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‘For God and For My Country’: Pentecostal-charismatic Churches and the Framing of a New Political Discourse in Uganda

Barbara Bompani¹

Introduction

On Monday 31st March 2014 30,000 Ugandans gathered at Kololo stadium in Kampala, the site of great national celebration events such as in 9 October 1962 when Uganda celebrated independence, the Union Jack was lowered and the national anthem sung for the very first time in public. Back in 2014, fire jugglers, acrobats, singers and schoolchildren performed at a long ceremony arranged to celebrate the country’s new Anti-Homosexuality Act, signed into law by President Museveni in February 2014.² Pastor Martin Ssempe, ³ an evangelical leader who has been one of the most vocal activists against Lesbian, Gays, Bisexual and Transsexual (LGBT) rights in the country, led a march of several hundred people who, leaving the campus of Makerere University, walked in line to join the crowd at Kololo stadium carrying signs saying ‘Mr Museveni thank you for saving the future of Uganda’, ‘Uganda Belongs to God’, ‘Obama, we want trade not homosexuality’. The event, pithily entitled the ‘National Thanksgiving Service Celebrating the Passing of the Anti-Homosexuality Bill’, was organised by the Inter-Religious Council of Uganda (IRCU), an umbrella organisation of the country’s major denominations, and other groups that had supported the passage of the Anti-Homosexuality Bill into Law, among whom there was a strong representation of Pentecostal-charismatic churches (PCCs) and Pentecostal organisations. Speakers addressed the crowd from the impressive stage where Museveni sat beside his wife, Janet Kataaha Museveni, in large chairs surrounded by government officials, members of parliament and religious leaders. ‘Today, we come here again [to celebrate] sovereignty and freedom ... [and] to take charge of our destiny,’ said David Bahati, the politician most closely associated with the promotion of the Anti-Homosexuality Bill starting in 2009, ‘The citizens of Uganda are with you, Mr. President. The religious and cultural leaders are with you, Mr. President. The members of parliament and the nation is behind you’ (Hodes, *TheGuardian* online, 2 April 2014).

This event exemplifies how in recent years the rise and political action of the Pentecostal-charismatic (PC) community has impacted upon the very nature of Ugandan politics, firmly integrating morally aligned initiatives into public policy. The impact of PC discourse in the country is in particular laid bare around issues of

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² On 24 February 2014 President Museveni signed into law the Anti-Homosexuality Bill that was passed by the Parliament in December 2013 when it was presented as a Christmas gift to Ugandan Christians by the Parliament speaker Rebecca Kadaga, also associated to Pentecostal-charismatic circles. The Ugandan Constitutional Court nullified the Anti-Homosexuality Act for lack of parliamentary quorum in August 2014.

³ Pastor Martin Ssempe is the leader of One Love Church, previously known as Makerere Community Church. This is an evangelical church based in Makerere University mainly attended by university students. He has been one of the most vocal voices in campaigning in favour of the Anti-Homosexuality Act and he abundantly features in radio and TV programmes, newspapers and internet venues.

sexuality and morality. The recent Anti-Pornography Act⁴ and the Anti-Homosexuality Act, both approved by the Parliament in December 2013, are intrinsic to this public moralisation and religiously driven public action.

From a religious minority isolated from the public and persecuted during Idi Amin's era (Ward, 2005)⁵, Pentecostal-charismatic churches (PCCs) started to grow in the 90s and according to Epstein (2007) and Gusman (2009) in recent years nearly one-third of Ugandans have converted to Pentecostal-charismatic Christianity. Alongside their numerical growth their political and public participation has increased and is now very vocal. In particular regarding the issue of sexuality Pentecostal-charismatic leaders seemed to have focused their energies in articulating the immorality of homosexuality, which they often present as an external Western import that clashes with African and Christian values. The moral discourse around sexuality seemed to have united a diverse and otherwise fragmented Ugandan Pentecostal-charismatic community. As Pastor Ben articulated in an interview:

We [PCCs] are together when we discuss certain issues, certain challenges. And other issues, due to our religious freedom, divide us and we divert. With Bahati's Bill [Anti-homosexuality Bill] you have seen all the Pentecostal churches coming together and saying the same thing. Under the same roof, coming together and making a resolution in the same day, wow! (Pastor Ben Fite, 10 February 2013, Namuwongo)

And again:

The government, they understand not philosophy or theology but numbers: the greater you are the greater the voice and the more like they are to listen. Like with the Marriage and Divorce Bill and the voting for this, we are pushing against certain aspects of this heavily. Also the issues of homosexuality and lesbianism. We find ourselves needing to unite to fight against this. When talking about the Anti-Homosexuality Bill and the Marriage and Divorce Bill we have to unite. (Rev. Timothy Kibirige, Associate Superintendent of Pentecostal Assemblies of God – Uganda and Pastoral Team Leader of Entebbe Pentecostal Church, Kampala, 25 March 2013)

This chapter is concerned not only with religious perceptions of sexuality but also with the tightening relationship between politics, the nation and public religion in Uganda. Focusing on the analysis of a Pentecostal-charismatic church in the capital Kampala, Watoto, the chapter will show how the sexuality discourse has entwined with and been promoted by PCCs who in doing so are becoming instrumental within the new nationalist discourse of public regeneration in the country. Ultimately the analysis is informed by the idea that public politics in Uganda today simply cannot be understood in isolation from religion and new forms of religious public interventions.

⁴ The Anti-Pornography Law, approved by the Ugandan Parliament on 19 December 2013, outlaws overtly sexual material including music videos and 'provocative' clothes like miniskirts.

⁵ At the time of the East African Revival in Uganda Pentecostals were first denied permission but later in 1960, colonialists authorized them to start operating in the country. In 1970s, former President Idi Amin expelled all Pentecostal groups that went underground. But after the 1979 liberation war, the ban was lifted. Then more churches started to be established (Gifford 2000; Pirouet, 1980).

Pentecostalism and Politics in Uganda

In the colonial and post-colonial history of Uganda organised religion has played an inextricable role in national politics. Historically both the Anglican and Catholic Church have held a near duopoly on Ugandan Christianity (according to the Ugandan Census 2002, 85.4% of the population declare to belong to a Christian denomination, Uganda Bureau of Statistics, 2007). Religious sectarianism has defined Ugandan politics since Christianity first took hold in the Bugandan monarchy (Rowe, 1964). For Gifford, 'the rivalry between Anglicans and Catholics has become institutionalized in their respective political parties; Obote's UPC (Ugandan People's Congress) was linked to the COU (Anglican Church of Uganda), and the [opposition] DP (Democratic Party) to the Catholic Church' (Gifford, 2000:105). During the decade before independence political parties began to form based largely along Catholic and Anglican divides (Ward, 2005:112). While Milton Obote, a Protestant and the nation's first independence president, 'endeavored to create a secular state, in which religion did not intrude into the political sphere...entrenched religious loyalties, which he himself could not transcend, make it hard for him to succeed' (Ward, 2005:112). Religious divisiveness characterised most of the post-independence period.

Early mainline Pentecostal churches began to take root in the late 1950s and in the 60s but in the following decade the Idi Amin's regime banned independent churches, further strengthening the hold of the Catholic and Anglican traditions. According to Ward, Amin – the only Muslim to serve as President – 'was not against Christianity as such. But he greatly feared the Churches as centres of opposition to his rule. He prohibited altogether the small evangelical and Pentecostal churches which has have? proliferated in the 1960s', intensifying the powers of the Catholic and Anglican traditions (Ward, 2005:115). PCCs's consolidation and affirmation in the country is concomitant to the Museveni's regime.

Gifford (1998) positions the rise of early born-again churches in parallel to Museveni's era and for both 1986, when the National Resistance Movement (NRM) came to power, proved a historic year. Beyond the global momentum of the Pentecostal-charismatic movement, PCCs found relevance in Uganda due to two distinct factors, the reforms and ideology of the Museveni's regime that saw in PCCs a non-sectarian ally to redevelop the country, and the HIV epidemic. Ideologically, in fact, PC churches existed outside the political-religious divides of the Anglican and Catholic Church, and proved in harmony with the goals of the NRM (Gifford, 1998). According to Freston, relatively early on Museveni and the NRM saw themselves 'as creating a "new dispensation". The Catholic and Anglican churches are of the old dispensation, whereas the "born again" movement is part of the reconstruction' (Freston, 2004:142). Furthermore their theology and practical ethos funded on prosperity, accumulation and regeneration really worked in affinity with the NRM's national reconstruction project. For Gifford, 'their enormous growth, public profile and impact were evident to all' and while the theological vantage of churches greatly differed, they were unified in a stress of economic and material success and accumulation (Gifford, 2000:111).

