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HIV/AIDS, Pentecostal Churches, and the “Joseph Generation” in Uganda

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In Kampala, Pentecostal churches have been filling the public space since 1986. The paper focuses on the transformation that Pentecostal churches have been experiencing in Uganda, with an increasing involvement in society. I discuss interactions between this process and changes in national strategies regarding HIV and AIDS prevention, and show how the concept of “salvation” assumes renewed meanings in this context. I analyze young people’s involvement in religious campaigns against AIDS, and the fact that this is linked to the Pentecostal discourse of the “break with the past,” which in Uganda has found a new dimension in the rhetoric of a “Joseph Generation,” charged with building a Christian country and opposed to the fathers’ generation.

Introduction

Uganda has been at the center of the AIDS epidemic in Africa. This fact has shaped the role that Christianity, and especially the growing Pentecostal movement, have assumed in influencing HIV and AIDS politics and representations. In Uganda (with special reference to Kampala), Pentecostal-Charismatic churches (PCCs¹) have been filling the public space since 1986. This phenomenon has had an impact not only on the religious landscape, but on the social and political setting, because of the transformation of many of these churches into faith-based organizations (FBOs).² Since the turn of the millennium, international flows of money and local forces have combined to fuse political and religious agendas, and the AIDS epidemic has been a powerful spur for PCCs to become more deeply involved in social activities. This phenomenon is particularly evident in four of the largest Pentecostal-Charismatic churches in Kampala, the capital city: Kampala Pentecostal Church (KPC), Makerere Full Gospel Church (FGC), Makerere Community Church (MCC), and Rubaga Miracle Center (MC).³ These churches have extended and institutionalized activities that engage with HIV/AIDS, for example, programs caring for people living with HIV and AIDS (PLWHA) and for orphans, education about the virus (information and prevention

programs), youth projects, schools and counseling facilities. Many of these efforts are directed at children and youth.

Two main factors have contributed to the institutionalization of PCCs around HIV/AIDS activities. First, the HIV/AIDS epidemic itself encouraged a significant theological refocus among Pentecostal churches in East Africa, 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. This took place after 2000, and was perhaps influenced by the Kanungu massacre in March 2000, after which public opinion called for greater governmental control over the proliferation of churches.⁴ After this disaster, the Ugandan government made moves to exert greater control over new churches, requiring them to register with the government and apply three different times for renewal of their licenses.⁵ Second, the introduction of PEPFAR funds into Uganda from 2004 significantly redirected the country's strategies in the struggle about HIV/AIDS, creating an opening to which Pentecostal churches were ready to respond. From 2004 to 2007, Uganda received about \$650 million from PEPFAR, which became the largest HIV-related donor to the country. Much of the funds provided antiretroviral treatment (ARVs) for people living with HIV and AIDS, but a considerable amount was channeled into FBOs working on HIV/AIDS prevention issues, particularly those concerning abstinence and faithfulness.⁶

The paper focuses on two related processes. The first is the transformation that Pentecostal-Charismatic churches have been experiencing in recent years in Uganda, with an increasing involvement in social programs and an institutionalization of their activities. I discuss the interaction between this process and the broader context of HIV/AIDS programs in Uganda, in which PEPFAR funds and political decisions influenced by Christian morality have modified national strategies regarding HIV and AIDS prevention. I then show how the concept of salvation, central to the Pentecostal theology, assumes renewed meanings in this context.

The increasing moralization of Ugandan responses and politics related to the epidemic leads us to the second point: the development of Pentecostal discourses about the need to raise a new generation of "saved" (born-again) people, future leaders for the country. This rhetoric of the "Joseph Generation," developed in different congregations, is a creative way of interpreting the Pentecostal idea of breaking with the past (Dijk 1998; Meyer 1998), with the young people's generation charged with building a new, Christian country, saved both in a spiritual and in a physical sense ("safe," free from AIDS). This project, presented in several Pentecostal congregations in Kampala through training camps, youth teams, and other initiatives and directed at young people, finds a parallel in President Museveni's politics—which, from the mid-1990s, recognized youth as important social actors in the reconstruction of the country after the wars that had marked the 1970s and the 1980s,⁷ and in the increasing prominence in Uganda of HIV/AIDS prevention programs that focus on sexual morality, promoting abstinence

