees and asylum seekers, and act further as brokers on legal, immigration and social issues between them and constituted authorities. The vision statement of the Cherubim and Seraphim Church Pentecostal is complementary:

It is our mission to provide a place where the depressed, the frustrated, hurting and the confused can find love, peace, acceptance, help, hope, forgiveness and encouragement. To share the Good News of our Lord Jesus Christ with over 11 million residents of London... It is our mission to have no less than 3 churches per city in the UK by 2004.

Free language instruction is instituted by the churches to facilitate the integration of new African migrants. The establishment of hospital and prison ministries by Aladura provides alternative medical care of a spiritual nature, in a context where health insurance schemes have become unaffordable to many. The enthusiasm with which these objectives are being acted out has socio-economic and religious implications for the host society.

Aladura churches, particularly in the UK, have acquired large properties to make their mark. In many cities, erstwhile warehouses, disused church buildings, cinemas, discotheques, brothels, pool halls have been acquired and re-sacralized into new sacred spaces of worship. The acquisition of fleets of buses to take members to church, the establishment of computer training centres and cyber-cafes, lodging and accommodation services, religious bookshops, day care centres, recreation and rehabilitation centres reposition Aladura as both employers and providers of social services. All this is of immense religious, social and economic import for the churches as well as the new host context. Unfortunately the media has paid scant attention to them because of the social marginality of most Nigerian migrants.

While Aladura churches represent the earliest forms of African religious creativity in Europe from the 1960s, African Pentecostal forms of Christianity emerging only from the 1980s and 1990s have come to dominate African religious geography in Europe. One explanation for this lies in the novel repackaging of their religious messages and the aggressive preoccupation with such issues as prosperity, employment and financial breakthrough. These indices have a ready appeal to a large cross-section of immigrant youths especially with the promise of rapid upward social mobility in failing state welfare systems, contexts which are increasingly becoming hostile and unaccommodating to many old and new migrants. Moreover, African-led Pentecostal/Charismatic churches seem to be open to wider channels of ecumenism and religious
networking through their engagement with global, transnational Pentecostal networks and activities. There are evidently traces of mutual demonization and antagonisms between the Aladura and Pentecostal/Charismatic churches, each preoccupied with aggressive proselytism in a competitive and complex religious field. In another arena, these seemingly strange religious bedfellows are ecumenically engaged in what we have described elsewhere as the politics of religious networking in Europe (Adogame 2003). The physical dominance and transcultural mobility of African Pentecostal/Charismatic churches in the diasporic context has led some Aladura to adopt more Pentecostal/Charismatic forms. Evidently, some splinter groups have emerged from the traditional Aladura as the Cherubim and Seraphim Church Pentecostal and Pentecostal Celestial Church of Christ in London. Aspects of Aladura praxis and liturgical system are being transformed with Pentecostal flavour and colouration. In fact, the politics of Pentecostal identity comes into sharp focus with the tendency of some Aladura to describe themselves as Pentecostal. The self-identification of the CLA as an organization that is ‘Evangelical-Pentecostal-Spiritual-Praying-Fellowship’, with its four tenets as ‘Pentecostal in Power, Biblical in Pattern, Evangelical in Ministry, and Ecumenical in Outlook’, illustrates this inclination. The tendency towards globalization is not limited to the Pentecostal/Charismatic churches, Aladura also work out strategies for a further insertion into global religious maps. This is noticeable in their networking strategies, emerging multi-racial/ethnic configuration, appropriation of new media technologies and the taking on of new epithets such as ‘worldwide’, ‘global’, ‘international’, suggestive of their globalness, transculturalness and internationalism (Adogame 2002a: 81-85; Adogame 2002b: 38-48).

*Religious worldviews, ritual enactments and spiritual warfare in new cultural contexts*

Aladura churches describe themselves as bona fide Christian churches that emerged to supplant the lukewarm religiosity of mission-related Christianity. They attest to the increasing secularization of the world, a development which their ‘divine mission’ is set out to counteract. In a matter-of-fact way, they express this claim to a special spiritual task or ‘mission’. For instance, CCC self-identification as *Oko ighala ikehin* (the last ship/vessel/boat for salvation) best exemplifies the fusion of this-worldly and other-worldly orientations in their understanding of *ighala*—salvation (Adogame 2000a: 8); Aladura take the Bible as the pivot on which their entire belief code and ritual world is anchored.
The Bible is accorded supremacy in matters of doctrine, faith, ritual and conduct. They vehemently renounce any rapprochement with occultism and traditional religion. CCC tenets are outlined succinctly in their Constitution, which states the belief of the church that the name, organization of the church, its doctrines, beliefs and rituals are derived primarily from the inspirations of the Holy Spirit. ‘Members are strictly forbidden to engage or participate in any form of idolatry, fetish ceremony or cults, black magic and charms.’ The total condemnation of ‘juju’ and ‘charms’ is stated in C&S’s original constitution as follows: ‘The Order . . . believes in the curative effects of prayer for all afflictions, spiritual and temporal, but condemns and abhors the use of charms or fetish, witchcraft or sorcery of any kind and all heathenish sacrifices and practices.’ The Devil embraces any extra-Aladura ritual, not only Yoruba deities and medicine, but freemasonry, Rosicrucianism, the Reformed Ogboní Society, spiritualism—the whole array of contemporary occult practitioners (Harris 2002: 91).

