Episode 5

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**SPEAKERS**

Nick Mwandia, JC Niala, Tom Fearon

**JC Niala** 00:15

Hello, and welcome to the fifth episode of Afro historyscapes Podcast, where we give you a different perspective on African history. We tell the story of African histories through objects at the Horniman Museum and Gardens in South London. These objects bring to life fascinating stories from the past. Together with the object and histories, we open a different window into African worlds.

**Tom Fearon** 00:43

We show how these objects continue to be used on the continent, and in the diaspora in various ways. The narratives we share are based on research carried out by the Horniman’s, curators and community researchers. Each month we focus on a different theme. But we think another way to explore the history of Africa is through the idiom of movement. Africa is a dynamic continent that has always been on the move. If you're interested in African history, material culture, and museum collections, then this is the podcast for you.

**JC Niala** 01:17

We're your hosts, JC Niala

**Tom Fearon**

and Tom Fearon

**JC Niala**

This week, we continue to explore the theme of religion. Religion and spirituality are dynamic forces that have shaped the histories, material culture, and cosmologies of peoples on the African continent.

**Tom Fearon** 01:38

Just as we saw last week, when we discussed with Community Action researcher Sabrina Al-Sayed, the Kel Tameshek people's involvement in the trans-Saharan trade routes. Where Islam has, and continues to shape material culture, art and music from the east to the west of Africa, and back again. And this also opened up a fascinating perspective on the spirit world. Where the influence of spirits known in Islam as Jinn can be kept at bay, or even embraced through these material and artistic practices.

**JC Niala** 02:10

This week, we'll discuss something that might feel like a familiar topic to some of our listeners, the history and influence of Christianity on the African continent. We're delighted to be joined today by Reverend Nick Mwandia, Community Action Researcher, theologian, and priest of St Andrew's church, in the parish of Slip-End to discuss some of this. Welcome, Nick.

**Nick Mwandia**

Hello. Great to be here.

**JC Niala**

This is Afro historyscapes. always something new, always has been, always on the move.

**Tom Fearon** 02:55

Christianity in Africa is not just about missionaries. Christianity has been a dynamic force on the African continent since biblical times, helping to build empires and religious orthodoxies that are uniquely African. And Christians in Africa today still continue to embrace, renew, and transform the religion in conversation with existing worldviews, even exporting them back to Europe.

**JC Niala** 03:21

For example, St. Augustine, the great theologian and philosopher, credited for the development of European Christianity was a Berber from North Africa. He shared an ethnic heritage with the Sahara and traders we discussed last week. St. Augustine's writings on Christianity have shaped what it means to be a Christian in Europe today. When I first found out that he was African, like me, I was blown away. We often hear about how European missionaries changed the African continent, but much less about how African peoples have profoundly affected Christianity, and philosophy in Europe.

**Tom Fearon** 04:01

And in this episodes, we return to East Africa, and the Ethiopian Empire, also known as Abyssinia. Ethiopia has existed in one form or another since around the eighth century BC. But what is now modern day Ethiopia is thought to have been founded in 1270. The founders of this empire, however, which formely spanned Ethiopia and Eritrea trace their lineage back to biblical times, the Solomonic dynasty, the role of the Ethiopian Empire until 1974, claimed descendancy from King Solomon of Israel, and Queen Makeda of Ethiopia, otherwise known as the Queen of Sheba, although other modern nations, including Yemen, claim the Queen of Sheba as their own. Either way, the meeting between these two figures appears in both the Jewish Bible, the New Testament and in the Quran. And oral literature tells us that their son Menalik I, became the first ruler of this kingdom, although this is also contested. But either way throughout the centuries, the various fluctuating empires in Ethiopia became some of the most powerful empires not just in Africa, but in the world.

**JC Niala** 05:12

Yes, there's a painting that originates from Ethiopia and the Horniman collections. Object number, nn17962. The painting illustrates a single scene from the story of King Solomon and Queen Sheba. It shows Malik, the son of Sheba, travelling to Jerusalem to see his father, the biblical King Solomon. The story is central to the ancient Ethiopian book, The Kebra Nagast, or ‘Glory of the Kings’. The book has been described as a repository of Ethiopian national and religious understanding. It is an account written in Geʿez, the ecclesiastical language of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church of the origins of the Solomonic line of Ethiopian emperors, and it explains how the Ark of the Covenant came to Ethiopia. This is understood as a historical fact by many Ethiopian Christians. As well as Rastafarians.