Early PC churches of the late 1980s and 90s kept politics at arms length. In line with Corten & Marshall-Fratani's (2000) analysis of PC Christianity in Africa, new Pentecostal churches maintained a relatively apolitical stance espousing 'an ideological commitment to a clear separation between the life of the 'saved' and the ways of the world, the practical division...is much less clear' (Jones, 2005:497). Throughout the 1990s the initially marginal churches experienced prolific growth and

their descent into the public started to take place when the PC community gained significant influence in the Ugandan public sphere because of HIV. The HIV epidemic is inextricable from the proliferation, institutionalisation and increased politicisation of the PC community. Beginning around 2000, HIV provided the conditions for PCCs to transition into or form Faith-based Organisation (FBOs). International flows of development aid and local conditions came together and fused political initiatives with the religious agenda of the PC community. Two contributing factors helped institutionalise the PC community around HIV, the theological stance and international funding. First ‘the epidemic itself encouraged a significant theological refocus among Pentecostal churches...from an “otherworldly” to a “this-worldly” attitude, from the urgency of saving as many souls as possible in the short term, to long-term programs, with a stress on the future of the country’ (Gusman, 2009:68). Second, beginning in 2004 PEPFAR⁶, funds originating from the United States government, redirected national strategies around HIV to ‘morally’ informed campaigns. In four years PEPFAR allocated around \$650 million USD to Uganda (ibidem). PCCs capitalised on PEPFAR funds that were ‘channeled into FBOs working on HIV/AIDS prevention issues, particularly those concerning abstinence and faithfulness’ (ibidem). According to Cooper (2014) and Patterson (2011) U.S. evangelical and African Pentecostal-charismatic churches have been among the primary beneficiaries of PEPFAR funds. In turn, in recent years US evangelical efforts in sub-Saharan Africa have experienced a profound increase (McCleary, 2009; Hearn, 2002). For Cooper, PEPFAR ‘can be said to have institutionalized [the foreign and domestic evangelical] presence in US humanitarian aid by enshrining the moral prohibitions of conservative Christianity in the very conditions of its funding (Cooper, 2014:3).

PEPFAR was not the only development initiative that has helped to institutionalise the Pentecostal presence. Under George W. Bush’s administration an executive order established an official office for Faith-Based and Community Initiatives in the US Agency for International Development (USAID) ‘with the express purpose of facilitating foreign aid contracts with faith-based service providers’ (Cooper, 2014:3). USAID issued a subsequent ruling that prohibited discriminatory practices against religious organisations. For Clarke, this equalised ‘the treatment of secular and religious organizations [but] effectively tilts the balance in favour of the latter’ (Clarke, 2007:82). Yet the increased prominence of faith-based actors is not solely the result of U.S. interventionism. According to Cooper, ‘the theological turn in international emergency relief both responds to and serves to amplify on-going developments in the domestic politics of sub-Saharan African states, where non-governmental organizations in general, and religious organizations in particular, have come to play an increasingly prominent role in the provision of social services’ (Cooper, 2014:4). In Uganda PCCs became increasingly involved in HIV initiatives and in this way national strategies took on a moral character for prevention not anymore based on ‘secular’ approaches but on religiously and morally driven public interventions.

HIV was significant not only for PCCs but also because it changed the nature of the public sphere by creating for the first time open dialogue on sexuality. For Tamale ‘the HIV/AIDS Pandemic has in many ways flung open the doors on sexuality’ (Tamale, 2003:5). In a break from the past, HIV made sex and

⁶ The U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) is the U.S. Government initiative to tackle HIV (but also Tuberculosis and Malaria) around the world with a comprehensive multi-sectoral approach that expands access to prevention, care and treatment.

consequently sexuality an acceptable topic for public discussion. For Epprecht, ‘in recent years [the linguistic] subtlety [when discussing homosexuality] has begun to change quite dramatically...[and] depictions of same-sex sexuality are now becoming increasingly explicit and frank’ (Epprecht, 2008:8). HIV redefined discussions of sexuality in the Ugandan public sphere. Institutionalised discrimination against homosexuality was introduced with the ‘former British colonial power through legislation aiming at re-educating “the native subjects” in sexual mores’ (Strand, 2012:566), yet sexuality has remained a taboo topic in public circles. With the entrance of sexuality into the public, PC public action started to be diverted into promoting their own conservative interpretations of morally acceptable sexual behaviour that was in clear contrast to the increasingly vocal and internationally shaped LGBT discourse of homosexuality as a human right (Hoad, 2007). In order to morally and materially ‘secure the future of Uganda’, conservative churches started to engage in a political battle that aimed to transform legislation and public policies through different levels of action and influence. The analysis of Watoto church below will elucidate this process.