In spite of these claims to the primacy of the Bible and a total repudiation of what Aladura perceive as ‘unchristian’ and ‘unbiblical’, their ritual cosmos is evidently suffused with features that demonstrate some affinity with Yoruba religious worldview. The dialectics between Aladura’s self-image as a Christian Church *sui generis* that refuses any connection with traditional religious thought and praxis on the one hand and the public perception of their rapport with Yoruba religio-cultural matrix on the other raises the politics of cultural identity (Adogame 1999). As far as Aladura are concerned, faithful observance of biblical injunctions and church norms ensures health, wealth, good fortune and salvation. Failure to observe them correctly places one’s health in jeopardy by making one vulnerable to the discretion of malevolent agencies. This uncompromising stance sometimes lays them open to censure. The Aladura are quite stark in their criticism of any member or group that attempts to introduce what they would call ‘un-Aladura’ or ‘unchristian’ doctrines and practices. Rufus Ositelu puts it plainly:

> Our rules and regulations, our beliefs and practices are quite explicit. The Holy Bible is our dictionary and reference point. Those who devise other means for problem resolution without calling on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ are not for us but against us. Within every group, there are always Judases. These are the people that give us a bad name. When we see such cases, we immediately call them to order and pray that God removes Satan’s scales which have blindfolded them.

This statement is suggestive of the dichotomy between official and popular religiosities. In every religious movement, there are undoubtedly
variations in the perception and contextualization of beliefs and codes of conduct between the levels of leadership (official religiosity) and clientship (popular religiosity). While Aladura church leadership considers straying from prescribed codes of belief and rituals as against church law, the hermeneutics of beliefs and ritual may be interpreted differently at times on the level of popular religion.

One basic feature that reveals an affinity and continuity between Aladura and Yoruba cosmologies is the belief in spiritual forces. Linked to this is the tenacity with which ritual enactments take place. As Ray (1993: 267 f.) argues, ‘While rejecting most of the “pagan” belief content of the religious environment, the founders of the Aladura churches retained two fundamental elements: the belief in invisible forces, especially malevolent spiritual powers, and the belief in the efficacy of ritual action.’ The Yoruba recognize a duality of cosmic space, though as intricately intertwined domains. Aladura worldview echoes Yoruba understanding and polarization of the cosmos into orun (heaven/sky as the abode of the spiritual entities) and aye (the world/earth of human habitation). In fact, aye is a sacral entity because it serves as a centre for the dramatization of spirit beings. It is a delineated space occupied by two pantheons of paranormal forces, orisa (four hundred supernatural powers of the right) and ajogun (two hundred supernatural forces of the left), engaged in a timeless and sustained competition for its domination. Human beings are caught up in this ‘cross-fire’ between the benevolent and malevolent spiritual forces. However, the antidotal reference and escape from these ‘spiritual conflicts’ is the recourse to divination and propitiation of the orisa. The orisa, including Orisa Nla, Orunmila, Ogun, Shango, Yemoja and Esu, are largely benevolent to humans so long as their precepts are jealously guided and kept (Abimbola 1994). They are primarily concerned with blessing human beings with all the ‘good things in life’ (Hallgren 1988). Their wrath is incurred when their precepts are flouted, and when they are not adequately propitiated. On the other hand, the ajogun such as iku (death), arun (disease), ofo (loss) and so on are inherently malevolent. The spirit forces that make up this genre are preoccupied with total human annihilation. Figuratively, aye assumes a ‘marketplace’ and the journey through it to the final destination—‘home’ (the spirit world/heaven)—is characterized by life’s vicissitudes (Adogame 2000a: 3-29).

This epistemology makes sense in Aladura ritual sensibilities. There is an observable resilience in belief in the reality of, and ritual attitude towards, the suprasensible powers. Members believe that the physical world is populated by a multiplicity of incorporeal entities. However,
a remarkable change lies in the constitution of this spiritual repertoire, as well as the agency and strategies through which ritual enactments are authenticated. ‘The continuity between indigenous ritual practice and Aladura was not based on the syncretic reproduction of ritual acts or symbols, but on the principles lying behind the concept of spiritual power, which remained substantially the same’ (Harris 2002: 90). Basically, the Aladura share a similar mentality in their belief tradition, employing an indigenous hermeneutic of spiritual power but casting it within new conceptual frames of reference. The bedrock of their belief system is the pre-eminence of benevolent powers—God, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, the legion of angels. The bestowal, manifestation and appropriation of *agbara emi mimo* (power of the Holy Spirit) form the nerve-centre of Aladura spirituality. Harris (2002: 13) aptly summarizes the Aladura power concept that, ‘*agbara emi mimo* forms the focus of ritual, the pivot of prayer; the subtext of all dreams and visions. It is also the basic dynamic behind the Aladura divinatory system of prophecy and prayer, whereby the visioner, empowered by the Spirit, reveals the activities of unseen forces . . .’.

The stark reality of *ajogun, aje, oso* and the numerous malevolent spiritual powers is not a bone of contention in Aladura epistemological tradition. These powers come in for the full weight of Aladura censure and aggression. However, the medium of control is what has changed. The Aladura wage ‘spiritual war’ on the enigmatic forces through elaborate prayer rituals, prophecy, trance, visions and dreams. They abhor any recourse to divinatory methods through the *babalawo* (diviner or traditional medicine-man) or the employment of *ebo* (ritual sacrifice). Aladura liturgical tradition is thus a highly expressive action characterized by a heavy dose of rituals enacted to resolve individual and collective existential problems. Each segment of the ritual worship is seen by members to be full of religious symbolism and meaning. Although they vary in matters of specific ritual details, the Aladura are perpetually engaged in rituals. They continue to believe in traditional causes of diseases, illnesses and evil. Nothing is given to chance, be it childbirth, naming, marriage, infertility, academic examination, promotion, unemployment, acquiring visas, xenophobia, death, dreams, accidents, sickness, poverty, loss of property, homelessness etc. As far as Aladura are concerned, natural problems can be resolved through natural and spiritual means, but ‘spiritual’ problems can be diagnosed and solved only through ‘spiritual’ means. Illnesses that defy medical prognosis are easily interpreted as ‘spiritual attack’. Barrenness or premature death are usually not treated as natural occurrences. A person who experiences
a prolonged state of unemployment reads spiritual meanings into his
difficulties. In all circumstances, Aladura hold fervently that an afflicted
person must be healed, and the beleaguering malevolent powers inval-
idated at the same time.

