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Transculturation of the Spirit: The Re-Enchantment of Secular Europe Among 2G African Christians

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Abstract

Religion, culture, and ethnic heritage play a significant role in shaping migrant identities. This paper investigates the interplay of these factors in the identity formation of African Christian migrants in Europe. In particular, it analyzes how second-generation (2G) migrants integrate Western secular values with Pentecostal orientations to facilitate upward social mobility. The analysis is based on a critical review of existing literature, supported by selected ethnographic case studies and qualitative interviews discussed in the cited works. By drawing on empirical research from various European contexts, this study aims to provide a rigorous and multidimensional understanding of intergenerational identity reconstruction among 2G African Christians. By centering the Pentecostal family as a primary site of socialization, this paper explores how 2G African Christians both distance themselves from indigenous African spirit cosmologies and adapt elements of these cosmologies to pursue secular, achievement-oriented objectives. This dialectical engagement highlights a generational shift: while first-generation migrants depend heavily on religion and religious institutions for integration, 2G migrants prioritize secular aspirations as they navigate socioeconomic structures, negotiate belonging, and construct new forms of transnational identity.

Keywords: 2G migrants; African Christianity; Europe; identity; belonging; intergenerational dynamics

1. Introduction

Global migration and world Christianity are deeply intertwined. A 2010 Pew Research report shows that Christians constitute 49% of the world's 214 million religious migrants, making Christianity the most geographically mobile religion worldwide. Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, and adherents of African Traditional Religions follow, each representing less than 9% of global religious migrants. Subsequent Pew findings (2012) further indicate that Europe and North America serve as the primary destinations for Christian migrants, with Europe also functioning as the largest source region, accounting for 44% of all Christian migrants.

Against this backdrop, this paper reimagines the intersection of religion and migration by examining how intergenerational dynamics, African Christianity, and indigenous spirit cosmologies shape cultural and social integration in Europe. A particular focus is given to the contexts of the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, which function as primary case studies for in-depth analysis due to their sizable African Christian populations and distinctive migration histories. Where relevant, literature and examples from other European settings are discussed to illustrate parallels and contrasts, but the central findings are derived from these two national contexts. It argues that second-generation (2G) African migrants are reshaping European secularity, blending it with African Pentecostal religiosity to navigate three key domains: socioeconomic mobility, social integration, and religiocultural belonging. The analysis therefore, foregrounds how 2G Africans negotiate identity within Dutch and British societies, while also indicating where trends may be generalizable or context-specific, and examines how this process involves distancing themselves from the religious

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frameworks of their parents' society while simultaneously distancing themselves from the religious frameworks of their parents.

2G migrants—children of first-generation (1G) immigrants—occupy a unique sociocultural position shaped by generational differences in language, religion, values, worldviews, and socioeconomic priorities. These intergenerational dynamics influence how each cohort responds to broader forces such as education, marriage, economic pressures, environmental concerns, and conflict. As a result, 2G migrants often develop identity strategies distinct from those of their parents, particularly in relation to religion and cultural heritage.

The term migrant itself is notoriously difficult to define. Frederiks (2015) describes migrants as "a highly diversified group of people, who have very different biographies and migration stories" (p. 13). The International Organization for Migration (IOM) acknowledges this complexity, offering a broad definition that reflects common understanding: a migrant is anyone who moves away from their usual place of residence—within or across borders—temporarily or permanently, for a variety of reasons. This definition encompasses legally defined categories such as migrant workers and smuggled migrants, as well as groups not explicitly defined under international law, including international students.

Drawing on insights from existing research on second-generation migrants in the United States (Kurien 2005), the Netherlands (Asadu 2018; Adenekan-Koevoets 2021), the United Kingdom (Nyanni 2021; Kwiyani 2017), and Australia (Rocha et al. 2021), this paper affirms that the entanglement of religion and migration is not new. In the biblical narrative, the migration of Abraham from Ur to Canaan represents an early theological framing of movement, settlement, and integration. Abraham's journey reshaped demographic and religious landscapes in the ancient Near East and continues to inform contemporary Christian understandings of mission and mobility—particularly within Pentecostal traditions. This historical coalescence of religion, race, and migration persists today, as Fesenmyer (2022) notes, with these categories intersecting powerfully in Europe and beyond.

Christianity's global portability and its prominence in migration statistics intersect with the segmented assimilation patterns found in African Pentecostal churches in Europe. While first-generation (1G) migrants often treat the church as a cultural fortress for preserving home traditions, second-generation (2G) migrants negotiate and subtly re-enchant European secularity by distancing themselves from their parents' stricter religious systems. Building on this generational contrast, the remainder of the paper develops three lines of inquiry. First, it examines Europe as a socioreligious landscape marked by a rapidly expanding Muslim population despite Christianity's high migration inflow. Second, it analyzes the distinctive features of African Pentecostalism—particularly its capacity to fuse secularizing impulses with Pentecostal spirituality and elements of African primal religiosity. Third, it employs intergenerational dynamics as an analytic framework to explain how 2G African migrants integrate Pentecostal spirituality with European secular norms as a strategy for identity formation, social mobility, and belonging.

2. Europe as a Context: The Christian Migration and Politics

Europe exemplifies a modern society in which secularity, religion, and politics interact in complex and often contested ways. Although it remains the most popular migrant destination in the West (Zanfrini, 2020), its strong secular orientation makes it "far less favorably" disposed toward immigrant religion compared to other Western regions (Frederiks, 2015, p. 14). Yet despite this uneasy relationship between secular norms and migrant religiosity, Europe also demonstrates how migrant religions can reshape a secular environment into a more visibly multireligious and multicultural society (Jenkins, 2007). The political implications of this transformation have become increasingly volatile, with immigration emerging as a polarizing force in European public life.

Within the religious sphere, Europe's landscape is undergoing significant shifts. Even with high levels of Christian migration, three demographic and sociocultural factors are driving a noticeable rise in Muslim visibility. First, Muslim migrant communities tend to have higher birth rates than

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secular European populations. Second, patterns of geographic concentration make religious change especially visible in major urban centers. Third, secularization trends disproportionately affect Christian migrants—particularly second-generation youth—who may eventually identify as religious "nones," while Muslim identity often remains publicly anchored in communal practices and collective visibility.