**Tom Fearon** 06:12

I love this painting. I think it shows how Ethiopia is a place where the Bible comes alive, where the lines between religious tradition and historical fact become blurred. And this is where the story of Christianity comes into Ethiopian history. In the fourth century, CE, Christianity was adopted as the state religion of then Kingdom Aksum. In fact, this is recorded on the Ezana stone, which accounts the conversion of King Ezana of the Kingdom of Aksum to Christianity, eventually declaring it as the state religion, which continued to be the case in modern Ethiopia until fairly recently. During this time, the Ark of the Covenant is thought to have been transferred from Egypt to Ethiopia.

**JC Niala** 06:57

Yes, the fourth century. So Christianity has been African for much, much longer than European narratives might have think. Christianity probably came to the region via Red Sea trade routes. Since this time, the religion has become an important aspect of Ethiopian identity. The Ethiopian church, the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo church, is the oldest and largest church in the country, with traditions and theologies unique to Ethiopia. But having said that, Ethiopia is a nation, where people have many different faiths, live side by side,

**Tom Fearon** 07:36

Yes, that is true. And objects which I think demonstrates this distinctly Ethiopian Christian heritage is objects number 1973.268, a silver crucifix in the Coptic style. This style of cross is common across Ethiopia. There are many in the Horniman collections, but this is my favourite. I'm drawn to the geometric shape, an intentionally imperfect metalwork of this cross. Unlike the simple cross common in Europe, this crosses in the ornate Coptic style, common in the Eastern Orthodox Church, it is worn in places and I imagine this one being used in worship are worn regularly by devotee. Although this is a crucifix probably worn as jewellery, other crosses like these are very large and used in processions mounted to the end of a long pole.

**JC Niala** 08:28

I really like what you said about how you imagine it being worn. I often do the same with objects in the collection, thinking about how they're actually used and how people interact with them, rather than where they're currently stored. Religion doesn't just exist in isolation, but it comes alive and gets transformed by worshippers themselves. And we can see here how African worshipers have been building traditions, empires and material cultures centred around Christianity for centuries. I think this is a good time to introduce today's guest, Nick wandia. Hello, Nick.

**Nick Mwandia**

Hello.

**Tom Fearon** 09:05

Hi, Nick. What do you think that these Ethiopian Coptic crosses tell us about the history of Christianity in Africa, specifically Ethiopia.

**Nick Mwandia** 09:15

Well Tom as you already mentioned, the widespread adoption of the Christian faith as an official religion and evidence of crosses occurred in Ethiopia in the 4th century. King Ezana of the pre-Ethiopian Aksumite Empire established Christianity as his realm’s official religion. Aksum had an advanced and wealthy economy. He developed a coin system for the state and was unprecedented in putting an image of the cross on the coins. These coins are a hallmark of the strong Christian devotion and culture of that Ethiopian nation.

After the decline of Axum another Christian state arose in the 11th century, the Zangwe dynasty. One of the rulers, King Lalibela is famed for his construction of twelve beautiful churches, each of which is entirely carved, inside and out, from the bed rock. Some of these astonishing architectural constructions are, from an aerial view, shaped like an Ethiopian cross. They are now designated as UNESCO World Heritage Sites while at the same time still being actively used for worship and pilgrimage.

Ethiopian Coptic crosses are a variation of the common symbol of Christianity. The variety of designs and configurations is also extremely vast in comparison with any other Christian society. Their design is also influenced by their use, and so larger ones are used in processions and smaller ones made to be hand-held or slung round a person’s neck.

Their stylised appearance tends to be very different to those found in Europe. So for instance, Ethiopian crosses are commonly made from intricately worked lattices and made from a variety of materials including wood and metal. Because they are hand crafted each cross will not be identical to any other and bears the creativity of the particular artisan who makes it.

**JC Niala** 11:19

Gosh, thank you, Nick. That's a wealth of information. The cross on the coin also shows us something that we tend to think of separately nowadays, it combines commerce and Christianity. I also found your beautiful description of the churches in Lalibela, and the ways in which they can be experienced and seen differently, depending on whether you enter them, or looking at them from the sky really fascinating. This is typical of African architecture across the continent, where constructions take in a 360 degree view. But returning to the cross, it's a material representation of faith across the Christian tradition. And in all parts of the world. These Ethiopian crosses are particularly unique. How important is the object cross in the Christian tradition?

