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## **Women in motion: the gendered space of african Christian migration in Italy**

(Abstract)

African migrations to Europe has generally tended to follow the historical and linguistic trails of colonialism, thereby making Britain and France the preferred destinations for African migrants from the former British and French colonies, respectively. However, particularly remarkable is the emergence of southern European countries such as Italy, Spain and Portugal as newer centers of attraction for migrating Africans. Such immigration have continued to mediate transformations in the political economies of both Europe and Africa, as well as constructing new translational economic, political and cultural spaces.

The African presence in Italy is becoming more and more visible in the public space through the flourishing Afro-Italian cultural productions, the mushrooming African churches (most from Nigeria and Ghana), and a vibrant Afro-Italian civil society that cope with social, religious, cultural, economical, and political issues concerning the African Diasporas in Italy. As regards to the religious practices, the variety of traditions of African Christianity is incredibly diverse. One can observe Adventist, Evangelical, Pentecostals and Charismatic congregations of the Neo-Pentecostal type. Many are multi-linguistic and conduct worship in translating to and from Yoruba, Igbo, Pidgin English.

This paper illustrates the role of African women pastors in the context of migration, their profiles as religious and community leaders and their challenges as pastors, wives, mothers, workers and migrants. African Women pastors in the context of migration receive a great deal of visibility and exercise a certain degree of power and authority both within and outside the religious communities. In their diasporic condition they don't merely transfer themselves, their professionalism, their human, cultural and religious assets, but also concepts, ideas, traditions, images and symbols; African women invent new cultural, social, political practises and even new forms of symbolic citizenship, despite the efforts of most of the European countries in denying it to them. They devise new strategies of promoting themselves both as individuals and as a group and give way to new forms of identity that are characterised by an overlap of multiple-belonging to their own experiences, community interests, cultural values and expressions of spirituality and religion.

Their role is both interesting and intriguing particularly in countries with a strong catholic identity like Italy where women cannot exercises any spiritual and religious leadership role. This paper analyses the articulation of their lives in relation to the structure and agencies deployed in the Italian context of migration where they simultaneously inhabit multiple arenas in the public and private sphere.

The paper looks at African women pastors as protagonists of new Italian cultural, social, and religious scenes in which all the common features of the African Diasporas are reinterpreted and conditioned by the Italian context. The paper seeks to reveal how African women pastors' role, formed within the Pentecostal communities and shaped by disconnection, reconstruction, and re-creation fashion arguments for empowerment, self-determination, self-definition, inclusion and engagement of the African diasporas in the Italian civil society.

Particular attention is paid to the different practices of leadership embedded within multidimensional and fluid relations of power and belongings through which women pastors experience the condition of being at the same time subject to ethnic, social, gender and religious discrimination and to recognition, admiration and consecration by African religious communities. The paper is an alternative and critical response to the (re-)production of knowledge that offer a reductive constructions of immigrant African women in Italy and Europe. It illuminate a new

dimension of the African women in the Diaspora that recognize them as active actors who exercise their power and acquire material, emotional and symbolic resources to engage themselves in the struggle for the social, economic, political and religious citizenship.

The paper is based on a work in progress conducted in Italy through the use of mixed methods drawn from the interdisciplinary methodologies in the social sciences. The use of mixed methods, such as statistical data, life stories, interviews, and participant observation enabled the study to illuminate the African women pastors' lives from origin to destination, linking pre- with post-migration characteristics, across time, spaces, and generations. The result of the field work is a *narratives of creativity* through which women pastors present their critiques of dominant and institutionalized relations of exclusion, and conceptualize issues such as identity, ethnicity, gender, and citizenship in the Italian society.