2.1. The Politics of Migration and the Cultural Nativism

Religious visibility—particularly when framed through cultural and political narratives—has contributed to the renewed prominence of far-right movements and anti-immigration campaigns across Europe over the past decade. Countries such as the Netherlands, France, and Germany have brought these debates into the European Parliament, where migration has become a central political theme. The 2023 Dutch general election and the 2024 European Parliament elections marked a significant shift, with right-wing parties gaining increased representation across the continent. While religion is often invoked in public discourse, nativism—the prioritization of perceived native cultural interests—remains a key factor shaping grassroots support for these parties. This sentiment has mobilized segments of the electorate, including younger voters, who seek greater influence over immigration policy and governance.

In the Netherlands, public debates frequently link migration to domestic socioeconomic pressures. As Ben Crum notes, anti-migration narratives often attribute housing shortages, rising healthcare costs, and cultural change to the presence of migrants (Crum, 2023). Such framing produces a form of liminality, positioning migrants as legally present yet symbolically marginal. Prominent political actors, including Geert Wilders and the Partij voor de Vrijheid (PVV), have contributed to this discourse, with similar themes echoed by the Forum voor Democratie (FvD) led by Thierry Baudet (Crum, 2023). Following the PVV's electoral success in 2023, migration became a central topic in coalition negotiations. By late 2025, however, public discussions reflected a shift toward more centrist approaches under leaders such as Rob Jetten (D66), illustrating the dynamic nature of Dutch political responses to migration.

Historically, migration to the Netherlands has been shaped by colonial ties, labour recruitment, asylum flows, and family reunification. Religion and culture played a limited role in earlier migration patterns. Since the early twenty-first century, however, migration has diversified significantly, including refugees, highly skilled workers, international students, and transnational religious communities (Guveli & Platt, 2023). While the refugees arrive from regions of conflict such as in Africa, Syria, Afghanistan, and Ukraine, transnational religious communities are primarily African Pentecostal churches with their intrusive and publicity savvy characteristics.

Provisional 2025 data from the Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) indicate a stabilization of net migration following the 2022 peak:

Year	Total Net Migration	Africa (Net)	Asia (Net)	Europe (Excl. NL)
2022	223,798	16,300	64,600	138,600
2023	137,366	14,600	61,000	57,400
2024*	101,700	15,100	60,000	33,600
2025*	94,686	16,200	55,300	27,100

These figures show that the Netherlands functions not only as a destination but also as a transit hub for migrants moving onward to countries such as the United Kingdom and the United States, contributing to fluctuating net migration levels. Despite these patterns, anti-migration narratives continue to shape public discourse, often producing racialized and exclusionary sentiments that heighten the vulnerability of migrant communities. Nativist rhetoric frequently invokes secular values—such as gender equality, LGBTQ+ rights, freedom of expression, and debates surrounding religious dress—as markers of cultural difference. This dynamic contributes to the construction of otherness, where religion becomes racialized and social identities are framed through a binary

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opposition between the "secular" and the "sacred." The following section shows how these factors create a state of permanent "liminality" (being between two worlds without fully belonging to either) for migrants by squeezing them the host context and pressure from home.

2.2. Liminality and Vulnerability in Migration

The concept of liminality, originating with an ethnologist, Arnold Van Genep, and as popularized by the anthropologist, Victor Turner (Skjoldager-Nielsen and Edelman 2014), illuminates how migrants negotiate identity and belonging in precarious social and political contexts. According to Juanita Barreto Monje (2018), liminality describes the "betwixt-and-between" phase of transition, characterized by ambiguity, vulnerability, and transformation (Monje 2018,34-35). Liminality, understood as betweenness, denotes a transitory condition marked by ambiguity, vulnerability, and heightened exposure across physical, emotional, and rational domains as migrants struggle to make meaning amid displacement (Carson et al. 2021).

When migratory aspirations devolve into experiences of exclusion and loss, the search for hope becomes urgent and relational. Although this study does not directly measure the effects of precarity on church attendance, the observed expansion of migrant social media networks following restrictive policy shifts indicates a reconfiguration of belonging beyond formal religious institutions. These digital and relational spaces function as alternative sites of meaning-making, connection, and visibility for migrants navigating liminal uncertainty. This dynamic resonates with the anthropological concept of *communitas* which emerges within liminal conditions as a form of solidarity grounded in shared vulnerability rather than institutional structure (Turner 1997, 94). As analyzed by Carson, "communitas of shared liminal reality," particularly when mediated by spiritual leadership, sustains collective identity by reminding displaced communities who they are when conventional markers of belonging are destabilized (Carson 2016, 41).

For Christian migrants, *communitas* is theologically reconstructed in belongingness—a relational process through which migrants negotiate identity, hope, and social inclusion amid marginality. In migratory contexts, liminality is not merely spatial but existential, emerging from the suspension of familiar social, cultural, and religious structures while access to new ones remains uncertain. *Post-liminality* describes the condition in which migrants successfully negotiate this precarity within geographic, political, and social spaces, enabling them to approximate the primary aims of migration (Carson 2016). Drawing on Pierre Bourdieu, such negotiation requires access to both physical and social spaces through which migrants can convert aspiration into stability (Bourdieu 1977). These aims are often reducible to economic security, social recognition, and personal or familial safety. Yet the pursuit of these goals exposes migrants to significant risk, compelling them to confront the precarity generated by social dislocation, identity disruption, and political uncertainty—often intensified by exclusionary public policies and the resurgence of anti-migrant rhetoric, particularly toward African migrants (Ter Haar 2000). Somehow, communitas offers hope to ameliorate the adversity embedded in migrants' vulnerability.

For the causes of vulnerabilities, we argue that migration is closely intertwined with vulnerability. This vulnerability may arise from political instability, economic hardship, or cultural pressures in both the country of origin and the destination context. Religion often becomes a crucial resource in this process, providing networks of support, coping mechanisms, and a sense of continuity amid dislocation. Yet when combined with the uncertainties of mobility and the pressures of navigating multiple localities, political debates around migration can heighten migrants' sense of insecurity.

A further dimension of transnational vulnerability emerges from public sentiments that blame migrants for local socioeconomic challenges (Frederiks, 2015). Xenophobic attacks in South Africa against Zimbabweans, Nigerians, and even Western expatriates illustrate how economic frustration can be redirected toward migrants, exposing them to violence and exclusion.

