African Christianity. The case of Ugandan Pentecostalism

Alessandro Gusman (University of Turin)

Workshop «Africa on the Move»
3-6 June 2019, Turin
The Pentecostal expansion

According to the “Atlas of Pentecostalism” (Pulitzer Center) almost 35,000 new believers join Pentecostal churches each day. Of the world's two billion Christians a quarter are now Pentecostal—up from 6 percent in 1980.

http://www.atlasofpentecostalism.net/cartography/item/0fd288150e92583bc9c1b4bd7ffeaf9

According to Barrett and Johnson (World Christian Encyclopedia) from 520 millions in 2001 to 640 millions in 2011.

The issue of multiple belonging
The Pentecostal expansion

This exceptional growth is rapidly transforming the «geography of Christianity.

---

**Regional Distribution of Christians**

*1910*

- Americas: 27.1%
- Europe: 66.3%
- Middle East-North Africa: 0.7%
- Asia-Pacific: 4.5%
- Sub-Saharan Africa: 1.4%

*2010*

- Americas: 25.9%
- Europe: 36.8%
- Middle East-North Africa: 13.1%
- Asia-Pacific: 23.6%

Figures for 1910 are from a Pew Forum analysis of data from the Center for the Study of Global Christianity. Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

Pew Research Center’s Forum on Religion & Public Life • Global Christianity, December 2011
Is Christianity still a «Western» and «whyte» religion? These data also question the idea of a progressive decline of Christianity in the world.

The growth of Pentecostalism plays an important role in the shifting of Christianity to the Global South.

Pentecostalism started in Los Angeles («Azusa Street Revival») early in the 20th century, but soon expanded to Latin America and to the rest of the world. > «indigenization»
A starting definition

According to Joel Robbins (2004): «Pentecostalism is the form of Christianity in which believers receive the gifts of the Holy Spirit and have ecstatic experiences such as speaking in tongues, healing and prophesying».

Centrality of charisma, which is shared by all born-again

Keywords: Glossolalia, faith healing, deliverance, prosperity gospel
Ritual «effervescence»
Deliverance session
Deliverance session
Pentecostalism in Uganda

In the Great Lakes Region, Pentecostalism expanded later than in West Africa, in different forms and with different trajectories, depending on religious and political history of each country.

In Uganda, a troubled history: persecutions under Idi Amin and Milton Obote; religious freedom restored in 1986.
Pentecostalism in Uganda

In Uganda (and in Kampala) 3 main colonial religions:
- Church of Uganda (Anglican)
- Catholic church (Pères blancs, Combonians, Mill Hill Fathers)
- Islam

Today in Kampala only, more that 1,000 Pentecostal churches; a much visible and audible presence

Official census: Pentecostals grew up to 11.1% in 2014 (from 4.7% in 2002) > moreover, “Pentecostalisation” of mainline Christian denominations (Kangwa 2016) and of the public sphere (Marshall 2009)
Strategies of space occupation

- Widespread diffusion in the urban landscape, also in the «interstitial» and informal spaces of the city
- A visible presence in the physical space of the city, and in the virtual space of media (ie.: www.watotochurch.com; https://robertkayanjaministries.org/)
- Strategies of evangelization: street preaching, “crusades”, parades in town, etc.
- The city as a space to «conquer» and to «purify»
- From biwempe churches to mega-churches
Abstinence pride march
Renown international gospel artist Papa San rocks for Abstinence.
A process of «institutionalization»

- Institutionalization of the charisma (Max Weber)

- From an “other worldly” to a “this worldly” perspective; from the need to save the individual to the need to «save the nation»

- Starting from the 2000s, Pentecostalism started to have a growing political influence in Uganda > main political aim: «moralization» of the Ugandan society

- Two case studies: a) HIV/AIDS policies; b) sexual minorities’ rights
Case Study 1

The fight against AIDS and the « Abstinence Campaign »
Pentecostalism, Youth, AIDS

- Young people as main target of the evangelizing (and moralizing) mission

- “Joseph Generation” > intergenerational divide (*break with the past*)

- «Pro-Abstinence campaign»: moralization of society and «salvation» for young people > intersection among physical and spiritual dimensions

- «Control» over sexuality: self-control and peer control
AIDS in Uganda

Uganda (2017)

1.3m people living with HIV
5.9% adult HIV prevalence (ages 15-49)
50,000 new HIV infections
26,000 AIDS-related deaths
73% adults on antiretroviral treatment*
68% children on antiretroviral treatment*