Watoto Church and ‘The Vision of Transforming the Nation’

Watoto, a Swahili word that means child, is the most well known of all Ugandan Pentecostal-charismatic churches. Formerly called Kampala Pentecostal Church (KPC), it changed identity in April 2009. Pastor Gary Skinner and his wife Marilyn started Watoto in 1983. Pastor Skinner is from a family of missionaries, he was born in Zimbabwe and grew up in Canada. Watoto is closely aligned to the Canadian Pentecostal Assemblies of God (PAG). The church follows what they call a ‘relational theological’ approach, based around a passage from James 1:27 that indicates a requirement to look after widows and orphans for religion to be pure. As such, Watoto has two children’s villages, where they house and educate orphans, and adheres to a commitment to protect families and the future generation in order to build the future nation. In Uganda Watoto is very famous for its choirs and its own popular radio station, Power FM. ‘Watoto’ can be considered to be a brand and the church uses it to maximum effect. Watoto has five churches in Kampala, identified from each other by their location: Central (in Nakasero), North (in Ntinda), East (in Kazinga), South (Lubowa), and West (in Kyengeru). Watoto also has a church in Gulu in Northern Uganda, and drawing from participant observation (November 2012 to June 2013) it seems that they are constructing churches in Israel, Burundi, and South Sudan.

Watoto Central has three services on a Sunday, and one on Saturday evenings; it encourages its congregation to commit to a ‘cell’, a locally based prayer group led by a cell leader that meets once or twice weekly in a members’ home. It offers several programmes for different targeted users; for example ‘Daughters of Destiny’ for women churchgoers, ‘Men of Valour’ for male participants and the ‘School of Community Leadership’ for professionals to transform their sphere of influence in society. Watoto Central, the biggest church, holds approximately 1500 people at a time and constitutes a sprawling block of offices and rooms located in the heart of Kampala city. Its congregation is socio-economically mixed, but all are fluent English speakers, as no sermons are offered in other languages.

Drawing from a research period of eight months in Kampala which consisted of attending church services in Watoto Central and in Watoto North, interviews with church-members and leaders, focus groups with church members and participating in cell activities (Kampala, November 2012 to June 2013), Watoto can be broadly

characterised as a dynamic institution with a very clear mission that focuses on shaping a new generation of Ugandans and a more 'prosperous', both spiritually and materially, nation. Watoto's narratives and discourses on personal moral regeneration developed vis-a-vis discourses related to the regeneration of the country and the construction of a new 'reborn' Uganda inspired by theological and religious Pentecostal understandings, values and beliefs. Based on the vision of the leaders, Gary and Marilyn Skinner, the picture that emerged was that through several interventions and actions Watoto is committed not only to influence the spiritual realm but is also prepared to battle to shape the public and political sphere. Action aimed to change is an integral part of the transformative theological interpretations of the church that simultaneously works on three different levels: 1) the personal in which individuals work to become better Christians and better citizens; 2) at a church level in which the religious community operates to improve the life of the church and its spiritual, material and numerical growth; 3) and at the national level in which by extension the nation is perceived as the imagined community (Anderson, 1991) that incorporates all the virtues of the individuals and of the religious congregation. The nation, intended as a Christian-Pentecostal nation, is an aspiration to work for with dedication and constant commitment. On Saturday 26 January 2013 at a Watoto service Pastor Komagum asked the congregation to pray for the nation, and pray for the next 50 years, so that 'we raise up a next generation of willing to risk their lives for this church, so that we will see a new Uganda, a blessed Uganda, a Uganda that is one with Jesus' (Chris Komagum, Watoto, 26 January 2013). Then Pastor Komagum asked everyone what the motto of Uganda was, and people shouted out 'For God and My Country'. Pastor Komagum repeated the motto, and said that the choir had prepared a very special song named 'This nation belongs to God'. On the screen a big Ugandan flag was displayed as the choir started to sing the patriotic song. Lyrics included: 'there is no power that can change us but God and my country' and 'let the people see that the nation belongs to God, the father, the son and the holy spirit,' and, 'Father we lay our country in your hands, we lay our future in your hands' (Watoto, 26 January 2013).