from sex before marriage and faithfulness within marriage (Human Rights Watch 2005). The notion of the Joseph Generation proposes that a new, morally pure youthful generation will be able to reverse the moral corruption of the parental generation, seen by many young born-again as responsible for the spread of AIDS in the country, and will thus transform Ugandan society from within. The last section of the paper discusses how the overlapping of different messages—religious and secular—creates confusion among young people, who have to cope with a variety of social, political, and religious forces proposing different solutions to the same problems.

The paper draws upon ethnographic research carried out in Kampala, Uganda's capital city since 2004, in particular on six months during 2005–2007, when I focused on the interrelation between the HIV/AIDS epidemic and the changing religious landscape. I visited several Christian churches (Anglican, PCCs, Roman Catholic), but I conducted research mainly in four Pentecostal churches: FGC, KPC, MC, and MCC. These are all predominantly English-speaking churches, and all but MC are located near the campus of Makerere, the main Ugandan University. Because of the use of English, the congregations are composed mainly of middle-class people and students, though MC has a more variegated audience. I focused particularly on the young, educated members of these churches. The churches are involved in several social activities, especially education, counseling, and care of ill people and orphans, and have a thick weekly calendar of activities, including two to five Sunday services, choir groups, youth teams, Bible-study groups, sports and leisure activities, and cell groups.⁸ I took part in a number of churches' activities, became a member of cell groups at FGC, KPC, and MCC, went to "crusades" and other public events organized by born-again groups, and attended conferences and training camps for youth.

Pentecostal Churches in Uganda

Pentecostalism in Uganda has experienced phenomenal growth since the late 1980s, regarding both the number of churches and their size, and it has thus moved from the periphery to the core of the local religious landscape. The first Pentecostal congregations appeared in the country in the 1960s (notably the Full Gospel Church and Elim Church), but in the mid-1980s there were still only a few, with small congregations (Musana 1991). Today, PCCs can be found literally at every corner, and since the early 2000s, they have constructed huge buildings, able to host ten thousand or more people. At the time of my fieldwork in 2005, Miracle Centre, Kampala Pentecostal Church, Full Gospel Church, and Deliverance Church, had already built or were working or planning to replace their old buildings with new and larger ones.

The increasing size of the new church buildings is an index of the financial and social power wielded by PCCs, as well as of their expansion into FBOs, involved in development and social activities, in particular the care of orphans and people living with HIV and AIDS.

The year 2005 saw the start of the program *Bye Bye Biwempe*,⁹ which promoted the construction of stable and permanent churches instead of those easily perishable, built with mud, wood, and bamboo. In the early phases of the movement, *biwempe* churches were a symbol of pride for the born-again or "saved" people (known locally as *balokole*, sing. *mulokole*), because they symbolized the vitality of a religion which presented itself as dynamic and fluid, able to permeate society with its malleable structure, in opposition to the mainstream Christian churches, portrayed as old, static, and far from common people's real needs.¹⁰ *Biwempe* structures required a constant and common participation of the congregation to build and maintain; believers felt they were deeply involved in the process of raising a new community and making it grow.¹¹ In the words of G., a 38-year-old *mulokole*: "The Europeans brought technology, education, hospitals, and churches for free, but we don't feel these churches are our churches. *Biwempe* churches are ours: we paid for them; we constructed them, bit by bit. We feel these places are our places; there, we feel at home" (G 2007). This is not the case of the new, huge structures: the believer's help in this situation is often limited to financial support.

The construction of permanent churches in Uganda in place of the *biwempe* ones is an indication of the institutionalization of the PCCs, at least regarding the biggest and most well-established ones.¹² The government bill mentioned above represents an official marker of this process, but since the early 2000s, several churches began to get involved in the social and political arena and to expand and organize their activities and call themselves faith-based organizations (FBOs). Not all the believers agree with the transformation just described: if young *balokole* usually consider positively the new direction churches have undertaken, and see it as a sign of modernity, the few people whom I met who had already been Pentecostals in the 1960s told me they feared this process was going too far. R, "saved" since 1979, says the movement has lost part of the spiritual energy it formerly had. One of these aspects is the use of time on Sunday services. "In the past, there was not a timetable: one just went to church and spent there even the whole Sunday. Now the time is precise: a service lasts two hours, and then it's over; most of the people go back home. There's no time for praying and for fellowship" (R 2006).