12:12

Well, just as for other Christian societies all over the world, the cross is an important symbol of the most significant act of the founder of the faith. And so if Ethiopian Christians understand it, is having a multi layered significance. Adding includes being a visual representation of Jesus Christ's crucifixion. However Ethiopia is unique in the way the cross is given prominence in the common life and society. Scholars have noted this as a stylistic and visual aspect of Ethiopian Christian culture.

Christians in Ethiopian society have long used their crosses as a symbol of their veneration of Christ. It has also been used as a tangible symbol of their source of physical and spiritual protection and as a way of symbolising their identity as individuals and as a community.

For example, in some places in Ethiopia crosses adorn the tops of both churches and people’s homes. They are also commonly sewn into traditional clothing and are common as tattoos, as a brand or even as an incision on parts of the body.

**Tom Fearon** 13:24

And what about other parts of Africa? Even though there has been a long history of missionaries on the African continent, how have Africans themselves embraced and shaped the story of Christianity?

**Nick Mwandia**

13:36

Christianity first arrived in in Africa in the 1st century and spread gradually outwards from parts of Egypt to North Africa and Ethiopia. Further advancement of the faith occurred when the Roman Emperor Constantine made Christianity the official religion of the Empire in 312 AD, a territory that included Roman-controlled regions of North Africa.

Christianity is believed to have first arrived in Ethiopia in the first century. There is evidence for this in the bible from a story in the book of Acts chapter 8. It tells of the Ethiopian eunuch who was court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians. He had come to Jerusalem to worship and on his way back he met with Philip the apostle. He had a conversion experience and was baptised by him. He was one of the earliest adherents of the oldest tradition in sub-Saharan Africa.

Christianity’s long presence in Africa saw it develop uniquely in various places, including North African, Ethiopian Orthodox and Coptic Egyptian forms. After its early establishment Christianity declined in the 7th century with the ascendancy of Islam on the continent. However, the Ethiopian rulers held out against invaders and successfully resisted Islamic conquest. As a result, from a very early onset, Christianity has continued virtually uninterrupted as the official religion in Ethiopia and has persisted on and off in other smaller pockets of North Africa.

The later story of Christianity in Africa was initially shaped by the arrival of Portuguese and Dutch missionaries in Sub-Saharan Africa in the 15th century. Other European nations followed suit as Christian missions to Africa increased, particularly in the 19th century, driven by a challenge to the slave trade and the growing colonisation of Africa.

**Tom Fearon** 15:42

Wow. What you've just said really highlights how complex the story of Christianity is on the continent. On the one hand, missionaries were active in working to abolish the slave trade. And on the other, were part of spreading the colonial project.

**Nick Mwandia**

15:57

Yes, and as Africans embrace Christianity, they also help to shape it. This they did by contextualization and enculturation.

**JC Niala** 16:08

Could you explain a bit more about what contextualization and inculturation mean?

**Nick Mwandia**

16:14

Sure, contextualisation is the attempt to understand Christian faith in terms of the traditions and culture of a particular context. It’s application in Africa was in part a reaction to the detrimental impact of the western colonial era, especially in the early and middle part of the 20th century. Many of the missionaries arriving on continent at this time made the assumption that western Christianity was the pattern given by Jesus for the church. However African Christians, having their own cultural consciousness and worldview, gradually became mindful that western theologies, fashioned in western situations, did not really address the African needs adequately.

Consideration of local questions and the African contextual existence was often absent, ignored and or actively suppressed. A common concern was that Christianity in Africa had been used to destroy the traditional, cultural and religious foundation of the African peoples. Local Christians including many theologians began to explore the possibilities that could be found within an understanding of their own unique anthropology.

Inculturation on the other hand is a related idea that informs much of the theological work in Africa and some attempts to transform Christian practice. It involves approaches that seek to use concepts, symbols and the general worldview found in the African context. This is in order to express the Christian faith in a way that Africans can relate to more naturally.

Expressions of this tendency are found in many of the mainline catholic and protestant denominational churches but more so in the African initiated churches.

**JC Niala** 18:07

Gosh, that really turns on its head, the widespread narrative about the impact of Christianity on the continent, and also helps to explain how there's now so many African initiated churches. Do you think that Christian practice has been interpreted and transformed in line with the various traditional African values and worldviews?

**Nick Mwandia**

18:29

I think it has to some extent, this is particularly true for Christians in academia but less so in the churches of Africa. Where transformation has been attempted there has been an emphasis on reflecting the concrete and historical reality of the African situation and a desire for “meaningfulness”.