The Youth and Future Leaders

Discourse analysis of church sermons displayed how the terms nation, country, future, vision, generation and transformation were extremely recurrent in the weekly service. These words were followed in weight of repetition by leader, leadership, moral, morality, integrity mostly associated with sexual integrity, sex, sexuality, change, community, value and family and echoed in the words of interviewees and participants. The analysis also highlighted how the focus of those sermons was predominantly the Youth interpreted as the future of Uganda.

My mother church in Kampala called Watoto church has had a great impact in the lives of young people. Young people form the majority percentage in all the celebration points. The church has been a model to other Pentecostal churches in Uganda, Africa and globally. Reverend Gary Skinner got this vision early enough and he invested all his time, effort and resources in college and University students. These students have matured into professionals, responsible family men and women and are now very developmental in church (they own the vision) and are change agents in society and nation promoting good value systems. I am a product of this background. Young people are the backbone of the church as old people phase

out. (Anonymous leader in Watoto, 30 March 2013)

Uganda is an extremely young country; currently about 6.5 million (21.3%) Ugandans are between 18–30 years and the number of young people is projected to grow to 7.7 million by 2015 (The State of Uganda Population report, UNFPA Uganda, 2013) and the attention to the junior members of the congregation is also revealed in the style in which services are delivered. Services in fact were very much a spectacle with lots of singing and dancing, and performances from the youth, women and dance groups and nights out and social events are constantly advertised at the weekend. It was articulated to me in these terms:

Watoto provides an environment that suits young people-talk of balanced and anointed bible teachings, mentorship, caring attitude, good reception, motivation in form of rewards and recognition, relational building, small fellowships like weekly home cells which provide identity, family environment, eats and drinks, personal sharing and grooming, mobilisation of resources for parties and marriage ceremonies are a motivational factor for young people, freedom and flexibility in the dress code, organised fellowships, bible studies, effective counselling skills, good role models, powerful and lively praise and worship sessions, intensive prayer sessions and follow-ups for spiritual growth. Generally young people feel homely and cared for in Pentecostal circles regardless of their family and parental status. (Pastor Titus Makuma, PAG Uganda, 25 March 2013)

Pentecostal-charismatic congregants are ‘regulated subjects’ (O’Neill, 2010) who serve on a daily basis Christ and the nation. Watoto’s main transformative goals were clearly outlined during Sunday sermons and then reinforced, discussed and assimilated in small cell groups during the week and through individual reading and prayer. Young churchgoers are trained, through the power of prayer⁷ and through material interventions, to become tomorrow’s leaders. The School of Community Leadership, a programme designated to train ‘transformational leaders in the community and in the country’,⁸ was instituted with this intent. To become ‘transformational leaders in the community and in the country’

Our church is so important to our community, and it’s not just what happens in this building that is important, but what happens in the society, in the community. And so I thought it would be good for us to train some of our cell leaders, or maybe some of our professional people, doctors or lawyers or teachers or people who work in offices are secretaries, to help them to understand how they can bring Christ into their community [...] and that is

⁷ For example: ‘There is a power of praying, praying as a nation for politics – all this is in the bible. These people [corrupted administrators and politicians] they know they are doing wrong. They are hurting our country. But they do it for personal gain. This is short term. They will not go to heaven. We pray that they recommit to Jesus and follow the right path’ (Sarah, cell leader, Watoto, 30 November 2012).

⁸ This is a leadership course run by Watoto Church to ‘equip Christian professionals to be transformational (change) agents in their spheres of influence and community’ as mentioned in the website: www.watotochurch.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=353&Itemid=298 It is designed for leaders and professionals in corporate organisations, government, NGOs and church. The programme runs for 18 months and consists of six face-to-face sessions and many online activities. A face-to-face session is held every 3 months.

what the School of Community Leadership is all about [Lots of clapping]. I would have liked to call it a School of Political Leadership, but it wouldn't have been politically correct to do that [laughter] so it's the School of Community Leadership and I want to thank you for making the commitment to the city of Kampala and to the country of Uganda and together we are going to change Uganda! [Cheering and clapping.] So, we've learned about leadership and we've learned about strategic service, about integrity, and community, we've learned how to enter into the community and to work with the community. (Watoto, Gary Skinner, 2 February 2013)