*All adults/children living with HIV

Source: UNAIDS Data 2018
A short history of AIDS in Uganda

3 phases:

1) 1982-1992: rapid and uncontrolled growth; lack of knowledge
2) 1992-2001: decline in prevalence rates, from 18% to 5-6%
3) 2002-2013: stability around 6%, but according to some researchers with a low increase

Policies:

1) From 1987: AIDS as a social and health problem
2) During the ’90s: massive communication around AIDS; «ABC» strategy
3) 2004-2013: towards an «AB» strategy
PEPFAR program

PEPFAR SINCE 2003

2.4 million+ people received treatment

11 million people received direct care

$12 billion estimated yearly cost of treatment by 2016

Source: pepfar.gov
PEPFAR program

Figure 1: All Focus Countries: The U.S. President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief
FY2007 Planned Funding for Prevention, Treatment and Care

Total Care Funding
(Includes Counseling and Testing)
32%

Prevention of Mother-to-Child Transmission
PMTCT 6.9%
Injection Safety Activities 0.4%
Blood Safety Activities 1.7%
Abstinence/Be Faithful Activities 7%
Other Prevention Activities 5.2%

Prevention of Non-Sexual Transmission 9%
Total Prevention Funding* 21%
Prevention of Sexual Transmission 12%

* Excludes counseling and testing
Note: Numbers may be adjusted as attribution criteria and reporting systems are refined.
Abstinence/Be Faithful activities represent 33% of funding for prevention activities.
PEPFAR in Uganda

Introduced in November 2004

From 2004 to 2009: more than 1,2 billion dollars (treatment and prevention programs)

More than 1/3 of total funds for prevention went to “AB” programs, and mainly to “Abstinence only” campaign > a large amount of this money to Pentecostal FBOs (CAWA; True Love Waits; Family Network; …)

“War” to condoms: the free distribution of condoms declined from 118 millions in 2007/08 to 69 millions in 2010/11
Abstinence Campaign

I'm Waiting
I'm Abstaining
I'm Safe
I'm a Survivor.
Abstinence Campaign

«Married women have no possibilities to protect themselves against the virus, when the husband gets it from another woman. They cannot ask to use a condom, because this would mean they mistrust their husbands. A woman came and told me she knew the husband was not faithful, but she feared he would divorce her if she refuses to have sex with him. In such a case, the woman loses the financial support of the husband, and often the only solution for her is to negotiate sex with other men. Paradoxically then, she is now even more exposed to the risk to contract the virus” (Interview with J., Uganda AIDS Commission)
PEPFAR and the ABC strategy

- Transnational factors influencing local policies

- Young people as main target ("Abstinence campaign") > yet, in 2006: 135,000 new cases, 60% of them were married people, with the highest percentage among 35-40 years old women, and 40-45 men

- Lack of attention on other, more important factors > women's vulnerability
AIDS and social vulnerability

Socio-economic factors are keys to understand the spread of the AIDS epidemic in most African countries.

When the focus is only on changing sexual behaviours (as some of the prevention programs in Uganda did), then we miss a large part of the picture.
Case Study 2

Pentecostalism and the Anti-Homosexuality Bill
The “Anti-gay” Bill

Uganda Anti-Homosexuality Act:
- proposed by MP David Bahati in 2009;
- passed by the Parliament in 2013;
- signed by Museveni in February 2014;
- the Constitutional Court ruled the act invalid in August.

- Homosexuality was already criminalised following a law introduced under the British colonial rule; the new law was aimed at increasing the penalties for homosexual behaviours, up to life imprisonment.

- Well-known Pentecostal groups and leaders were among the most vocal supporters of the Anti-Homosexuality Act.
Homosexuality and social control

- Sexuality represented as a “social problem”: from 2004 to 2009 three waves of “moral panic” around sexual behaviours, considered as disruptive of the integrity of the social fabric

- Creation of “folk devils” (Cohen, 1972)

“We lost a generation; our fathers were killed by their immoral habits; do you want to be the next? Or you want to be remembered as the generation that brought a moral revolution in Uganda?”.
The new “Christian citizen”

- Sexuality, “social contamination”, and the need for a new form of subjectivity

- “Christian citizen”: individual responsibility; self-control; accountable subject

- Hence the idea of a “redemptive citizenship”, in which the political and religious (spiritual) dimensions are tightly linked

- “Social redemption” e “moralization” as a political project: conversion and individual salvation are part of a wider program of redemption and salvation for the whole nation.
Bibliography