The resilience of Aladura cosmology and ritual praxis is evident in
the diaspora. Efforts are made to ensure continuity, and church members
retain the same practices as they face the same dangers. Witches, wizards
and sorcerers shuttle across geographical boundaries unrestrained. As
an informant remarked, ‘Witches do not require any visas to come to
Europe from Africa. Some reside here, and others can come over as
frequently as they have nocturnal assignments to accomplish. So as
Christians, we must watch out for the red alert signal always.’ In other
regards, many Africans find their sojourn in Europe rather more compli-
cated than they had envisaged. Prior high hopes of ‘making it’ on
arrival in Europe, to use Nigerian parlance for ‘material success and
upward social mobility’, are dashed. In fact, the ‘secularizing’ Europe
becomes personified as Satan’s stronghold. Europe is further perceived
as the ‘Dark Continent’ in dire need of spiritual regeneration. Life is
particularly difficult for African migrants, because of declining European
economies, retrenched welfare systems, cultural gaps, xenophobia at
individual and institutional levels, acute unemployment, police harassment
and brutality, dashed hopes, stress, loneliness, extended family expectations
from home, and mounting unpaid bills and mortgages. Under these
distressing conditions, many Africans find spiritual, psychological and
material succour in the church. Through elaborate rituals, a sense of
identity, security and protection is provided for members.

The church conveys its power over malevolent forces by employing
metaphors from common parlance in reference to Satan (Adogame
1998a: 159). During ritual services, Satan is accused as having stayed
too long within the society and has become an illegal immigrant that
must be deported immediately to where it belongs. This is akin to the
experience and anxiety of illegal immigrants among them who are
always conscious of their status and the uncertainty that goes with it.
At the end of the service, members ‘praise God believing that the
deporation order has been issued to Satan, the illegal immigrant, the
one who is not supposed to be here but has been tormenting people
for too long’. This metaphorical repositioning of Satan or the Devil
encompasses the discourse on individual and institutional racism. The
‘demonic spirit of racism’ is perceived as the paraphernalia of Satan
itself. Xenophobic tendencies are the bulwarks instigated by Satan to
promote hatred among humans and distract them from fellowship with
God. An informant’s testimony and the subsequent thanksgiving ritual during a Sunday worship service will suffice here:

I came to Germany in 1983 with our two children. It was a family reunion with my husband who studied earlier and is now residing here. A few months after I arrived in this country, one of my main worries was how our children will fit into German schools without any prior grasp of the German language. But thank God that they caught up very fast within a year, although they lost a year due to the different school systems between Germany and Nigeria. During discussions with German family friends on one occasion, the couple told me in a highly discouraging tone that my children could never adjust and cope in a German high school nor attend a German university. ‘At best they will end up in a Hauptschule but certainly not the Realschule or Gymnasium’ they added. I took this comment with exception and discussed with my husband afterwards. It was a trick of the devil and I refused to claim it. So I took it as a prayer point to the church. I fasted and prayed as I have never done before, asking God to arrest the plans of this ‘spirit of racism’. My inner mind told me this was a spiritual attack in the making, so I depended on my God for a counterattack. I told my God that my children will not only succeed in this Deutschland but will excel to the chagrin of the Devil. I thank Jehovah for the special prayers by members... To God be the Glory! Our son and daughter went successfully through high school and they have both gained admission into German universities. Brothers and sisters, join us in thanking God for this miracle in our family...

The remarks of the German couple, on the one hand, may not necessarily mean any ill will, but simply explain how the educational system works. On the other hand, they could be interpreted as laced with racism. But inherent in this testimonial is the conviction that these comments were overtly racial. As a result, the informant took them very seriously and even read in religious and racial meanings. Her reaction could be understood by reference to the local context.

The German education system provides different paths for students based on individual ability. The traditional three-tiered system is based on the assumption that students have different capabilities that are best handled by segregating them into separate types of school and by providing differentiated instruction. Following the Grundschule (fourth grade), the school system tracks students of differing abilities and interests into the Hauptschule (lowest track), Realschule (middle track) and Gymnasium (college track). This structure represents a pyramid of academic achievement. Entrance into any of the levels is based on criteria such as academic achievement and potential, and qualities such as ability to work independently and self-confidence. In this ranking, the lowest-achieving students attend the Hauptschule where they receive slower paced and more basic instructions. In the eyes of the German public, the Hauptschule is meant for the ‘drop-outs’ from the Grundschule. Probing my informant
further on why and how she inferred this conclusion from the couple’s statement, she retorted,

Can you imagine that the couple was convinced that our children can never do well in German schools? What kind of prophecy is this? This is definitely not coming from God but the Devil. They say this because we are Africans and blacks. The society continues to think that African (black) children have a lesser intelligence than whites. This is a very myopic way of thinking. You see, my children have proven the direct opposite... I really think all white people must begin to change these stereotypes...

Ostensibly, the comments of the German couple were understood and interpreted as the device of Satan. The fact that a single remark during a conversation over coffee could generate such concern is significant in understanding the prevalence of rituals among the Aladura diaspora. It demonstrates a continuity of religious worldview, particularly the belief in malevolent, indiscernible entities and the complex ‘spiritual battles’ enacted to ward off their influences.

