Voluntary migration of African people to Western countries especially to the United States and the United Kingdom has increased throughout the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, marking an unprecedented phase in African migration. Based on recent surveys, we may estimate the number of migrants to be about 150 million (see Howell and della Fuente 2008). The causes of migration are varied and complex, having social, economic and political dimensions. They include: political conflicts, human rights violations, poverty, lack of work incentives, population pressure, environmental degradation, and desires for personal improvement or reunion with families (Ter Haar 1998: 24, Kalu 2007: 65, Tettey 2007: 238). Migration and extensive movement of people across borders are also linked to complex social networks that have evolved along with globalization and transnationalism (Zeleza 2002). Transnational connections characterized by an increased flow of people, information, goods, and other resources across national boundaries is altering social contexts in ways that impact significantly on religious practices and the spread of religious ideas (Wuthnow and Offut 2002: 209).

The growing phenomenon of African churches in this new Diaspora has received massive scholar attention. Following Andrew Walls's insightful observations about the shift of global Christianity to the southern hemisphere (1998, 2002: 31–34, 47) and Philip Jenkins’ seminal study on the same topic (2002), a large body of literature emerged about the level of religious vitality in the global South and what this shift implies for the churches in the global North. Olupona and Gemignani (2007) mapped out the religious dimensions of new immigrants in America, contributing to the understanding of the complex American religious landscape (Adogame 2008b). Adogame (2008c) and Terr Haar (1998) have contributed immensely to our understanding of African immigrant religions in Germany and the Netherlands.
Adogame, for example, points out (2008c: 306) the remarkable changes in the host countries that have been occasioned by religious diversity and pluralism. This is because wherever they go and settle African peoples are known to travel with their religions and cultures.

The complex dynamism of contemporary migration within and beyond Africa is partly reflected in its increasing feminization, which largely challenges traditionally perceived male-dominated migration patterns (Adogame 2008a; cf. Cross et al. 2006). Gender is a critical aspect of global migration and transnationalism, yet it was not until recently that scholars began to examine its dynamics. Gemignani (2007), Adogame (2008a), and Crumley and Clyne-Smith (2008) have explored how gender is intricately woven into the entire migration process. They demonstrate how gender relations, roles and hierarchies differently shape the migratory behavior and experiences of women and men. Olupona and Gemignani (2007: 133) further argue that religious communities among migrants offer women opportunities to develop autonomy through their leadership experiences.

Despite receiving little scholarly attention, Kenyan religious movements have become transnational and feminized, just like others from Africa. This chapter examines some of these transnational religious movements in Kenya and the Kenyan Diaspora. It situates gender within the processes of globalization, migration, and transnationalism. Using three case studies, we demonstrate how women in Kenya and in other geo-cultural spaces are engendering and reshaping new religious movements. Exploring how women’s new religious leadership and the emerging patterns of transnationalism intersect, influence and reshape one another, it concludes by arguing that religious networks provide African women with opportunities to exercise autonomy through religious leadership both locally and globally.

The selected churches are: Faith Evangelistic Ministries (fem) and the Teresia Wairimu Evangelistic Ministries (twem) USA chapter; Jesus Is Alive Ministries (JIAM) and JIAM International; and Single Ladies Interdenominational Ministries (SLIM).1 These three churches/ministries are based in Kenya but have transnational networks, missions, offices and media ministries abroad.

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1 This ministry was formerly known by the name, “Single Ladies Interdenominational Fellowship” (SLIF). According to Elizabeth Wahome, its founder, the name change was occasioned by the group’s desire to engage in evangelism outside Kenya. The Kenyan government would allow it to do so only as a ministry, not as a fellowship. Elizabeth Wahome, “Interview” with Richard Kagoe on K24 Television, December 29, 2008.