Uganda's Struggle against HIV and AIDS: The ABC Strategy Loses Its C

The history of the epidemic in Uganda can be divided into three distinct phases: the first (1982–1992) saw the rapid spread of the epidemic through the country, starting from the southwest; the second (1992–2001) saw a significant fall in the incidence to the lowest rate (from 18 percent nationally, with peaks of 30 percent in some districts, to 6.1 percent in 2001); and the third and ongoing one (2002–) is marked by stabilization around 6–7 percent,

but with a tendency to a new increase (UAC 2006; the document is based on the Ugandan HIV/AIDS Sero-Behavioural Survey, UHSBS). Not all AIDS specialists agree with the official data reported,¹³ but the country is held up by many (e.g. Epstein 2007; Iliffe 2006) as a success story. There is general agreement that political action during the late 1980s and the 1990s by the government was partly effective (Putzel 2004), as I explore further below.

Two points evidenced by the UHSBS conducted in 2004–2005 are particularly interesting in this context. The first is that Uganda is experiencing a shift in HIV prevalence rates: from young people to older, usually married, individuals (UAC 2006). The second point is that 42 percent of the new infections occurred among married people.¹⁴ These facts, reported in the Ugandan media,¹⁵ have reinforced the idea, widespread among young *balokole*, that the fathers' generation is "lost," and that, to rebuild foundations for Uganda, a moral revolution is necessary, targeted at "immoral" behavior, such as having premarital or occasional sex, or multiple partners. For many Pentecostals, hope for the future resides with the young generation. The Ugandan government's national HIV/AIDS policies focus on young people as a priority population group for prevention projects and signal promoting abstinence as a priority for this group, leaving condom use only for those people who "have been identified to be sexually active and are not able to take on AB (*Abstain, Be Faithful*)" (e.g. UAC 2007:16).

The three phases of the epidemic are marked by different political interventions. National HIV and AIDS programs started in 1987, soon after Museveni took power, and declared the struggle against the epidemic as one of the government's priorities. Strong information campaigns about the virus were launched, with slogans such as Love Faithfully, and Zero Grazing.¹⁶ At the time, almost no references were made to the use of condoms (Allen and Heald 2004).

During the 1990s, the "ABC model" (Abstain, Be Faithful, Use Condoms) appeared and became a core concept in the struggle against the virus, even though it was officially employed in Uganda starting only from 2002. In this period, the distribution of condoms grew considerably, in spite of the moralizing message preached by church leaders, especially those of the fast-growing Pentecostal movement, which insisted on changing individual "sinful" behavior (Allen and Heald 2004).

National HIV/AIDS prevention strategies shifted again after the introduction in Uganda of the PEPFAR program in 2004 (Epstein 2005, 2007). Uganda's apparent success in reducing the number of HIV infections, together with strong local emphasis among politicians, public figures, and church leaders on "family values" in coping with HIV and AIDS, proved to be useful for right-wing politics in the United States, supported by evangelical Christians. Museveni, and especially his wife, Janet, a declared Pentecostal, began to oppose condom diffusion as "improvisation and not a solution" (Tumushabe 2006). Led by the government, Uganda's HIV/AIDS prevention programs began to place more emphasis on the Abstain and Be Faithful and less on Use Condoms (Tumushabe 2006).