Economic vulnerability also shapes expectations from home. Most African migrants often feel compelled to support family members financially, sending remittances to "improve the standard of

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living of the family left behind," even when this requires reducing their own consumption in the host country (Adelakun et al., 2025). Such remittances contribute to economic growth in countries of origin but also accelerate brain drain, particularly in nations like Nigeria, where the mass emigration of skilled professionals—popularly termed japa—reflects deeper structural failures (Asaju & Dapo-Asaju, 2013). Insecurity, inadequate infrastructure, and unemployment drive both internal and international migration, sometimes forcing migrants into perilous journeys involving trafficking networks or dangerous sea crossings.

Family and cultural expectations create additional layers of vulnerability. Leslie Fesenmyer's work on Kenyan migrants in Europe highlights the strain caused by misperceptions and unrealistic expectations from relatives at home (Fesenmyer, 2022). Similar patterns appear among immigrant communities in Canada, where elderly migrants often depend heavily on their children for financial and emotional support (Laaroussi, 2017). These pressures compound the psychological effects of social disruption and separation from family networks.

In response to these vulnerabilities, migrants frequently turn to religious and cultural institutions as primary sites of support, identity formation, and social integration. Johnson Asamoah-Gyadu notes that Ghanaian migrants in the Netherlands often rely on churches as their first point of contact and community-building (Asamoah-Gyadu, 2016, p. 153). Thus, for African migrants, religion fosters resilience and provides a framework for belonging. Yet this raises an important question: What happens when religion becomes subordinated to secular aspirations in the identity-making process?

The following section addresses this question by beginning with the historical rise of African churches in contemporary Europe as a communitas that offers cultural belonging across successive generations of African Christians. For the purposes of this study, *Africa* refers specifically to sub-Saharan Africa—a region shaped by centuries of cultural and religious encounters. Despite its internal diversity, the term is used here as a collective descriptor for people whose cultural and religious practices are rooted in this geographical context.

3. African Pentecostal Culture in Secular Europe

This section examines how the first-generation (1G) African "fortress church"—oriented toward survival, cultural preservation, and protection from perceived secular hostility—gradually gives way to a second-generation (2G) mode of "re-enchanted secularity." The central argument is that while 1G migrants use religion as a refuge from the secular world, 2G migrants increasingly use religious identity as a credential to negotiate their place within that same secular environment.

Pentecostalism's global spread is rooted in its distinctive portability and its capacity to engage dynamically with diverse cultural contexts. This adaptability is captured in the description of Pentecostalism as "a religion made to travel" (Dempster et al., 2011). Its transnationalization reflects the movement of people, ideas, rituals, and cultural practices across borders, producing new religious forms that are shaped by—and in turn reshape—the multicultural landscapes of contemporary Europe.

Transnationalization involves the circulation of religious and cultural identities, a process Ulf Hannerz describes as the crossing of boundaries through which "culture flows" alongside "migration flows" (Hannerz, 2002, p. 8). Within this framework, the African Pentecostal presence in Europe can be understood partly through the lens of reverse mission—the idea that African churches are called to re-evangelize a secularizing Europe. While this strategy facilitated the movement of African Pentecostal missionaries into European cities, its effectiveness has been mixed. The same features that helped populate African Pentecostal congregations—such as the emphasis on spiritual warfare, deliverance, and the African cosmology of spirits—also limit their appeal among Europeans who may find these practices culturally unfamiliar or theologically distant.

The growth of African Pentecostal churches in Europe is further shaped by the synchronic relationship between African indigenous spirit cosmologies and Pentecostal spirituality. This fusion has energized African congregations, offering a religious framework that resonates with migrants'

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lived experiences of uncertainty, mobility, and vulnerability. Yet it also creates a cultural and theological boundary that can hinder broader integration into European religious landscapes.

Against this backdrop, 2G African Christians navigate a different set of cultural expectations. Their engagement with Pentecostalism is less about cultural preservation and more about identity negotiation within secular Europe. For them, Pentecostal spirituality becomes a flexible resource—one that can be selectively mobilized to support educational aspirations, professional advancement, and social belonging. This shift marks the emergence of a distinctly nomadic or hybrid identity, in which religious and secular logics coexist and mutually reinforce one another.

3.1. Reverse Mission, Transnationalization, and Transculturality

The aim here is to frame the movement of African Pentecostalism not just as the movement of people, but as the movement of symbolic capital, mobile spirituality and heterogeneity. African Christianity is commonly expressed through three major streams: Western-founded mission churches, African-initiated churches (AICs), and African Pentecostal churches. Both AICs and African Pentecostal movements draw on a shared resonance between indigenous African religious worldviews and the Pentecostal emphasis on supernatural power, healing, and spiritual warfare (Asamoah-Gyadu, 2015, p. 51). Beginning in the 1960s, these streams—especially the Pentecostal tradition—began expanding beyond the continent, with Nigeria, Ghana, Kenya, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo emerging as key missionary-sending hubs.

Early examples of this outward movement include the Nigerian Aladura churches (Olofinjana, 2019) and the Kimbanguist churches from the Congo, both of which established significant diasporic presences in the United Kingdom and North America (Garbin, 2012). Among African Christian traditions, however, Pentecostalism has become the most widely exported, with churches such as the Church of the Pentecost (Ghana) and the Redeemed Christian Church of God (Nigeria) establishing extensive transnational networks. These churches share several features: autochthonous leadership, the integration of African indigenous practices into Pentecostal spirituality, and a mission strategy centered on planting new branches across global cities.

Israel Olofinjana identifies the Church of the Lord Aladura (London, 1964) and the Cherubim and Seraphim Church (1965) as early examples of migrant-founded African churches in Europe (Olofinjana, 2019, p. 384). Their expansion has been interpreted through several overlapping frameworks—*reverse mission*, *transnationalization*, and *transculturation*. The concept of *reverse mission* expanding what is described as "asylum Christianity" (Ukah, 2009), frames Europe as a post-Christendom mission field in need of re-evangelization. Motivated by this vision, African churches mobilized resources to establish branches in cities such as London, The Hague, and Houston during the 1970s.