In a focus group with Watoto members aged between 18 and 25, participants highlighted examples of successful Watoto-trained leaders who were having a practical impact on society and politics. 'I see the power [Pentecostalism] is having on our city. Look at Jennifer Musisi [lawyer and public administrator, currently Executive Director of Kampala Capital City Authority]. I really look up to her. She takes her faith and is applying it in the city. It has improved so much' one participant articulated while another continued in the same vein saying 'you can see her integrity, you can see she is really aligned with Christianity. She and Allen Kagina [Commissioner General of Ugandan Revenue Authority URA] are examples to us all, their faith has really become part of what they do. They do good working' [sic] (Focus group, Kampala, 1 June 2013). Other examples of successful Pentecostals, not necessarily linked to Watoto, like First Lady and Minister for Karamoja Affairs Janet Museveni, Director General of the Uganda AIDS Commission Christine Ondo, and MP David Bahati, were frequently mentioned as inspiration and elevated as proof that the Pentecostal way of living and action was changing the nation.

Danger of Corruption: Preserving the Youth and the Nation

Evangelical forms of Christianity provide an intense emotional ethical code for believers and sharp demarcations between sinful and rightful public and private behaviours. The Youth, who represent the future and the advancement of the religious community, and in this case by extension of the nation, are at the centre of this protective strategy, delineated by the church, of isolation from pollution and corruption. If the church wants to succeed in PC terms, then the Youth must be forged as incorruptible and ready to face the worldly challenges (fieldwork observation, November 2012 to June 2013).

While providing a morality to the congregation, Watoto puts a lot of emphasis on sexuality and sexual behaviour, which is at the forefront of the construction of their moral framework. Sexuality discourse is included in the reframing of the nation; firstly for the idea of reproduction and continuation of the community that is expressed in heterosexual married couples, and then because the relationship between nationalism and morality lies between a set of private and public attitudes, as well as rightness and decent attitudes towards sexuality (Mosse, 1985). This constitutes the foundation of a legal and moral order that would stop to exist if norms were challenged (and therefore it is a danger to fight against it). Morality, respectability and integrity assign a clear place in society to everyone, to women, man, foreign and national, normal and diverse. Unchanged and fixed sex roles are part of this continuity, they are the 'fabric of society and the nation' (Mosse, 1985: 17). Any confusion between categories would lead to chaos and lack of control and order. Within this interpretative framework, if the Youth do not absorb and perform the normative values, the nation will stop to prosper and ultimately will stop to exist.

Members of Watoto through Pentecostal Christianity become morally responsible citizens (O'Neill, 2010) who are the guardians of the extended community: the nation. Much as political nationalism may be built up on stereotypes, this Watoto form of religious nationalism draws from clearly defined ideas of manliness and women's role and these roles are deeply discussed and reinstated in groups like 'Daughters of Destiny' for female and 'Men of Valour' for male congregants. A constant message of danger and ideas that the Youth is targeted by sinister forces that oppose the Pentecostalisation of society is present in Watoto's interpretations and teaching:

Over the next 50 years, I see that the Pentecostal movement will penetrate into all other aspects that are jeopardising the moral stance of the nation. Such as homosexuality. This is having a big impact by the way because this movement [LGBT rights movement], the way that it is coming slowly, it is a terrible killer, a killer of spirituality and a killer of people. These people are coming up and they are targeting the youth. They are targeting the youth of today because they are going to be the church of tomorrow. (David, Watoto member, 28 May 2013)

Sermons put a lot of focus on right sexual behaviour that is expressed through marital sex, procreation and heteronormativity. Although discussions on homosexuality are not as frequent as 'sexual integrity' and 'morality', homosexuality is largely discussed in smaller meetings as cell discussion groups:

In the church they teach you that you should not get involved in the same sex relationships. Man-to-man, girl-to-girl, it is against the Bible. It is not allowed. These ones I really oppose. Also, I really oppose these ones that have the side dishes [extramarital affairs]. It is not really pure. It is most especially wrong [...] It is important to have family values. Uganda started from family values so without the family Uganda just wouldn't be. It would not be the same country. To allow these things to happen would be a very bad thing. So I am glad that we are having these bills in parliament, the Marriage and Divorce Bill and the Anti-Homosexuality one. It is good. It will protect our country. (Arnold, Watoto member, 21 March 2013)