Christian theology and by extension church practice are both generally seen as exercises in relevance; to be done in and through the concrete life experiences. A need is expressed for a type of theology and practical faith which will take account of the mind-set of the African peoples as well as their unique circumstances. It is prompted by a variety of concerns which include the historical or contemporary background of adversity, issues of African Christian identity, and gender issues.

This underlying motivation in African Christian theology and practice shows itself in the endeavour to draw together various sources found in African culture and religion, and drawing them in a coherent and meaningful pattern. For example, the understanding of God is sought in terms that are familiar.

Most African theologians seeking themes have been limited to those African elements that are typical or emphasised in African culture. Such elements highlight the specific value or originality of the African culture for theology and for common faith. Some of the themes that have been explored for Christology include Jesus Christ as Chief, Jesus Christ as Ancestor, as Elder brother, as King, or as Healer.

There are two main categories grouped on the basis of the underlying ideology; liberation theology and inculturation theology. Liberation theologians find their stimulus in Africa’s moral, social, political and economic struggles. They attempt to set these within theological contexts and so highlight the concrete socio-political and economic realities of the continent.

Inculturation theology encompasses the majority of theological work in Africa. Such approaches seek to use concepts, symbols and the general worldview found in the African context for pursuing theology. That is, the way we talk about God. The reality of the relationship between African culture and the Christian faith is not just a translation of western faith into local terms or a new language of faith. Instead the aim is for a more profound insertion whereby the church actually becomes part of the culture.

**Tom Fearon** 21:32

And also by the church actually becoming part of the culture is necessarily African. So for your research, what comparisons have you drawn between African spiritual veneration and Christianity?

**Nick Mwandia**

21:47

Well, culture is a key concern in my study of different elements in African tradition and how they are worked with in the context of Christianity. I have been drawn by the work of a particular theologian, the Tanzanian, Charles Nyamiti. Nyamiti has developed a sophisticated and integrated Christology as part of what is arguably the most highly developed systematic theology in Africa. He is also one of the few African theologians for whom who it is possible to find a lot of secondary literature on his work.

Nyamiti sums up and brings a balance between scripture and tradition as well as reason and experience. By working with ancestral theology and the elements that are common to the majority of various African communities he constructs a theology that is relevant to any black community in Africa.

His approach works with the validity of the belief in ancestors as well as Christian revelation. In justifying his method of seeking inspiration from local culture as well as philosophy he refers for instance to Church fathers like St Augustine and the Cappadocians. These are examples of well-regarded Christian teachings which who borrowed philosophical elements from various philosophies of the Graeco-Roman cultures. These were modified for theological purposes allowing for the construction of (and to quote Nyamiti) ‘a Christian philosophy which could not be perfectly identified with any of the philosophies in their particular cultural milieu’ They all borrowed ideas and used them in synthetic and syncretic ways to arrive at new theological constructs.

Nyamiti develops his ancestral theology by first examining the African understanding of the term “ancestor”. He did this by carrying out an extensive survey of peoples direct experiences of ancestral veneration in Black Africa. He was then able to examine the Trinity (God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit) from the African ancestral viewpoint.

His survey of the African traditional notion of ancestor reveals five chief characteristics. The five essentials are kinship, sacred status, mediation, exemplarity of behaviour, and title to regular communication, and together they represent the core qualities of the theme of the ancestor.

By taking these elements that determine the African understanding of ancestor, he was able to look at each in turn to see how far they could be mapped onto the Christian meaning of the Trinity. He observed that all these essential elements apply to the Father in his relationship to his Son.

This of course is a brief summary and there are many other nuances which he draws out in his work between the elements that he recognised and divine and human relationship. Essentially what his comparison concludes if we work with his analogy is that ‘God the Father is, analogically speaking, the Ancestor and Ancestress of his Son, and this latter is his true Descendant’.

**JC Niala** 25:24

Thank you so much Nick for introducing us to Charles Nyamiti’s work. Your description of it really lifts a lid on a question I know many people have about the widespread adoption of Christianity across the continent. It is a profound lens with which to look at the ways in which traditional African concepts and practices can be brought into conversation with and transform religious belief – making it as you rightly say relevant on the African continent.

I think our listeners would like to know a little bit more about Charles Nyamiti and what might have led him to develop such a methodologically rigorous African theology?

**Nick Mwandia** 26:05

Charles Nyamiti was born into a Christian home in Tanzania in 1931 and sadly passed away last year in 2020. He was ordained as a Catholic priest in 1962. As well as having two PhDs – one in systematic Theology and one in Cultural Anthropology – he also studied music theory and played the piano. For those who may like to find out more about his work two of his books are Christ as our Ancestor – Christology from an African perspective and African tradition and the Christian God.