Public mental images and cultural profiling

The public is heavily reliant on the mass media for information about what they perceive as ‘uncivic’, ‘unconventional’ and ‘exotic’ religious movements. A common observation about media portrayal of NRMs such as Aladura is that the movements’ activities are newsworthy most especially when they are involved in internal conflicts, fraud, scandals or matters which are considered controversial by the public. Even where such accounts attempt to be balanced, the exotic, problematic and conflictual aspects often predominate. James Beckford (1985) aptly summarizes this tendency of the mass media to characterize and caricature NRMs as threatening, strange, exploitative, oppressive and provocative. Biased presentations of a generalizing nature are sometimes rooted in cultural stereotypes, commercial pressures and armchair journalism. The categorization of NRMs as problematic and conflictual is mostly prejudiced and has the tendency to feed directly into public ignorance. Proper investigative journalism may have positive benefits for the society by unveiling criminal and unwholesome activities that occur within a specific movement. But a sensationalist approach often helps to cement the public perception of NRMs as exotic, destructive and antisocial. Scholars need to accord sufficient attention to the consequences of such sensationalist depictions of religion. This section examines the public image of Aladura in Europe against the backdrop of
their evolution in Nigeria and in diaspora. We contend that public mental pictures of Aladura particularly in their formative years, as constructed by mission church officials, British colonial administrators, post-colonial political elites, some colonial missionary historiographers and host country officials, largely inform the contemporary public perception.

Because of the religious, political and socio-cultural circumstances surrounding the emergence of C&S, CLA and CAC from the Anglican Church mainstream, the relationship that developed between old and new churches before the independence era was both sympathetic and antipathetic. The nucleus of these movements got official recognition to operate as fully fledged associations, prayer bands within the Anglican Church. Central to their activities was an increasing awareness for a more ingrained African Christian spirituality. Meetings also became arenas where members freely exhibited their newly acquired spiritual gifts of prophecy, visions and dreams. The church authorities viewed with trepidation what they called an introduction of ‘irregularities’ and ‘innovations’ into church doctrine and rituals. Moreover, the anxiety that the groups’ popularity might undermine and supplant constituted authority led to their official recognition to operate as fully fledged associations, prayer bands within the Anglican Church. Central to their activities was an increasing awareness for a more ingrained African Christian spirituality. Meetings also became arenas where members freely exhibited their newly acquired spiritual gifts of prophecy, visions and dreams. The church authorities viewed with trepidation what they called an introduction of ‘irregularities’ and ‘innovations’ into church doctrine and rituals. Moreover, the anxiety that the groups’ popularity might undermine and supplant constituted authority altered the official status accorded to them. Thus, attitudes towards the prayer groups began to change and their activities were condemned as unscriptural (Peel 1968: 62-63; Turner 1979: 124). For instance, Josiah Ositelu was summoned on 2 February 1926 before the church authorities with allegations of introducing irregularities into the church (Turner 1967: 25-27). The authorities found his explanation unconvincing. Consequently, he faced suspension and dismissal from the Anglican Church on 19 April 1926. The prayer group led by Moses Orimolade and Abiodun Akinsowon functioned under the Anglican Church in Lagos. Leaders and members of the group had no initial plan to break with the mission church they attended. The church authorities officially ejected them in 1925, as they could no longer countenance their prayer and spiritual activities. Thus, a mixture of doctrinal and political considerations partly culminated in the eventual emergence of Aladura churches such as CAC, CLA and C&S. Ostensibly, these circumstances bred mutual suspicion. In order to attain supremacy and public patronage, each church became engaged in demonizing ‘the Other’. The mission churches openly criticized Aladura of being totally suffused with Yoruba cultural practices, syncretistic features, and what they perceived as an indiscriminate use of charismatic gifts. Aladura on the other hand, accused Anglicans of practising ambivalent Christianity, idolatry and a faith too dressed in foreign (western) garb in their polity and liturgical content.
The colonial situation further precipitated an uncongenial relationship between Aladura and the mission churches. Mission churches had closer ties to the British colonial government. Schools, colleges and hospitals established by mission churches were run within the framework of the colonial system. This proximity had considerable socio-economic and political advantages both for mission churches and the colonial machinery. Such a relationship gave the mission churches a socio-political leverage. This advantage was sometimes employed to the detriment of the new indigenous churches. There were indications of spiteful treatment of Aladura by the colonial administration (Turner 1967: 27-28).

Omoyajowo (1978: 97) noted that ‘In those days; enlightened people generally did not want to show interest in Aladura openly. How could they when the powers-that-were, the colonial administration, in a way regarded these churches as _religio illicita_?’ He highlighted the impression of a colonial officer (Captain Ross, the Resident at Oyo) about the indigenous churches when Ross wrote in 1930 that ‘they (Aladura) are not recognized Christian missions and they should be regarded as enemies’. The colonial governments were also apprehensive of the danger that such groups might pose to constituted authority if they became ‘well established’ and ‘strong’. Such an attitude influenced many post-colonial political elites who treated these churches with contempt during their formative years. ‘They preferred the more socially dignifying, and more sophistication-conscious mission-connected churches to the spiritually-oriented Aladura churches which were almost exclusively patronized by the poor, the illiterate, and the sick’ (Omoyajowo 1978: 98).

The political tide that followed Nigerian independence in 1960 flowed also into the church. Independence created an escape route from ‘the unfavourable and spiteful attitude of the white warlords’ (Omoyajowo 1978: 98). Just as the mantle of political leadership fell on Nigerians, so also did the administration of mission churches become the exclusive responsibility of local bishops and clergy. Consequently, a slight change in the disposition of the mission churches towards Aladura became evident. There was a shift from antipathy towards sympathetic inquiry and empathetic understanding (Turner 1978: 45). A 1960 Report of the Christian Council of Nigeria (CCN) on ‘Christian Responsibility in an Independent Nigeria’ noted:

. . . The praying bands which began within the Lagos churches have almost separated themselves from them. It has to be recognized that these groups (Aladura) have arisen out of dissatisfaction with the life of the Church (or its lack of life)

. . . There is cause to examine ourselves to see whether the full and joyous life that marked the early Church is present in our congregations, whether we show
the same sensitivity to the influence of the Holy Spirit, and an equal dependence on prayer...