Interpretations of reverse mission vary. Some view it as an attempt to symbolically reverse the colonial missionary enterprise of the nineteenth century. Others see it as a theological mandate to confront what is perceived as Europe's exportation of secularism, humanism, and liberal social values. Yet another reading suggests that reverse mission primarily serves to create social solidarity among African migrants, offering community, identity, and social capital to church leaders who preside over expanding transnational networks. These churches often remain ethnically clustered, reflecting the cultural and cosmological diversity of African societies, even as they attract a plurality of African nationalities within their congregations (Adogame, 2012, p. 316).

Critics argue that the theological claims of re-evangelizing Europe are often overstated, overshadowed by pragmatic motivations such as community formation and the consolidation of leadership authority (Asaju & Dapo-Asaju, 2013). Nonetheless, reverse mission has undeniably provided migrants with extensions of their home churches and has reshaped Europe's religious landscape by challenging secular norms and offering an alternative to the growing visibility of Islam. At the same time, the same religiocultural features that energize African Pentecostalism—its emphasis on spiritual warfare, deliverance, and African cosmology—have limited its ability to attract

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indigenous Europeans. Most African Pentecostal churches remain geo-ethnic enclaves with limited cross-cultural reach.

A notable exception is a small group of Nigerian-initiated Pentecostal churches that have embraced contextualization and severed formal ties with home denominations. These churches represent a new genre of West African-initiated Pentecostalism with predominantly European membership. Examples include Sunday Adelaja's Embassy of the Blessed Kingdom of God for All Nations in Kyiv and Festus Nsoha's Holy Ghost End Time Ministries International (HGETMI) in Prague. As Pavol Bargár notes, HGETMI was not planted as a daughter congregation of a Nigerian denomination, and therefore does not function primarily as a worship space for African migrants (Bargár, 2014, p. 89). Instead, these churches have fully indigenized their leadership, worship, and membership.

African Pentecostalism's appeal among migrants is closely tied to its problem-solving orientation and its integration of African spirit cosmology. Many African migrants seek spiritual protection from perceived "household wickedness" or malevolent forces believed to follow them across borders. Pentecostal leaders respond to these concerns by adapting African cosmological frameworks into biblical categories of spiritual warfare, demonology, and Christology (Adebayo, 2024; Kalu, 2009, p. 89). In doing so, African Pentecostal churches in Europe have globalized African spiritual worldviews (Stålsett, 2006), offering migrants a familiar religious universe that affirms their cultural identity.

This process reflects the broader transnationalization of African Pentecostal culture. Through the movement of people, ideas, rituals, and institutions, African Pentecostalism has transported its cultural meanings, values, and practices across borders. Gisela Welz conceptualizes this as the transnationalization of culture—a process in which cultural forms "stream across borders of nation-states" and extend beyond static boundaries through the diffusion of people, ideas, and artifacts from a shared point of origin (Welz, 2008, p. 38).

Reverse mission and transnationalization thus represent two sides of the same phenomenon: the transplantation of African Pentecostalism into Europe without shedding its culture-specific features. These features have contributed to the growth of African churches but have also hindered their integration into European society. Their strong cultural orientation often prevents effective contextualization, leaving them on the margins of the religious landscape and limiting their appeal to younger generations (Währisch-Oblau, 2009).

African Pentecostal churches are compatible with African primal spirituality, which is embedded in African spiritual cosmology. African spirituality functions as epistemological primacy, and the interlocutor in constructing African Pentecostal theologies that provides the theological resonance with the people in their concrete experience. In short, African Pentecostalism has emerged as the outcome of a conversation between culture and religion; it "maintains a fine-grained balance between promoting and creating cultural change and feeding into existing cultural realities, characterized by a certain taken-for-grantedness of a spiritual dimension" (Lindhardt, 2015, p. 28).

The emerging complex system of 'new' cultures known as the Pentecostal culture or worldview that is African is a cultural system legitimized by its tenacity in shaping public space and flowing with African Pentecostals anywhere. This tenacity is confirmed by its importance in mapping the World Christian Movement and as a source of hope and resilience to immigrants.(Molteni & van Tubergen, 2022). For these churches to thrive beyond their migrant base, they must transition from being cultural movements that transmit African cosmology abroad to becoming international churches capable of contextualizing theology and practice. As Dutch Reformed and evangelical leaders have argued, African churches must cultivate forms of worship and leadership that are "contextual and credible" within European society if they hope to pass their traditions to future generations (Paas, 2012, p. 468). Without such transformation, they risk remaining culturally bounded enclaves and losing their second-generation members to Europe's secular environment.

The mobility of the Pentecostal Spirit—combined with the portability of a tradition grounded in Scripture, charismatic experience, and minimal institutional infrastructure—has made

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Pentecostalism particularly adaptable within Europe's secular environment. Unlike high-church traditions that depend on cathedrals, formal hierarchies, and sacramental systems, Pentecostalism travels lightly. Its flexibility has generated transcultural *flows* that unsettle the imagined homogeneity of European secularism and introduce new religious energies into public space. These flows create a Third Space, a hybrid zone where African cultural identity and European social belonging coexist and mutually reshape one another.

Third Space illuminates the liminality of African migrants—their experience of being suspended between cultural worlds, neither fully "inside" nor "outside" European society. It also highlights the ambiguity inherent in migrant identity-making, where belonging is negotiated across shifting cultural, religious, and generational boundaries. Within this liminal zone, African migrant churches occupy a marginal yet generative position, serving as sites where new forms of diasporic identity are forged. It is precisely within this marginality that the rise of second-generation African migrants is unfolding, as they reinterpret Pentecostal spirituality and re-enchant European secularity in ways that differ markedly from the strategies of their parents.

3.2. Marginality and Migrant Pentecostalism in Amsterdam

Institutionally, marginality shapes how churches engage the host society. Rather than seeking full incorporation into dominant religious structures, many migrant Pentecostal churches operate as semi-autonomous religious spaces, oriented toward transnational networks rather than national ecclesial recognition. This orientation allows them to serve as protective enclaves for first-generation migrants while simultaneously creating tensions for second- and third-generation members who must navigate multiple cultural and social fields. This quagmire is illustrated with the example of Amsterdam, where African Pentecostal churches cluster within the Amsterdam Zuid East area.