**JC Niala** 26:41

Thanks, Nick. And as you also mentioned, there are many other people who've written about his work. As we draw to the end of the episode, I was wondering if you could share with us what has happened as people from the African continent move and join existing diasporas outside of Africa. They often bring their ways of worshipping with them. How do these Christian outlooks challenge Christian traditions in the West?

**Nick Mwandia** 27:09

Thank you, JC. African Christians are far more conservative in terms of both beliefs and moral teaching than British Christians. They are by nature deeply religious, and the family is the nucleus of both individual and community existence. The idea of relationship and sociability is central both morally and ethically. It runs through all aspects of life including orientation towards God. The individual finds his or her identity primarily in the shared existence with others in community.

**Tom Fearon** 27:45

And that's quite a contrast to Western societies where identity is increasingly individualised.

**Nick Mwandia** 27:51

That’s right, so first generation African immigrants in the West face a radical detachment from this social consciousness and so, having been uprooted from one natural context, they never fully achieve the necessary transplantation that would facilitate a complete enculturation in their new home communities. They hang on to their old traditional cultural roots making the process incomplete.

Integration of traditional attitudes means that the patriarchal world of scripture looks very familiar to African Christians. They come from a society based on, amongst other things, patriarchal clans ‘that practice polygamy and circumcision’ and in which the ‘supernatural’ is very much a part of the way the world is understood.

One area in which the church in the West can be positively challenged by the experience of African Christianity is Christian worship. Within the life of the historic churches there is a growing recognition of a need for balance between form and freedom in worship; between liturgy and the spontaneity of praying, sharing and exhorting others. Trying to transform local attitudes in this respect is not without its challenges.

For one, worshippers in most of the traditional churches tend to view dancing or swaying as inappropriate for a solemn or religious setting. Africans on the other hand regard such physical movement as perfectly normal. Westerners compartmentalise their lives into the secular and the sacred whereas Africans use song in every area of their lives.

**JC Niala** 29:37

That's so true what you say about song and the ways in which African peoples do not separate the secular from the sacred is so true. It makes me think of Stormzy who is of Ghanaian heritage. On his album Gang signs and prayer he has a gospel song called Blinded by your Grace which may seem odd for a grime artist. I think that Stormzy is a powerful example of how African ways of being transcend boundaries. For example, Classic FM heralded him as a modern day Shostakovich and the Archbishop of Canterbury quoted one of the lines from Blinded by Your Grace which goes ‘I stay prayed up and get the job done’. That line shows a holistic connection between material and spiritual life.

**Tom Fearon** 30:25

Yes I remember Stormzy performing this song at Glastonbury in 2019, in his words, ‘We’re gonna take this to church’, he took 100 000 festival goers to church with him. Such a powerful demonstration of faith on a public stage!

**JC Niala** 30:42

But African Christianity does more than that. Nareick, you able to share other ways in which it challenges Western Christianity?

**Nick Mwandia** 30:51

Yes there are other possibilities. African Christianity can also help in addressing the religious tendency of many Christians in the UK to the fashion of ‘believing without belonging’. The rampant individualism in Western Christianity is challenged by the communitarian approach.

Churches in the West can gain renewed understanding of the practice of church membership. In the bible Paul uses an analogy with a body in first Corinthians Chapter 12 verse 12. He describes the way in which a member of Christ’s Church is a vital, interconnected and indispensable organ. In the West we need to rediscover the biblical vision of humanity through inter-relatedness and the intrinsic mutual dependence. This has far reaching impact on Christian life, worship, and service.

Within this discipline will be the necessary recovery of the attitude of listening and receiving –an action of faith – as a prerequisite of knowing. There are indications that this is already being addressed in different ways. For example, some emerging churches practice ‘belonging before believing’ in order to include those with a post-modern mentality that shows little Christian knowledge, is suspicious of institutions as well as seeking to “test” the faith.

This relational trait combined with a tendency to a more literal conformity with the bible also contributes to another characteristic of African Christianity, where reaching out through missionary and evangelistic activity is normal. These activities are a part of everyday life and so are spread through every day social relations such as family, friends, business and work. And as with the example of Stormzy are communicated through songs and signals.