As Epstein argues, the development of PCCs activities targeting HIV/AIDS, together with the increasing public space occupied by Pentecostal morality in Ugandan society and PEPFAR policies contributed to this shift from ABC to an emphasis on AB only (Epstein 2007). Condom advertising disappeared from the streets (Epstein 2005), and new advertisements took their place, inviting people to abstain from sex. This campaign, promoted directly by the first lady, was supported by PCC leaders, and received funds from the PEPFAR program, though it encountered strong opposition from several organizations, which argued that it distorts preventive messages about HIV and AIDS, and was widely debated in Uganda's national newspapers.¹⁷

The debate about HIV and AIDS politics and the reasons for their partial success continues. Thus, according to some observers the stress on "family values" and behavioral change, supported by churches and FBOs, has been the real effective ABC strategy (Green 2003), while others maintain that the diffusion of condoms and information about HIV have been central to the success (Epstein 2007). The relative contributions of, respectively Abstinence, Be Faithful, and Condomise [*sic*] among the ABC's of HIV prevention is especially under discussion. Here, Pentecostals have been vocal in their claims that abstinence and be-faithful messages led to reduced incidence, and that this is a victory of religious moralism: of persuading people to become born again, "saved," and therefore to live "safe" lives.

HIV/AIDS and issues of stigma and discrimination, as well as issues of poverty and gender inequalities, have been much discussed in the public sphere in Uganda, but AIDS has remained for many a "disease of morality" (Becker & Geissler 2007), connected with "corrupted" behavior. In this context, Pentecostal discourses are popular, as they focus on immorality and the capacity to live a good Christian life—to be saved and safe (for a similar situation in Nigeria, see Smith 2004). PCCs thus maintain an ambivalent attitude toward the epidemic: they are among the most active actors in assisting and comforting sick persons,¹⁸ but they underestimate the structural components of social suffering (Kleinman, Das, and Lock 1997) and fix attention mainly on unsafe behavior, with the risk of encouraging stigmatization of HIV-positive people. The possibility of choice in sexual relations is often limited, especially for women, and socioeconomic conditions are factors that force people to expose themselves to the risk of contracting the virus (Gisel, Pool, and Nnalusiba 2002; Whyte 1997).¹⁹

Salvation: A New Generation, a New Country

As suggested above, the involvement of PCCs in the debate on HIV and AIDS prevention is giving their message about morality—abstinence and faithfulness—significant space in the public sphere in Uganda. I suggest that the shift from condom use to abstinence-only programs, and the PCCs' transformation into political and social actors, are linked to the notion of

a moral revolution for the country, which is at the core of the Pentecostal message. This idea is embraced especially by young people, who see in it an opportunity to escape the elders' control, as I show below. It is articulated in the idea that the country needs to raise a new generation of leaders, the so-called Joseph Generation—an idea rooted in a renewed concept of salvation. In the context of the AIDS epidemic, salvation assumes a physical, material meaning, which was previously not so central in the preaching of the *balokole*. To get saved means not only to save one's soul: it implies being "safe," and the way to obtain safeness, according to the *balokole*, is to be born again and follow the AB (Abstain, Be Faithful) precepts.

Salvation has a primary value in the theology of the Pentecostal movement: it can be reached only through a deep and heartfelt repentance, the admission of one's sinful nature. Saving oneself is believed to be the result of an individual decision, which consists in linking one's own life to Jesus Christ, and in accepting him as a personal savior; yet this personal decision is insufficient: salvation requires the action of the Holy Spirit. Strictly linked to idea of rebirth ("to be born again"), the concept of salvation finds in the context of Ugandan Pentecostalism a further emphasis: the term *balokole* designates in fact the group of people who claim to be saved.²⁰ Salvation had long been conceived by the *balokole* group as a personal experience, concerning almost exclusively the spiritual side of life; however, the HIV/AIDS epidemic provoked Ugandan Pentecostals to rethink their theology: from an otherworldly to a this-worldly attitude, with an emphasis on long-term programs that shape the future of the country. The notion of a group or generation of saved people, together with this shift to a this-world attitude, underlies the current emphasis among Pentecostals on the need to raise a new generation of saved (in a spiritual and physical sense) people (Asiimwe 2005; this has been observed elsewhere, see Corten and Marshall-Fratani 2001:7).