The Zuidoost (Bijlmer) location of African migrant churches situates them within a migrant-concentrated district, reinforcing its peripheral position in Dutch society. This area designated as a krachtwijk conveys the meaning of economic deprivation, racialized surveillance, and social stigmatization (Knibbe and Van der Meulen 2009). This perception is analyzed in in Kim Knibbe's "'We Did Not Come Here as Tenants, but as Landlords: Nigerian Pentecostals and the Power of Maps" where she observes, the categorization of African churches as "migrant churches" reflects their social distance "from the periphery to the centre" (Knibbe 2009). The emergence of the term "migrant churches" is attributed to "European church leaders" (Paas 2015, 11). The observation is that the public classification as a "migrant church" both obscures its global Pentecostal connections and highlights ethnic difference

Knibbe's analysis resonates with Khiyati Joshi's use of the racialization of a religious group rooted in the political and migration histories of such groups (Joshi 2016). Racialisation was also acknowledged at the 2023 European Conference of the World Council of Churches in Baarlo, the Netherlands, where participants observed that "racism is growing in our European societies, and churches need to ask how they have contributed to it" (Antje Helder-Rottwilm 2023, 2).This structural, symbolic, and spatial positioning of migrant churches at the periphery of dominant social, cultural, and religious systems is employed in this study as marginality.

Rather than treating marginality solely as deprivation or exclusion, this framework understands it as a relational condition produced through interactions between migrants, institutions, and host societies. Marginality is thus not static but dynamic, negotiated, and context dependent. For JHA and BPK-A, marginality is reworked internally as communal and spiritual capital by which first-generation members find cultural and spiritual continuity, while second- and third-generation members negotiate identity tensions between inherited religious practices and Dutch socialization, prompting adaptations in language, worship style, and leadership participation.

In migration studies, marginality has often been associated with limited access to economic resources, political representation, and social recognition. For migrant religious communities, however, marginality extends beyond socio-economic vulnerability to include religious otherness, cultural visibility, and contested legitimacy within secularized public spheres. In the Dutch context,

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where religion is formally privatized yet culturally regulated, migrant churches frequently occupy ambiguous positions: tolerated as voluntary associations while remaining symbolically distant from dominant notions of Dutchness and public religion. For example, RCCG churches led by JHA confront these public perceptions and municipal policies that both reinforce and circumscribe their social presence. These churches have forged some resilience strategies—such as participation in the ecumenical platforms including a network known as Samenkerk in Nederland (SKIN). Given that these platforms have limited capacity to alter broader societal perceptions, marginality therefore becomes a lens through which to analyze how migrant Pentecostal churches are simultaneously expanding and excluded.

From the perspective of the sociology of religion, marginality also describes the position of religious movements that fall outside historically established ecclesial traditions. Pentecostal churches—particularly those with non-Western origins—are often perceived as theologically excessive, emotionally expressive, or culturally alien, reinforcing their marginal status. This perception persists despite their numerical growth and transnational connectivity. A sociological implication here is that generational tensions emerge as second-generation members navigate the cultural distance between inherited Pentecostal practices and Dutch society, occasionally moving toward Western Pentecostal congregations.

Intergenerationally, marginality is experienced unevenly. First-generation migrants (1G) often interpret marginality as continuity with prior experiences of social vulnerability and therefore find security in ethnically bounded religious spaces. For second- and third-generation members (2G and 3G), however, marginality is frequently perceived as misalignment between inherited religious identities and lived experiences within Dutch society. This generational tension becomes a catalyst for linguistic adaptation, liturgical innovation, and renegotiation of belonging within the church.

While JHA illustrates a racialized and transnational marginality, rooted in recent African migration, ethnic consolidation, and global network affiliation, where exclusion is externally imposed yet internally mobilized for community cohesion, BPK-A, by contrast, exemplifies a historically embedded but generationally negotiated marginality, shaped by early missionary and colonial trajectories linking the United States, Indonesia, and the Netherlands. Its marginality is less racialized and more mediated through linguistic negotiation, heritage preservation, and intergenerational adaptation.

Finally, marginality does not imply passivity. Drawing on postcolonial and religious studies, this study approached marginality as a site of creative agency and institutional resilience by highlighting how migrant churches respond to marginalization by developing alternative social infrastructures, leadership models, and theological narratives that reinterpret exclusion as divine election, spiritual warfare, or mission. In this way, marginality is re-signified as a resource for meaning-making and communal cohesion. The study also conceptualized marginality of migrant churches not merely as exclusion from Dutch society, but as a productive tension that shapes the internal organization, outward engagement, and generational transformation of migrant Pentecostal churches. When examined alongside liminality and precarity, marginality illuminates how these churches function as contested yet vital spaces for negotiating identity, belongingness, and integration in the Dutch migration context.

So far, I have highlighted that marginality functions as a dynamic and generative condition, producing divergent pathways of belonging, adaptation, and church growth. I have also provided a crucial foundation for understanding how liminality operates with precarity in migratory contexts. To this end, we see that migrant Pentecostal churches sit precisely at this intersection embodying spiritual vitality while simultaneously occupying positions of social marginality. In doing so, they offer migrants continuity, communal belonging, and symbolic protection, even as they confront structural and cultural constraints within European society.

Therefore, suffice it to say that the dual condition—the double dilemma of liminality and marginality—forms the terrain on which diasporic identity is negotiated. It is within this ambiguous space that African religiocultural heritage meets European secular modernity, generating hybrid

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forms of belonging. We shall see immediately following, for first-generation migrants, this space often reinforces the need for cultural preservation and spiritual protection. For second-generation migrants, however, it becomes the site where new identity strategies emerge.

4. Second-Generation Africans and Identity (Re)Construction

The generational contrast outlined above—between 1G cultural preservation and 2G cultural negotiation—marks a decisive shift in how identity is constructed within African Pentecostal diasporas. Whereas first-generation (1G) migrants rely on Pentecostal churches as fortress-like spaces that protect African religiocultural identity from the pressures of European secularity, second-generation (2G) migrants inhabit these same spaces differently. For them, identity formation unfolds not through preservation but through reflexive reconstruction, shaped by the hybrid conditions of European life.

1G migrants interpret marginality and liminality as signals to reinforce communal solidarity, spiritual protection, and continuity with African heritage. Their churches function as cultural sanctuaries—repositories of language, ritual, cosmology, and memory. By contrast, 2G migrants engage the secular world directly. They mobilize Pentecostal spirituality as a flexible resource for navigating education, employment, and social belonging in Europe. Where 1G migrants emphasize continuity, 2G migrants embrace hybridity, crafting identities that blend African symbolic worlds with European secular norms.