African churches are also able to assist the church through the social role that they play. African Christians like most other migrant communities quickly establish socio-religious organisations that meet a combination of spiritual and practical needs so in this respect they are much better geared than the established churches to perform functions such as welcoming newly arrived immigrants and providing points of focus for them where they can receive warmth and friendship as well as other social, economic, educational and political activities.

Other beneficial strengths of African Christianity include the religious plurality that is not common in the West. African Christianity comes from homelands where religious diversity is a part of daily life. It speaks to the disadvantaged and marginalised populations. It enters into the conversation of fast spreading Islam across Europe in part because of the similarities in moral and social attitudes where the family and community are central. The capacity of African immigrants to engage in this missionary activity is further enhanced by the forces of globalisation, as their urban-based churches become centres within the strategic intersections of mobility, dynamism and change within Western societies.

However, owing to attitudes that are reinforced by conscious or unconscious prejudice, there are tendencies that influence white UK-born Christians not to see value in any other perception of God and the world, but their own thought and symbol system. It is common to find that western experts rarely find the ideological tone of the new churches much to their taste. The apparent reversal of the Europe-Africa relationship, which is presumed to operate in a particular direction, is consequently very disturbing.

The common Western view of African Christianity as “fundamentalist” due to their attachment to the literal text of the Bible and the way they interpret it causes many Europeans to see it as a threat to the Western social system which allows for liberal freedom and independent thought. In countering the often adversarial approach that defends a single (Western) cultural context by claiming a monopoly on understanding Jesus Christ, African Christological images enhance the discovery of the fullness of the gospel.

**Tom Fearon** 35:32

Yes, that's very true. And this is also true of many forms of Christianity in Africa. Although many worshipers have converted to Christianity at some point, these Christian values are embraced enthusiastically, and incorporated into African cultures, material worlds, and adherent’s visions of their place in the world, both on the African continent and in the diaspora.

**JC Niala** 35:54

Yes, this can be seen, especially for many African Pentecostal Christians, which is a thriving denomination based worship and experience of the Holy Spirit. In many parts of sub-Saharan Africa, the presence and power of these churches is hard to miss, with billboards, television channels, and mega churches dominating the social scene.

**Tom Fearon** 36:17

And as Nick mentioned, many African worshippers who migrate to Europe do so as missionaries, converting the dark continent of Europe back to Christianity, which has since forgotten. Remember, a few episodes ago, we discussed the Congolese members of the Church of Kimbangu, who express their faith through music on the streets of London. What a way to challenge the typical narrative of missionaries in Africa.

**JC Niala** 36:43

It is indeed. And I'd really like to thank Nick for his excellent contribution to this podcast. Thank you, Nick.

**Nick Mwandia**

It's been my pleasure.

**JC Niala**

This has been a great way to learn about the history and material culture of Christianity in Africa, and how it's been embraced and transformed by African worshipers. What would you like the listeners to take away from today's episode, Tom?

**Tom Fearon** 37:08

Well, let's return to the Ethiopian empire for a moment. The last emperor of Ethiopia was Haile Selassie. Not only was he Emperor, but like those before him, claimed descendency from the biblical King Solomon, and was a committed Christian. Even his name translates as ‘power of the Trinity’. In an address to the League of Nations in 1936, he said, “apart from the kingdom of the Lord, there is not on this earth any nation that is superior to any other.” He took this Christian attitude for tolerance and fairness into his politics, being an internationalist and an African, he was a leading figure in the formation of the United Nations, and what is now called the African Union. But not only this some adherents of the Rastafari religious movement based in Jamaica, and descendants of the African slave trade diaspora. Through their reading of the Bible, consider Haile Selassie to be the second coming of Jesus, or at least embodying his teaching. Rastafarians view Selassie as a positive symbol of their rich and biblical heritage. But why do I say all this? Although Selassie may not have been a perfect leader, he shows how religious and in this case biblical ideas become reality through empires, politics, worship, movements, interpretations and diasporas. Christianity is not just about religion. It is lived experienced and transformed by those who move by it. Often it is with religion, that history is made.

**JC Niala** 38:49

Thank you for listening to this week's episode of Afro history escapes with me. JC Niala

**Tom Fearon**

Tom Fearon

**Nick Mwandia**

and Nick Mwandia

**Tom Fearon** 38:59

Join us next week as we discuss with Community Action researcher, our Abiola Balogun traditional Yoruba religion known as Ifa and its deep connections to culture and history in West Africa and beyond.

**JC Niala** 39:13,

This is Afro historyscapes. always something new. Always has been always on the move.