Normative sexuality teaching and discussions are at the core of many church speeches. Gary and Marilyn Skinner frequently draw from their marriage to guide the audience, a young audience, to live a 'healthy' and morally impeccable sexual life stretching the danger of how non-conventional sexuality can be a detrimental to family, future generations, procreation, health and ultimately to god's will and vision for Uganda. On Saturday 16 February the sermon focused on the idea of integrity intended as sexual integrity:

I came up with the definition of sexual integrity and I want this to come up on the screen too. I believe that sexual integrity is expressing the gift of sexuality throughout life in a true, excellent and honest and pure way. I believe that sexual integrity self-control, it is respect, and it is responsibility in regards to your sexuality. Every single one of us has sexuality. I believe that sexual integrity is a powerful sign of our character. (Gary Skinner, Watoto, 16 February 2013)

Pastor Gary strongly stated that without sexual integrity ‘we are going to have trouble in our nation’ while Marilyn added that ‘there will be no beautiful Uganda without integrity’. As pastor Gary explained in the sermon,

I think we already have trouble in our nation, because there is a lack of sexual integrity. If we’re going to change the nation, we have to define a sexual integrity. To do that, we go back to Genesis [He reads from Genesis 1: 26-28]. God created us in his own image. Notice what it says, God created male and female. God is the author of our sexuality. Notice what he says to the man and the woman, he blesses them, he blessed their sexuality. He blessed their union. He said be fruitful and increase in number. I want to add a third sexual sin. And it is homosexuality. Homosexuality is when you have sex between people of the same gender, the same sex activity. Bible teaches us, in Leviticus that we must not have relationships between men. God says he detests homosexual sex, see the book of Romans. This [homosexuality] is such a massive subject right now and so important that I will have a whole message on this in a couple of months [...] Our bodies are designed to glorify God. Marital sex glorifies God. Any sex outside [the marriage] degrades your body. When you get sex outside of it and its intended purpose, it brings disease. (Gary Skinner, Watoto, 16 February 2013)

According to this interpretation, if the past for Uganda has been tortuous and it has been disappointing in delivering the post-independence promises, it is because society did not follow the right Christian path. But new hope now lies within the new generation of responsible Christian citizens.

Breaking with the Past, Shaping the Future

In line with Meyer (1998) and van Dijk, (2001) who argued that a rupture with the past is necessary in PC interpretations, Watoto’s narratives present a clear distinction between the first 50 years of Uganda since independence (1962) and the present situation of the country in which there are the ‘seeds’ for implanting a new revolution driven by Pentecostal-charismatic spirituality. As Pastor Gary Skinner elaborated,

There were some jubilee activities [2012 was declared Jubilee year in conjunction with the 50th anniversary of independence] around independence, one of them was the Jubilee Night of Prayer and it became international news when the President of Uganda, Mr. Yoweri Kaguta Museveni, in the first hours of Independence Day prayed a prayer of repentance for past 50 years of failure and a prayer of dedication to God for the next 50 years. (Skinner, Watoto, 5 January 2013)

Driven by the idea that productive and positive change cannot happen only throughout political interventions, there is a sense that this is a critical time for religiously inspired effective socio-political transformations.

On the first Saturday service of the year, on Saturday 5 January 2013, Pastor Gary Skinner greeted his congregation by announcing that something new was happening in Uganda. He explained that 2013 was the year of a ‘fresh start’ for the country, and according to him something very special was already happening. He told the congregation that he and other PC pastors had been invited to attend a dinner with

President Museveni and other politicians. To quote Pastor Skinner at the dinner:

a document was unveiled which has been coined “The Uganda Declaration”, a written pledge as a nation to God recognizing the specifics of our failure for the past 50 years and repenting for them [...] it is a dedication to God also outlining specifically what we intend to see God do in the next 50 years and making a realignment and a recommitment and a return to God as an international document. I believe that that this is a significant document at a critical moment in our national history and its not good for it to just be hanged up somewhere, it needs to be in the hands of every Ugandan who understands it and says yes to it. (Skinner, Watoto, 5 January 2013)

The ‘Uganda Declaration’ is a big and colourful, densely written poster that reads as a set of public and private commitments such as, for example, renouncing ‘the spirit of adultery, fornication, polygamy, homosexuality, prostitution and all the manners of sexual immorality’. The document was delivered to each member of the congregation who were then asked to sign it and return it. To quote again:

Mrs. Museveni signed it, Chris [other Watoto pastor] and I signed it, other leaders signed it. I would like to see members of Watoto church sign that document and I have a dream that it would be taken to our national square and then it would go to every district and we would see millions of Ugandans sign the document and say the next 50 years is a fresh start. (Skinner, Watoto, 5 January 2013)

It is still too soon to understand what this ‘fresh start’ will bring to the country, but for now it is sufficient to grasp the power and ethos of these words to understand how Ugandan Pentecostal-charismatic churches have transformed in less than two decades from a politically irrelevant minority with limited involvement in public action to a rapidly growing group with the clear intention to transform the nation and have a tangible impact on society and the political realm. While most of the international media tend to emphasise the role that external American evangelical churches have played in the initial draft and discussion of the Anti-Homosexuality Bill from 2009 onwards,⁹ as Watoto has demonstrated it is also relevant to highlight the important action that local Ugandan PC churches play on a daily basis to transform individuals, communities and the country; and their action seems to play a particularly strong and effective role around issues of regeneration, morality and sexual public behaviour.

Conclusion

Most Pentecostals have now joined politics indirectly or directly. There are pastors and church leaders who have contested for presidency and parliamentary seats at national level and Local Council positions at local/district/community level. Pastor Abed Bwanika [presidential candidate in the 2006 and 2011 elections, pastor at Christian Witness

⁹ For example, see *The Independent* (2014) at www.independent.co.uk/news/world/africa/how-uganda-was-seduced-by-antigay-conservative-evangelicals-9193593.html; the *New York Times* (2010) at www.nytimes.com/2010/01/04/world/africa/04uganda.html; *BBC World* at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-16068010>. In support of this point also see the documentary *God Loves Uganda* (January 2013) produced by director Roger Ross Williams.

Church in Kampala] has twice contested for presidency. Pentecostals are engaging corruption through prayer, media, parliament, security organs and some even use their church pulpits. Most Pentecostal churches in Uganda have gone partisan. This was shown in the way they supported and campaigned for different presidential candidates in 2011. They could surrender their church pulpits for political campaigns to be carried out during church services. They would also influence their congregations to vote for a particular party or candidate for one reason or another. (Anonymous Pentecostal pastor, Uganda, Kampala, 10 March 2013)

The above quote sheds light on how PCCs operate and engage with politics in Uganda. However, this research is more concerned with understanding less orthodox – from the discipline of political science – aspects of political intervention and influence that consist of addressing and framing citizens’ public and political behaviour and also, as highlighted above, shaping future leadership. Distinct from analyses that have depicted African Pentecostalism as aloof from politics (Corten & Marshall-Fratani, 2001), the study of Watoto shows how this Ugandan PC church has a clear vision for the future of the nation and how it actively aims to change society through religious inspired action according to their moral values (Thomas, 2008). The chapter highlighted how the church is energetically committed to advance its own normative project of singular religious identification and to promote its own conservative values, in which sexuality plays an irrefutable focal role, in an effort to reclaim the entire social and political sphere (Comaroff, 2009). In Christian-Judeo texts ‘the nation’ assumes a very important symbolical value as the overarching community where salvation takes place (O’Neill, 2010). Though it is not clear yet if this engagement towards the transformation of the entire country into a Pentecostal nation will ultimately lead to a theocratic state in which politics will be perfectly aligned with religious meanings and shaped through theological interpretations.

For now Watoto’s effort to save Uganda takes place at the intersection between Pentecostal-charismatic Christianity and politics through new understandings of citizenship. Watoto congregants perform their citizenship through being Pentecostals and in doing so create a new political vocabulary (O’Neill, 2010). According to the church’s interpretative narrative, the limitations of and disappointments with the current Ugandan government can be overcome through taking personal responsibility and action to govern themselves for the greater glory of God and of the country (*ibidem*). Through this lens, though, those who do not conform to PC morality will be excluded from the national project as it has been clearly demonstrated with LGBT communities and recent legislations, strongly promoted by the PC community, that aim to limit rights and citizenship of sexual minority groups.

Studies of nationalism, governance and more extensively politics in many African contexts need to take into account new forms of public Christianity and the way it is shaping ideas of citizenship and national belonging. The spiritual has already started to shape the material.

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