INTRODUCTION:
EXPLORING NEW FRONTIERS IN GLOBAL RELIGIOUS DYNAMICS

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Physical and virtual boundaries, enclaves, even linguistic divides cannot stop the motion of religious ideas, practices, and peoples. Nigerian church ministers and evangelists, for example, secure funds, lodging, and constituents, not to mention social, religious and cultural capital, to visit eager flocks from Kiev to Virginia. Yet the African Christian pastor—Nigerian, Ghanaian, or Kenyan—just left an African city inhabited by Hindu spirits, Muslim Sufis, and Islamists, where relatively few Indian or Arab migrants have existed as compared to the numbers of European and American missionaries who once evangelized Africans. Indeed, how relevant are missionaries of wealthy countries in poorer and less politically powerful regions today? In the post-imperial era, we must draw a different map showing the power of South Korea, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, and Nigeria, with its arguably more democratized religious capital than monetary wealth.

The goal of *Religions on the Move* is therefore to chart the dynamic religious flows in the wake of “reverse mission” processes within global Christianity. Defined simply, reverse mission refers to the evangelical and missionary zeal of the formerly missionized to reawaken Christianity in the former “Christian West,” especially Europe and the United States (Adogame 2000b, 2002, 2007a, 2007b; Kalu 2008: 271–91; Ojo 2007; Knibbe 2009). We move beyond the bi-directional religious flows implied in the idea of reversing sail between the former powers within Christianity and those whom they missionized to begin to envision a new cartography in four ways.

First, these essays illustrate how reverse mission has opened new avenues for formerly colonized and marginalized peoples to become religious agents not just in the centres of power but throughout the world. Second, we suggest that the new religious movements possess their own chronology and ontology, not linked necessarily to the timescale and discourses of empire and postcolonialism implied by reverse mission. The historiographies of respective religious traditions are quintessential for showing varied dynamics of religious expansion and transmission on a
comparative basis. Thus, third, the essays here focus on the complexity of religious activism in the context of globalization, notably with increasing geopolitical and economic integration, rising income inequality, migration and population concentrations, media and technology, gender and generational tensions in rapidly changing work and living arrangements, and racial and ethnic differentiation. Missionaries operate in the burgeoning new mega-cities that have no historical precedent, between religious institutions whose online presence may be greater than their physical one, and in other places these religious movers set their sights on as their chosen mission fields. Fourth, now that “reverse mission” has allowed us to understand religious movements “from everywhere to everywhere,” we seek to bring developments in multiple religious traditions—Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and Confucianism—into conversation with one another. The new map sketched through the research presented here shifts our gaze to the interchange between the global and local, from shifts in the missionary rhetoric in redrawn geopolitical religious boundaries in the wake of terrorism to such phenomena as the microcosmic movements of door-to-door Muslim daw’a in West and East Africa, the explosive expansion of Korean Christians into world missions, and the traces of Hindu spirits in Ghana, first arrived in West Africa during the era of British colonialism but now more visible than before.

Before we move further, it is important to acknowledge geographical and topical unevenness in the following chapters. Many, though not all, of the essays here concern Africa and Christianity. We, the editors, both specialize in Africa and the African diaspora but, as scholars in diaspora ourselves, sought to understand why Africa’s religious dynamics have stood at a distance: first, from theoretical conceptualizations of globalization, reformism, fundamentalism, and other hot topics, and, second, from the conceptual basis for understanding religious transformations outside the continent and in religious traditions that may not be historically tied to Africa in any way. We first contemplated these questions at the 2006 African Studies Association meeting in San Francisco (USA), during a panel session that explored how various religions have shaped and are being shaped by mobility and migration. This consequently led us to convene and co-chair a double panel at the Association for the Sociology of Religion 70th Annual Conference Religion Crossing Boundaries at Boston Park Plaza Hotel, Boston (USA) in 2008. While some of the papers with especial focus on processes of religious transnationalism were published in another book (See Adogame and Spickard 2010), others from this panel and from scholars who responded to a call for papers shared our questions