To articulate these dynamics, this section advances three claims:

2G migrants challenge and reflexively reconstruct their identity as "migrants." Unlike their parents, who often internalize migrant status as a permanent condition, 2G Africans contest this label. They see themselves as European residents with African heritage rather than as perpetual outsiders. Their identity work is therefore oriented toward integration, recognition, and social legitimacy.

2G Africans privatize and reimagine African primal spirituality. While 1G migrants foreground African cosmology—witchcraft, spirits, ancestral forces—as public explanations for misfortune or spiritual warfare, 2G migrants tend to internalize, reinterpret, or downplay these frameworks. They selectively retain elements that support personal meaning while discarding or secularizing others. The result is a harmonized worldview in which Pentecostal spirituality coexists with European rationality.

2G migrants reverse the weaknesses of reverse mission by repositioning themselves for upward social mobility. Rather than reproducing geo-ethnic enclaves, 2G Africans leverage education, professional networks, and cultural fluency to challenge nativist narratives and expand their social horizons. In doing so, they transform Pentecostal identity from a marker of marginality into a resource for mobility, visibility, and civic participation.

Taken together, these shifts demonstrate that 2G African Pentecostal identity is not inherited but reconstructed—a dynamic process shaped by negotiation, hybridity, and strategic adaptation. This reconstruction marks a departure from the fortress mentality of their parents and signals the emergence of a new diasporic subjectivity rooted in both African heritage and European modernity.

This section focuses on the intergenerational link between religion (Indigenous and Pentecostal), worldviews (including secular and religious) and language (as the means of cultural patterns) in the context of migration. By creating a new form of religiosity that challenges the African indigenous spirituality embedded in the worship and practices of African Pentecostal churches, 2G Christian migrants across Europe are challenging historic, cultural and religious norms.

4.1. Second Generation Pentecostals: Migrants or People with Migration Background?

As a part of the larger population of immigrants in Europe, 2Gs are differentiated by their status as children who are either born in Europe to immigrant parent(s) or who have immigrated with their parents. Currently, located between the ages of 18 and 35 years, 2G African Christians are depicted as adults who immigrated with their parents while still under six years of age. The 2G cohort in intergenerational contexts may include 2G African Christian immigrants whose parents are first-

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generation African (1G) Christian immigrants who arrived in Europe for economic, religious and natural reasons. Many of these 1G Christians were either purveyors or founding members of those churches.

Given that 2G members possess language mastery, educational attainment, social networking capacity, and patterns of selective assimilation—rather than strict adherence to parental cultural or religious practices—conceptual difficulties arise when they are labelled as *migrants*, despite the fact that their parents have already undergone processes of indigenization. Similar to the problematic labelling of non-Western congregations as "migrant churches," referring to 2G individuals as migrants raises legal, political, and cultural questions. While a full engagement with these debates lies beyond the scope of this paper, the distinction remains analytically important.

1G migrants typically occupy a pilgrim-like state, negotiating survival, belonging, and hope within a foreign context. Their identity is shaped by the uncertainties of settlement, the pressures of marginality, and the need to maintain cultural continuity. By contrast, subsequent generations—2G and increasingly 3G—experience post-liminality. They translate parental strategies into social inclusion, linguistic fluency, and cultural negotiation, enabling them to move more confidently within European institutions and public life.

For this reason, a theoretically accurate description of 2G individuals is people with a migration background (PMB) rather than as migrants. This terminology captures the dual reality of 2G identity: they simultaneously preserve and transform cultural, linguistic, and religious inheritances while integrating the social norms, expectations, and opportunities of their European contexts. The result is a hybrid self that neither replicates parental identity nor fully dissolves into the host culture, but instead blends both into a dynamic and contextually responsive form of belonging.

Research by Harvey Kwiyani and Caleb Opoku—two African scholars based in the UK—shows that second-generation (2G) African Christians in Europe are increasingly distancing themselves from the churches of their parents. A central reason for this shift is the generational difference in how African indigenous spiritual worldviews are perceived and interpreted. Kwiyani observes that African Christian youth in Europe are gravitating toward Western-initiated Pentecostal churches, particularly youth-oriented movements such as Hillsong. This shift reflects the Europeanization of 2G Africans, whose religious imaginations are shaped not only by their parents' churches but also by European schools, peer networks, and social environments. As a result, many 2G youth experience a contradiction between the cultural world of their parents and the secular, pluralistic world they inhabit daily (Kwiyani, 2017, p. 2).

Fieldwork by Nyanni in the UK-based Church of Pentecost (CoP-UK) reveals similar tensions. He documents significant conflict between 1G and 2G members over church beliefs, practices, and the future direction of the church (Nyanni, 2021, p. 2). Opoku likewise found that 2G Ghanaians left the CoP in protest against its Akan-infused worship style, songs, and spirituality—elements deeply meaningful to 1G migrants but culturally distant for their children.

In response, the CoP created youth-oriented branches known as Pentecost International Worship Centres (PIWCs), designed to moderate worship styles and appeal to younger members. This strategy mirrored earlier reforms introduced by the CoP headquarters in Ghana during the 1990s. However, despite these adaptations, the political and theological structures of the CoP remained largely intact within the PIWCs. This institutional continuity limited their effectiveness, and many departing youth did not return. Instead, some joined European-initiated Pentecostal churches, while others formed new independent expressions of faith (Nyanni, 2021, p. 76).

Three major areas of intergenerational divergence emerge from these studies:

1. Hyperspirituality

African Pentecostal hyperspirituality refers to the integration of African spirit cosmology, Pentecostal pneumatology, and biblical spirituality into worship and liturgy. While this complex theological system resonates deeply with 1G migrants—who remain connected to the cultural contexts that produced it—2G migrants often find it unintelligible or irrelevant. Their detachment

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from African cosmology makes it difficult to embrace a spirituality built around spiritual warfare, witchcraft, and ancestral forces.

Elam Donkor nuances this generational difference by noting that the same intense belief in the spiritual realm that leads 1G migrants to rely on the Holy Spirit for protection from evil powers leads their children to rely on the Holy Spirit for academic success, employment, and material well-being (Nyanni, 2021, p. xii). This shift reflects the secularizing potential of African Pentecostalism (Willard, 2019, p. 38), which allows 2G youth to retain Pentecostal identity while redirecting its focus toward secular aspirations.