This changing attitude is evident in the words of one of the most influential pastors operating in Kampala. Gary Skinner is the main pastor of KPC:

Some years back, we realized that we had to change our plans. God had a different mission for us; he wanted us to make a revolution in this nation. During the 1990s, when the AIDS scourge was at its top, we saw death everywhere, and the signs that the end of the times was coming. We thus channeled most of our energies to convert, before their deaths, as many people as possible into believers. But God has been good with us: he forgave us our sins, because he saw we were changing the lives of so many people, that Uganda was no more under the satanic control, and was becoming a true Christian country. AIDS started going down, but a huge number of children had lost their parents. We had to take those orphans and bring them up in Christ, and make them into future leaders for Uganda. And so we started the Watoto [Luganda, 'children'] project, and

today more than one and a half thousand children are cared for by this project.²¹ (Skinner 2005)

The idea of bringing up leaders clearly refers to a political engagement; when talking about future leaders, Skinner, like other pastors I talked with, alludes not only to spiritual leaders, but also to political leaders in Uganda's government. Politics was long seen by the *balokole* as a demonic arena, in which a born-again should not enter if he doesn't want to "lose himself"; however, in recent years, *balokole* have revised this notion, and the taboo on politics seems almost to have been removed. Pastor Martin Ssempe, leader of MCC, told me "Politics is a dangerous thing, because power and money are strictly related to corruption. It is not easy for a born-again to move in this setting, but it is necessary. If we want to have an impact on Uganda, we have to participate in political decisions; if we want to change this country, we need to take the risk" (Ssempe 2005).

The theological shift means looking at the future with a new hope, embodied in the young generation. This hope for renewal is channeled into action, into what is seen as a national struggle against AIDS, corruption, and all the other plagues that have been afflicting the country for the last decades. Most of the young *balokole* I met were attracted not only by the perspective of prosperity preached in PCCs, but also by this idea of participating in the building of a "modern country, where people won't die from AIDS and other illness, and where everyone can have a place to live, water, electricity, and a car," as one of the CAWA Ambassadors²² told me. Desire for modernization, hope for renewal, and struggle against the past finds expression in the rhetoric of the Joseph Generation.

The Joseph Generation: Pentecostalism and the Future of Uganda

The Joseph Generation, focusing on morality, especially abstinence, as an alternative way of fighting against AIDS, presents itself as a revolutionary movement, able to change the country. This thinking contrasts with the tension this discourse creates, both in gender and in intergenerational dynamics.²³

Young members of the Makerere Community Church often wear a T-shirt that states: "I'm waiting, I'm Abstaining, I'm Safe, I'm a Survivor." In the preaching of a number of PCCs, premarital abstinence is the only effective method to get salvation, to survive the plague of AIDS, to construct a new, Christian, and saved Uganda.²⁴ A popular Pentecostal booklet, sold in Christian bookstores all around Kampala, states: "We cannot build transformational leaders in Africa without dealing effectively with the challenge of the HIV and AIDS scourge. If we didn't, there would be no one to lead or to provide leadership. Africa has lost many emerging and marketplace leaders through AIDS, and abstinence is the most effective way of overcoming the

scourge of HIV/AIDS" (Asimwe 2005:69). This is the meaning of the so-called Joseph Generation rhetoric, which opposes the young generation of *balokole* to their father's generation, lost because of AIDS.²⁵ The discourse of the Joseph Generation, taken by the young *balokole* as a manifesto of their movement, is a way to express a break with the past and to bring the past to account, reconstructing the memory of wars, famines, and epidemics as the consequences of devilish attacks against a country that did not know real faith in God.²⁶

In this discourse, breaking with the past and building a Christian country imply a journey of redemption for both each person and the community. Salvation of the individual becomes real and finds its full realization only in the broader context of the common good.²⁷ "Rebirth" thus assumes a national meaning, frequently associated with the biblical metaphor of going out from the darkness. In this view, the past is the long, dark night, filled with pain and suffering, but by the action of the Holy Spirit, *balokole* see the light at the end of the night.²⁸

The reference to the biblical character of Joseph is highly significant for the *balokole*, because Joseph refuses the courtship of his Egyptian master's wife. He later becomes a leader in Egypt, but the beginning of his journey is marked by the moral strength that allows him to resist sexual temptations.²⁹ Being a *mulokole* for a young Ugandan man today implies following the example of Joseph: to set himself against temptations, to resist sexual temptations and the corruption present in many social contexts. Salvation, acquired in a single moment with the baptism of the Holy Spirit, becomes a process, a journey the *balokole* see as filled with devilish challenges the individual can overcome only with the help of Jesus and of fellow *balokole*. This rhetoric, with slightly different content, was present in all four of the churches where I conducted my fieldwork, and the discourse about the project to become leaders for the country was common among the young born-again Pentecostals I spent time with in Kampala, who defined their Christian identity in opposition to the previous generation, but also to their non-*balokole* peers.

