

African Christians on Pilgrimage in Europe: A New Home in Lourdes

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This paper focuses on pilgrimages of West African Catholic migrants in Europe, with a special focus on the pilgrimage to Lourdes. This Marian shrine in southern France is a site of global renown visited by six million pilgrims yearly. Among these visitors are also thousands of Africans. Part of them directly come from West Africa but a larger number of the Africans pilgrims lives as migrants in the Parisian suburbs. The paper investigates what meanings the pilgrimage to Lourdes has in processes of migration, place-making, transnational networks and continual identifications with home and homelands. It aims to reveal how different movements (religious, economic, political and social) are interconnected, how family belonging is expressed at the shrine, and how African migrants revitalize Catholicism in Europe as a lived religion outside the domain of the emptied Catholic churches.