2. Syncretic Culturalism

The hybrid cultural identity of 1G migrants—being simultaneously African and European—creates confusion for 2G youth. Embedded within this syncretic framework is the use of African languages, which many 2G individuals do not speak fluently. This linguistic gap limits their ability to access the indigenous religious worldview that undergirds African Pentecostalism. As a result, they struggle to understand or appreciate the spirituality of their parents, contributing to their disengagement from African-initiated churches.

3. Indigenous Patriarchy

Traditional African patriarchal structures often shape leadership and authority within African Pentecostal churches. In PIWCs, older members were sometimes placed among youth to supervise activities and enforce doctrinal conformity. This hierarchical model contrasts sharply with the more egalitarian and youth-driven ethos of churches like Hillsong. Consequently, 2G migrants—who value autonomy, participation, and creative expression—find African patriarchal structures restrictive. They remain drawn to Pentecostalism, but not to its African cultural packaging.

Taken together, these dynamics reveal that 2G African Christians in Europe are not abandoning Pentecostalism; rather, they are reconfiguring it. They remain deeply attached to Pentecostal spirituality but reject the African cultural, cosmological, and patriarchal frameworks that shaped their parents' religious lives. This reconfiguration underscores the broader argument of this paper: 2G African Christians are crafting a hybrid, contextually responsive identity that blends Pentecostal spirituality with European secular modernity. However, by transitioning from the "Fortress" to the "Bridge" (Hillsong-style or fresh expressions), they solve the immediate problem of cultural friction, but they introduce a new tension: The risk of spiritual dilution and familial disconnect. How can these tension be resolved in the emerging cultural hybridity analyzed as follows.

4.2. Harmonizing the Sacred and Secular: Credential Negotiation

The rise of 2G African Pentecostals in Europe triggered a paradigm shift orchestrated by a drift in the secular direction. explores the rise of 2G migrants and how they have constructed a new imagination that harmonizes both religious and secular offerings for socioeconomic gains is the burden of this section. It will also argue that all this innovation was designed to negotiate its place in European society.

Europe's transition into a post-secular and post-Christian context heuristically refers to a framework that shapes the geographical field in which 2G migrants live, work, and practice their faith. Western secularism is a product of scientific and industrial processes of the 14th to 19th centuries taught in schools and practised in European public life. Under this doctrine, Europe is a post-Christendom where religion is construed as ideologies in line with the scientific framework. Although this secularity does not completely obliterate religious legacies, it is limited to private life by creating a dichotomy between belonging to organized religion and believing in God. According to Rodney Stark and Roger Finke, this duality is referred to as 'believing and not belonging' to depict the distinction between the public expression of religion and its withdrawal into private lives. (Stark & Finke, 2000) They further observed that although church attendance is declining in the West, Christian values are still strong in Western society.

In contrast, pre- and postcolonial African society has a form of secularism that coexists with religiosity and makes no distinction between the private and public spheres of life. This secularism

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is compatible with a religiosity that is steeped in supernaturalism and directed towards secular goals. To confirm that Africans harness both secular and religious resources for material prosperity, two studies are examined immediately. First, the work of Stefan Paas links secularization in Africa to the emergence of new lifestyles, which he defines as changes in patterns and institutions that hold society together as individuals respond to "their own systems and laws based on functional reason and science." (Paas, 2019, p. 29) The form of change posited here is similar to that typically presented as the westernization of African societies by protestant missionaries(Mbiti, 1990; Meyer, 1997; Mukonyora, 2010). The second source is Benno van den Toren (2003), whose observational study was conducted in Bangui, the capital of the Central African Republic. The study noted that secularity due to lifestyle changes was observed in wealthy urban Africans who drifted away from Christianity to either ATRs or Islam because these Africans tied their Christian commitment to material well-being and lifestyle changes. This ultimately explains why mindset seems to play a role in people's motivation for religiosity.

Like parents, such as children, 2G African migrants have found Europe a suitable context in which to hold religious and secular goals in healthy tension. However, unlike their parents, they have aligned themselves with their generations elsewhere to prioritize secular pursuits against religiosity. In studies in Canada, Germany, and the USA, where pioneer migrants were found to be more religiously oriented than second-generation migrants, this differential was also found to have contributed to religiosity in the era of first-generation migrants (Molteni & van Tubergen, 2022). According to Frederik, one explanation for such intergenerational disparity in religiosity was that "currently, migrants seem to give precedence to 'secular' priorities such as finding a house, a job, and so on…."(Frederiks, 2015, p. 15)

It is fair to surmise that the disdain of the 2G members of CoP-UK for the church's hyperreligiosity is a signal of the relegation of religion to the background and its journey towards privatization. To justify this argument, we take the example of other 2G migrants in the West. Specifically, Hindu students in Britain,(Kurien, 2005) Muslim youths in Europe and Jewish students in the U.S. have all shown that secular priorities outweigh their religious affiliation. Given that religion and culture embody identities, these 2G migrants have orchestrated a paradigm shift in the way religion and secularity interact and how religion and migration function in identity construction. The next step is to theorize the identity construction for 2G African migrants as they negotiate their space in secular Europe.

4.3. Multiple Identities or Nomadic Spirits?

Given that 2G African Christian migrants in Europe modify their identities by recreating new paradigms through religious and cultural adaptations, we now theorize this possibility by drawing nexuses between the nodes of situational, cultural, social and interpersonal interactions and migration dynamics to construct and contest identities. With intergenerational dynamics, the chances of producing new, hybrid and multiple identities are increased by these interactions.

Drawing on the theory of migrant identity construction, 2G migrants mirror the nomadic/transnational pattern of identity formation by which group and self-identity are influenced by a plethora of interactions leading to identify modification either through assimilation or resistance of (an)other culture, which may be secular or religious.