The 1960 CCN Report further struck an ecumenical chord when it asserted that ‘the challenge to be one with Christ and to take Christ with us into all walks of life is an eternal one’. The mission churches gradually began to take a more objective stance in their estimation of Aladura. Such a changing tide was reciprocated by an increasing Aladura ecumenical appetite. By 1960, some Aladura churches had applied for membership in both national and international ecumenical councils. C&SS made early attempts to apply for membership into the CCN in 1960. Rejecting two applications, the then CCN General Secretary, Rev. W.S. Wood, called on Aladura churches to unite first before forwarding further applications (Omoyajowo 1978: 102). Aladura are still conspicuously absent from the CCN.25

We contend here that the public perception of Aladura acted as a significant stimulus in their determination to register with local, national and international ecumenical bodies. In another vein, public pressures partly explain the urge to form an umbrella body. Initial attempts at an umbrella Aladura organization were fraught with difficulties. The formation in 1961 of the ‘Spiritual Union of Aladura Churches’ in Ibadan represents the first bold attempt (Turner 1967: 70; Omoyajowo 1978: 100). This group metamorphosed into a body to be known as ‘the National Association of Aladura Churches’. Aladura played a central role in the formation of a continental ecumenical body, the Organization of African Instituted Churches, founded in 1978. As we have argued, this creation and involvement in local and international ecumenical organizations is one strategy of legitimizing their corporate status within the immediate society (cf. Adogame 2003: 24-41).

In spite of shifts in attitude, there continues a mutual demonization process between Aladura, mission churches and the Pentecostal/Charismatic churches. New insights gleaned from Kenneth Enang’s recent study Nigerian Catholics and the Independent Churches: A Call to Authentic Faith, demonstrates this. He puts forward this view:

The rapid proliferation of Independent Churches in Nigeria is a mounting problem... Since the ban of Secret Societies in Nigeria by the Federal Government in the late 1970s, the phenomenon of the spiralling acceleration of the establishment of churches has reached dimensions without precedent in the history of religion of our country as almost all the Secret Societies changed their sign posts to put on the labels of churches to avoid being banned by the authorities (Enang 2000).

These antecedents are not totally unconnected with Aladura public image generated both in Nigeria and Europe. We have highlighted this
historical trajectory in order to show how and to what extent the attitude of mission churches, the colonial administrative apparatus, colonial missionary historiographers and postcolonial political elites towards Aladura partly forms the wellspring for their public image retention and reconstruction in diaspora. We shall now illustrate how the public perception of Aladura diaspora is further sustained by focusing on their characteristic liturgical system and its attendant consequences, their alleged links to the Thames Torso case and the transnational sexual trafficking in Europe.

One feature that has had a negative effect on the public attitude towards Aladura in diaspora is their characteristically loud ritual services. Drumming, songs and music are accompanied with dancing. Extemporaneous prayer rituals are punctuated with intermittent loud shouts. In Nigeria where Aladura originated, such a ritual pattern does not often attract public criticism. In fact, it is believed that ‘shouting prayers’ has the potency of chasing away the demons and evil spirits in the vicinity. Thus, solemn, quiet prayers in a pietistic fashion do not have a place in their ritual. However, in Europe such loud programmes on Sundays and at midnight often attract the wrath of neighbours. Many European neighbours prefer a quiet Sunday morning of sleep and relaxation to attending church services. Litigation and complaints to local authorities and law enforcement agencies are rife. Such complaints usually end with ejection from the buildings, prosecution by the local authorities or imposition of fines. In Great Britain, for instance, prosecutions are generally served under S.80 (4) Environmental Protection Act 1990. A press release on prosecutions undertaken at Barking Magistrate Courts states:

Noisy neighbours have been given a stern warning by the Council’s Noise & Nuisance Team who have succeeded in a number of prosecutions recently. The Noise & Nuisance team are continually monitoring anti-social residents and businesses who are irresponsible and cause disturbance to others... And no organisations are immune from prosecution. Recently a prosecution was brought against the Celestial Church of Christ in King Edwards Road, Barking. Reverend Michael Onafaye, Shepherd in charge of the church was found to be in breach of noise notices due to the playing of musical instruments, singing and human speech at such levels that it constituted a statutory nuisance. Fines and costs totalled £2400.

In another report, the Celestial Church of Christ Revelation Parish located on Elm Lane, Catford, was threatened with ejection following complaints about noise to the council’s environmental health team. Neighbour’s complaints of ‘unbearable noise’ led to the suggestion by the local Council of soundproofing the roof to reduce the noise level.

The celebrated ‘Torso in the Thames’ case, in which the decapitated body of a five-year-old boy (named Adam by Scotland Yard...
detectives) found floating in the River Thames in September 2001 was alleged to be the victim of a ritual murder or a human sacrifice. A story headlined ‘Celestial Church of Christ: Nigerian cult link to Thames body—religious cults and sects’ reported: ‘Detectives are investigating the possibility that breakaway groups from a Nigerian “Celestial Church of Christ” may be linked to the body of a five-year-old boy found in the Thames’; ‘The five-year-old boy whose torso was dumped in the Thames may have been murdered during a “witchcraft” ritual involving spiritualist cults operating in London’. The South African pathologist, Dr. Hendrick Scholtz, commissioned for this investigation, claimed that the dismembered body of the five-year-old boy had all the hallmarks of a ritualistic death. Through a second autopsy he declared that it was a ‘muti killing’ of the South African variety. Other speculations about the killing were tied to voodoo invocation, black magic, child trafficking, witchdoctor killing and the One Love Family rituals. All news stories and public opinion condemned the act. Although recent news stories suggest progress with the investigation, the perpetrators of the crime are yet to be apprehended. However, media sensationalization of such allegations and the language chosen to describe suspects, the character and seriousness of the crime raise controversial questions. The media interpretation of the various aspects of this crime is not the main focus of this paper. However, we would contend that the sensationalization of stories on the indictment of specific geo-ethnic groups or religious groups such as the CCC, One Love Family and the Orisha/Ifa religious movements further serves to heighten public apprehension about them. The Guardian story by Martin Bright and Paul Harris entitled ‘Thames torso boy was sacrificed’ best encapsulates this general trend. Commencing with a blurb, ‘Police suspect the victim was a West African child slave, after forensic evidence points to a ritual killing’, they reported:

A young boy whose mutilated body was discovered floating in the River Thames last September was the victim of a gruesome West African ‘religious sacrifice’ intended to bring good luck, and was trafficked into the country expressly for the killing . . . . Detectives are now working on the horrifying theory that he was bought as a child slave in West Africa and smuggled to Britain solely to be killed. Experts on African religion consulted by Scotland Yard believe Adam may have been sacrificed to one of the 400 ‘Orisha’ or ancestor gods of the Yoruba people, Nigeria’s second largest ethnic group. Oshun, a Yoruba river goddess is associated with orange, the colour of the shorts, which were placed on Adam’s body 24 hours after he was killed as a bizarre addition to the ritual. The body was then stored for a further 24 hours before being offered to the Thames. The cultural clues fit neatly with the forensics as the Yoruba are found in Benin, Togo and Ghana as well as Nigeria. Thousands of Yoruba slaves were also taken to the
Caribbean, where elements of their religion formed the basis of voodoo rituals... Officers working on the case believe that the level of expertise involved could show the perpetrators imported a magician or priest to carry out the ritual. They also believe the amputated body parts will have been kept as powerful magical trophies... 31

Indications emerging about the possible perpetrators at the time of writing are still largely speculative. If and when the culprits are finally apprehended, how do we then cope with the varied indictments brought to bear on a specific geo-cultural zone, on specific religious movements and suspected individuals? Already, the ‘Thames Torso’ case has taken a new twist as this sensationalized reporting has received harsh criticisms from varied constituencies. Okome and Banoum argue in a recent article,

> As the result of the tragic murder of a little boy, all the hoary demons of traditional ‘black continent’ analysis in Europe are deployed to show that there are ‘barbaric’ strangers in Europe who have brought in these ‘voodoo’ and ‘black magic’ and ‘witch-doctoring’ practices. Ethnocentrism, xenophobia and nativism are combined and the reporting, whether it is by the Guardian, the BBC, or any other newspaper, or media outlet, totally loses any sense of objectivity. 32

Some existing Orisa groups in diaspora reacted and condemned this media sensationalism. In correspondence with Orisa devotees and sympathizers globally, they remarked:

We are writing to you out of concern for what is becoming an internationally significant media event that affects all of us as Orisa/Ifa people and sympathizers. In September 2001, a child’s torso was found in the Thames River in London. The ongoing police investigation and media reporting are committing some of the most fallacious racism against Africans, and, for us, against the Yoruba and the Orisa, specifically Osun and Sango. The crux of the matter is that the police and the media are perceiving the death of this child not as a murder but as a ‘ritual sacrifice’ by which they are condemning Africans and Orisa religion. Both Yoruba culture and the Orisa religion are being represented as primitive and savage which conforms to a Euro/American racist expectation of Africa rather than truth. And the weak excuse of saying it is done by a ‘deviant cult’ does not relieve the media of responsibility for its portrayal of all Orisa traditions, indigenous African traditions as a whole, as deviant and savage from the assumed civilized gaze of the West. We must respond with consistent and organized effort to hold journalists and filmmakers and their publishers/producers accountable... To date, it is mostly the BBC that is churning out the racist portrayal. The main point to make when writing a response is that murder is not a part of African religious practices and this murder should be treated the same way as any other murder, not as a cultural persecution through invented ‘cultural profiling’. Social deviancy and pathology is not the same as cultural norms! This ethical point must be demanded for African cultures, not just those of developed nations!... We are encouraging the global communities of Orisa and Ifa devotees to flood the BBC with emails and letters about their offensive and incorrect representation of this murder and to demand its correction along with a public apology to the communities damaged. 33
The group also interpreted the BBC Scotland mini-series programme, *Sea of Souls*, as clearly based on the Thames torso murder and the subsequent hysteria about African religion. This was akin to the BBC ‘Black Britain’ series, which was meant to promote and reflect the interests of the Black Community in the U.K. John Freedom critically remarked about the BBC, in respect of this programme (*Nobody’s Child*, BBC2, April 2, 2002), that ‘It has apparently been taken over by pseudo-imperialists who have now slandered black tribal culture . . . and painted Black Africans who still hold their tribal beliefs, as potential ritualistic killers!’

From the foregoing, we have not set out to speculate who the likely perpetrator is. Our task is far from exonerating any individuals or religious groups alleged to have committed the crime. Until a conclusive investigation is achieved, it is premature to censure any of the accused. Conversely, our focus was on the tendency and consequences of media reporting in aggravating public apprehension about individuals and religious groups especially in cases with inconclusive criminal investigations. The second point concerns ‘exotic’ ritualism which makes religious groups such as Aladura vulnerable to public frenzy. In the Thames Torso case, the detectives’ discovery of ‘seven half-burned candles wrapped inside a white cotton sheet’, ‘ritualistic candles’, the inscription of the name Adekoyejo Fola Adoye ‘three times on the sheet and cut into the candles’ were unreservedly suggestive to the detectives and the public media of Aladura’s complicity. These concrete objects occupy a conspicuous place in Aladura ritual and were thus used to suggest guilt by association.