On the basis of the theory of "transnational moral geographies", Levitt et al. explained their study of 2G Gujarati women in America in their struggle with Hinduist, American and Gujarati cultures. The spatial and temporal expression of this struggle is described from the perspectives of the religionist model and the socialist approach. Religionist theory argues that 2G migrants hybridize their experience in American Christian schools with the Hindu religions of their parents. Social theory, on the other hand, focuses on school interactions; influences from home with grandmothers/fathers; and local, regional and foreign travel combined to shape the hybridization of identity.(Levitt et al., 2017, p. 237)

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Another theory that explains the identity construction struggle by 2G migrants is the assimilation theory applied to a study of migrant students in the UK. According to Kurien Prema, two models of cultural integration are coterminous. The first is 'selective assimilation', which explains how these students "incorporate themselves into mainstream society while retaining some of the parent's culture and remaining embedded in family and community networks (which provides a shield against racism and helps achieve upward mobility). The second model, "Reactive ethnicity," explains how "the home country culture and tradition are reaffirmed and acquire a heightened significance in a self-defense mechanism against marginalization and discrimination."(Kurien, 2005, p. 437)

Drawing on these theoretical frameworks, geographic, religious, cultural and social factors clearly interrelate across different spheres to contribute to migrant identity modification. While assimilation theory presents this interaction as a paradigm of cultural resistance and resilience within which immigrants immerse themselves in the host context while remaining in their parents' cultural field, it ignores the possibility of striking a balance between the two cultures. Similarly, Levitt et al.'s proposition of theoretic fields assumes parallelism that ignores the merging of fields. 2G African migrants have been immersed in these fields, including geographic areas.

Nyanni's report portrays 2G Ghanaian members as Africans by retaining their African names, family bonds, and social network without adequate comprehension of Akan's spiritual worldview and language, disqualifying them as bona fide Ghanaians culturally. However, their mastery of the host's language allows them to enter into their host's culture and initiates a struggle between their parents and their context's culture. In terms of identity-making, these 2G migrants are caught, as it was "between continuity and change in the search for a new relevant identity" as part of their struggle "of living between two cultures." (Clarke, 2018, p. 159)

Given their European mindset and secular orientation, belonging is an invaluable framework for explaining how religion and culture intersect in the identity-making of this cohort of immigrants. By belonging religiously to peer congregations, retaining their social and family bonds with their parents, and negotiating their social space within the broader Western context, 2G migrants are creating a new identity and/or hybridizing their parents and hosts' identities to become Europeans. Moreover, religion is, to the 2G, a cultural factor that creates disenchantment with the cultural content of African Pentecostal worship and drives them toward a European-oriented Pentecostal church; it is fair to submit that 2G African Christian migrants are in one incurably religious position as their fathers are. In another way, they substitute the indigenous spirit cosmology of their parents with the Western Pentecostal spirituality hinged on the Holy Spirit.

It can also be argued that 2G African migrants are more socially immersed in European culture than their parents are. Given "the strong motivations transmitted by migrants to their children to succeed at school,"(Attias-Donfut & Cook, 2017, p. 121) 2G migrants are prepared for the higher echelon of European society unless hindered by racial and ethnic barriers on their path to upward mobility. Therefore, it is pejorative to impose a normative identity on a group of people on the basis of their race, ethnicity, religion and history. It can be argued that this cohort can no longer be referred to as migrants but rather as descendants of migrants.

Moreover, education provides an alternative to religion and religious institutions in mediating social and cultural integration. It may be appropriate to say that the interaction of migrants with basic education in their destination context opens them up countless possibilities that tertiary entry points do not offer. For example, an anglophone, lusophone or francophone African immigrant to the Netherlands has a language barrier to overcome. The point is that the removal of this barrier for their children at the Dutch *basis* school level positions them better in society than a master's or doctorate educational migrant.

In sum, 2G African Christian migrants have formed multiple identities of religious, cultural, and social belonging by which they are neither fully Western nor purely African. The practical expression of these multivalent identities is seen in labels such as African-American, British-Nigerian, and British-Ghanaian. These labels have one thing in common: they identify migrants on the basis of their

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cultural history and current context. Considering that migrant churches cannot indigenize as a practical reality that immigrant members of these churches cannot fully indigenize through them, it is necessary to revisit the notion that churches are centers of cultural integration.

As long as African churches retain political and theological authority, their churches will keep struggling with what Clarke refers to as holding "together transnational and national identities with regard to renewal beyond the first pioneering generation and the initial move of the Spirit?". (Clarke, 2018, p. 158) The only exception may be European-founded or oriented churches, as found in Kyiv and Prague, or those established by former CoP members in the UK.

So far, the bottom line is that 2G African Pentecostal migrants do not necessarily secularize in the sense of abandoning faith; instead, they utilize the secularizing potential of Pentecostalism, translate demon consciousness to developmental mindset. They are using their religious identity as a credential for excellence, resilience, and upward mobility within the European professional marketplace. Based on these points,

5. Conclusion

Thus far, this study has shown that the transnational identity of African Christianity in Europe exists in a state of tension with the national identities of the societies in which it is embedded. It has also demonstrated that the social and cultural worlds of second-generation (2G) African Christians differ markedly from those of their parents, as does the way they renegotiate belonging and reconstruct identity. While 1G migrants often view churches as centers of integration, the evidence reveals conflicting narratives between 1G parents and their 2G children. Moreover, churches that are themselves marginalized cannot effectively mediate migrant integration. On the basis of cultural resilience and resistance, churches—whether understood as political institutions or spiritual organisms—cannot be fully absorbed into the host culture; at best, they evolve into transcultural churches.

The analysis further showed that 2G migrants, regardless of their parents' migration histories, transcend the biographical constraints that shaped 1G experiences. They are largely detached from the postcolonial legacies that influenced their parents' choice of destination countries, such as linguistic familiarity or lenient immigration policies. For 2G migrants, identity construction involves confronting new realities: negotiating their place between parental expectations and host-culture norms, and navigating multiple identities produced through hybridization and diffusion. Even when unaware of these processes, 2G African Christian youth function as meeting points—or *subjects*—in the broader discourse on migration and identity formation.

Labels such as *British Ghanaian* or *African American* illustrate this subjectification, but they also obscure more than they clarify. Rather than perpetuating ambiguous racialized labels or misclassifying 2G individuals as "migrants," it is more accurate to describe them as Europeans of African descent. Their Africanness is embodied not through formal membership in African churches or family networks but through race, color, and inherited religious worldviews.

Up to this point, the analysis has treated "the West" and "Europe" as unified categories. Yet this homogenization risks flattening important contextual differences. A focused, comparative study of the Netherlands alongside France, Switzerland, Luxembourg, and other European contexts would likely reveal significant variations in how migration, religion, and politics interact across generations. Such ethnographic specificity would deepen our understanding of the complex and often contested terrain in which African Christian identity is reconstructed in Europe.

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