The recent scenario described above is certainly not without precedent in Britain’s public sphere. For instance, during 1988, the British print and broadcast media carried a series of allegations that children were being sexually abused and murdered by secret organizations during rituals variously described as witchcraft, black magic, ‘the occult’, devil worship or Satanism. In fact, a shorthand phrase which became a label for the new allegations was ‘satanic abuse’ or the synonym ‘ritual abuse’ and sometimes combined as ‘satanic ritual abuse’. Many observers have pointed out that the killing and sexual abuses of children are particularly suited to representing the quintessence of evil, the presence of the devil himself (La Fontaine 1992; Comaroff 1994). La Fontaine (1997) dealt extensively with the literature on the perceived satanic abuse of children in England. She concludes that behind the hysteria is a social movement, comparable to classic instances of witchcraft accusations and the witch hunts in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Europe. As van Dijk (2001: 573) remarked on this work,
Horrible images of Caribbean ‘voodoo’ filled the imagination particularly of the social interest groups who declared themselves in defence of innocent childhood and of the Western prerogative of protecting it in all circumstances. In fact this public moral outrage concerning African religious practices ideologically celebrated very Eurocentric notions of the young as defenceless victims of their own cultural religious forms and Europe as the idealised place where childhood blossoms in safety.

It would seem that there is a public mindset in dealing with controversial issues of this nature. Such ideologically loaded mindsets sustain the dialectics of ‘we/they’, and further indicate how and to what extent western public domains get caught in sensationalism resulting from exoticized images of African and African-derived religions.

A closely related issue that has been widely publicized by the international media is the transnational sexual labour trafficking in Europe. Some hotspots in this illicit industry are located in major European cities in Italy, Spain, Germany, Belgium, Holland, France, and Great Britain. In fact, concerning the influx of African sex workers, Italy represented the hotbed of the industry in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Public gaze soon transcended the local host context and drew the attention of African governments, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and international agencies. This, coupled with harsher immigration policies, led to a remarkable shift in and dispersal from the industry’s centre of gravity in the mid 1990s. Sexual traffickers and the trafficked gradually moved their operational theatres to major European cities such as Amsterdam, Paris, Berlin, Brussels, and London. Although this was largely a transnational activity, it also involved Africans who were identified as both traffickers and the trafficked. Religious groups such as Aladura and Pentecostal/Charismatic groups have not escaped media indictments and scholarly scrutiny. On the one hand, the media have indicted churches for complicity and for becoming ‘spiritual contractors’ in ensuring safe delivery of girls and young women to their various destinations in Europe. A news report stated: ‘The Celestial Church has been operating unchristian life as it embarked on illegal forex, drugs, mobile phone deals and engaged in prostitution but using Jesus Christ as a front to cover up their unholy activities’. Van Dijk notes how ‘further empowerment was acquired by the girls “taking prayers” at the rapidly emerging Charismatic Pentecostal churches in Benin city, such as those of Benson Idahosa and its offshoots’, and ‘the fact that increasing numbers of these young girls sought to establish contact with the many African, particularly Ghanaian Pentecostal churches in the country’ (Van Dijk 2001: 571; 1997, 1999). Although some of these stories may be unsubstantiated, commercial pressures and public biases have made them very popular.
Rijk van Dijk (2001: 558-586) encapsulates the moral panic that emerged in the Netherlands during the boom of under-aged Nigerian female asylum seekers smuggled to populate the local sex industry and launched into transnational sexual labour trafficking. He vividly describes forms of exorcist rituals and sometimes fabricated narratives undertaken by some of the culprits and shows how, out of public ignorance, the images of 'voodoo' were invented by the various authorities to explain 'the anxieties of supernatural origin' to the Dutch public domain. 'Voodoo' was defined as an essential element in how the system was operated. Van Dijk (2001: 566) aptly remarked that 'the extent to which this upheaval, this sense of boomeranging threat, was aggravated by the media, the sensationalism of their reports, the television documentaries full of suggestive screen shots of “dark” rituals, drums, fire, African girls filmed with hidden cameras as they went about their business in brothels and red light districts, and so forth'. The above scenario is often characteristic of media depiction of African religious traditions or aspects of culture. These media reports, however, might rather consider the target audience of these commercial workers. Who are the stakeholders in this industry? Who patronizes and benefits most from the sex industry and for what immediate and remote purposes? Is it meant to service the Dutch public, the Dutch sex industry or the immigrant community? Who are the real traffickers and how is the process structured and organized? Are these narratives true? These are obvious questions that researchers and scholars must also pay attention to in tackling the controversial terrain of transnational sexual labour trafficking. While some of these narratives certainly are true, caution needs to be exercised about taking them all at face value. There is a certain urgency to understand and interpret the dynamics and details of the industry on a global, transnational terrain. In actual fact, some of the bogus and implausible 'tales' may either be constructed to invoke public sympathy or even serve as a strategy of explanation to circumvent immigration bottlenecks and policies at the expense of public ignorance.

Conclusion

We have discussed above the histories of Aladura emergence in Nigeria and the diaspora, stressing continuity of emphasis and appropriation of ritual in both arenas. The knowledge gained by an understanding of Aladura religious worldview and African experiences in Europe can help in the reconstruction of public apprehensions in dias-
Aladura continue to engage establishing and asserting themselves in the host geo-cultural context. They increasingly play a social role in addition to their religious preoccupation. They have been registered as religious bodies, charitable organizations and sometimes as business outfits in different European countries. This process has granted them official recognition and legitimacy as religious organizations. Their involvement in intra-religious networking with local, continental and international ecumenical bodies facilitates status improvement and legitimacy in diaspora. Their engagement in extra-religious activities such as social welfare programmes, day care and recreation, language coaching, rehabilitation of drug addicts, the poor and the needy is meaningful and relevant in the light of failing European welfare systems. Aladura in Europe have served as employers by providing jobs especially for some members and the general public. The gradual acquisition of real estate, abandoned church buildings and warehouses have religious, social and economic implications for both the groups and their host society. Thus, Aladura provide religious, spiritual, social, cultural and civic benefits for both the migrant and the host constituencies.

REFERENCES


NOTES


2. The literature on the AICs is extensive. Some of the pioneering literature on the subject includes the works of Harold Turner, Bengt Sundkler, G.C. Oosthuizen, David
Barrett, J.D.Y. Peel, E.A. Ayandele, Martinus Daneel, R. Mitchell and J. Omoyajowo among others.

3. Other Aladura such as Christ Apostolic Church (CAC), and Evangelical Church of Yahweh (ECY), Aladura International Church followed.


5. Harris's (2002: 23) work on C&S examines the experience of Yoruba worker-students in the context of a racist society. She argues that, in spite of the many problems they encountered as members of a black immigrant working class, their own identity was shaped by the futures they planned as part of a national elite.


7. The Celestial Church of Christ UK is a registered UK Charity No. 280611. See also 'Cherubim and Seraphim Church Suro-Leve Ayo N5. Registered Charity No. 1080961’ at http://www.charity-commission.gov.uk/.


10. The Vision Statement of the ‘Cherubim and Seraphim Church Pentecostal’ is at http://www.safesurfing.co.uk/church/churchdetails.asp?id=8

11. Ositelu interview, see note 4.

12. This repositioning of itself at the institutional level by CLA comes out vividly in my conversation with Rufus Ositelu, see note 4. See also CLA official website at http://www.aladura.de.


15. Ositelu interview, see note 4.

16. According to Oshun (1997: 11), ‘Aladura churches have emphasized spiritual technologies such as faith in Christ, and his father, prayer to, and through him, in his name, and in the power of the Holy Spirit as basic to resolving every exigency of life and over-turning impossibilities. In this way, the Aladura conviction in a spiritual resource anchored in Jesus Christ represents Aladura faith at its best’.

17. One of the important elements of ritual enactment is the conspicuous use of concrete objects. The Aladura claim that all their ritual symbols are derived from the Bible, but also revealed through prophets and prophetesses in the church. A repertoire of concrete objects is employed and given symbolic meanings in Aladura ritual life. This extensive genre includes abeja (candles), tawari (incense), awone (consecrated oil), ipese (fruits), lofinde (perfume), agraheba (crosses), pagasha (metal collection pouch), amure (girdle), mariwo ope/uda (palm fronds) and sacred numerology. Water and colour are extremely important symbols in their ritual cosmos. The belief in the efficacy of ‘holy’, ‘sanctified’ water is very strong. Following effectual prayer rituals of sanctification, omi eyi (water of life) or omi agbara (potent water) is appropriated for therapeutic and prophylactic purposes (Adogame 2000b: 59-77). These objects are not ends in themselves but are means to achieving some ritual ends.


19. This text is part of ‘testimony’ recorded at the CCC parish, Frankfurt, Germany, November 1999.

20. See, for instance, Archived Information, ‘The Educational System in Germany: Case Study Findings, June 1999’, http://www.ed.gov/pubs/GermanCaseStudy/exec-
sum.html. The **Hauptschule** leads to receipt of the **Hauptschule** certificate and then to part-time enrolment in a vocational school combined with apprenticeship training until age 18. The **Realschule** leads to receipt of the **Realschule** certificate and then to part-time vocational schools, higher vocational schools or continuation of study at a **Gymnasium**. The **Gymnasium** leads to the **Abitur** and prepares students for university study or for a dual academic and vocational credential. [http://www.ed.gov/pubs/GermanCaseStudy/chap-
ter1a.html](http://www.ed.gov/pubs/GermanCaseStudy/chapter1a.html).


22. For a more detailed treatment, see Adogame and Omoyajowo (1998: 90-97).

23. CCC presents a slightly different case (see CCC Constitution Nigeria Diocese, 14). With the first CCC parish in Makoko-Lagos in 1951, it soon gained popularity in the locality through the healing activities of Oschoff. It was claimed that Oschoff healed an insane woman soon after he arrived in Lagos. The news of this healing miracle spread around Lagos within a short time. Such a development drew the uncomfortable gaze of the mission churches especially as several of their members left for the new movement in droves. Oschoff was summoned to a meeting organized by a number of clergymen from various churches including the Anglican Church. The meeting that took place at a hall in Yaba-Lagos was partly aimed at allaying their fears and suspicion about the new movement. Secondly, it was an attempt to curb Oschoff’s growing fame and popularity.


25. Most of the mission and Aladura churches belong to the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), All African Conference of Churches (AACC) and some to the World Council of Churches (WCC).


29. [‘Thames Body Linked to Nigerian Cult’ January 31, 2002 at http://www.mysouthwark.co.uk/southwark/community-localnews-jan02.htm](http://www.mysouthwark.co.uk/southwark/community-localnews-jan02.htm); ‘Celestial Church of Discord?’.


31. Martin Bright and Paul Harris, ‘Thames Torso Boy was Sacrificed’, *Guardian*
This story reported the critical response of one Temi Olusanya (the Nigerian Vice-Chair of the African Caribbean Development Association) to the media reports on the murder incident. ‘Adam’s murder had deeply shocked the West African community. This is a crime that cannot be tolerated in African religions. Murder is murder and we should work together to find the people who did this.’


34. For a synopsis of this series, see http://www.bbc.co.uk/seaofsouls/episode_guide/episode3_1.shtml (Sea of Souls Part 1) and http://www.bbc.co.uk/seaofsouls/episode_guide/episode3_2.shtml (Sea of Souls Part 2).