It should be noted that both the rhetoric and the practice of young *balokole* create and reinforce several social distinctions, hierarchies, and separations in social relations. First, they reinforce an intergenerational gap, evident in the audience of the four churches mentioned, where young people under 30 years of age are the great majority (especially at MCC and FGC) and hold positions of responsibility and leadership inside the congregation. Pentecostalism and the rhetoric of the Joseph Generation make available to young *balokole* a space to contest generational hierarchies and, in some situations, subvert them. Second, the Joseph Generation rhetoric stresses a fracture between two worlds represented as completely different and separated: the saved, Christian circle, where people are saved and protected by the Holy Spirit against satanic forces, and a nonsaved one, dominated by these same forces. The fracture affects the everyday life of people in Kampala: *balokole* tend to spend most of their spare time in church and strive to stay apart from

what they regard as non-Christian, a world they consider to be dangerous. On the other side, nonsaved youth regard *balokole* as strange and fundamentalists and use the term *balokole* with an ironic meaning: "those who 'pretend' to be saved." A third kind of distinction is gendered, and is underlined by the reference to Joseph: young men, not women, are charged to lead the country, and, as in the biblical tale, women are represented as morally weaker than men. While women are often involved in church activities and sometimes are given responsible positions, *balokole* women do not aim for leadership positions. During weekly teachings given in separate gender groups, young women are taught that men are better suited for such work and that the role of a woman is mainly that of a mother and a wife. While presenting itself as a revolutionary movement, of youth against the older, "corrupted" generation, the Joseph Generation therefore contains a deep conservatism concerning gender relations, in which women are subservient to men (Mate 2002). The story of Joseph underlines this attitude, as it implies that women, through their sexual wiles, are more responsible for sexual temptations, and thus for the spread of HIV.³⁰ Such social, gendered, and generational distinctions and judgments about the morality and immorality of others contrast sharply with Christian principles of love and forgiveness.

Despite these prejudices, the Joseph Generation is highly attractive to young, urbanized, and educated people. During a FGC cell group, this notion of setting an example and leading others through living a pure life was frequently discussed: "If we are to follow the example of Jesus, we have no choice but engage our culture and penetrate our society. We must walk the careful line between contact and contamination." Thus a student in Makerere expressed his opinion that too many people still think that faith has to be shown through prayers, and not through actions. He added: "Praying is good; reading the Bible is good; but we need to preach, to go to families, in the education system, in the media, in the business, in the government, and spread the Gospel there. We need to penetrate society if we want to change it."

The idea of forming a generation of leaders for Uganda is the backbone of the churches' recruitment of young people and of church activities subjecting youth to a profound moral programming. Youth teams, groups targeted at boys or girls where sexual education is mixed with religious contents, and training camps are all components of this program. During a four-day training camp I participated in during August 2005, organized by MCC and held outside Kampala, discipline, self-control, and self-respect were key terms that were reiterated constantly. The camp was led by a youth team, and youth leaders were responsible for most of the activities and the teaching, while the senior pastor, Ssempe, came only to preach. We woke up early in the morning, we washed in the river, and praying and teaching alternated with physical activities, so as to train "spiritual and physical muscles, both necessary to resist temptations and go against the wind of common ideas and culture," as one of the young trainers said. On this occasion, a student at Uganda's Makerere University told me: "One of the most

important challenges we have in the campus is the struggle for sexual purity. There are many students who are sexually promiscuous. We live [at] a time when people play sex for fun. That's why we need self-control, and live as men of God in an environment where we are surrounded by rotten people. As the Bible says: 'Don't conform to this world, but try to change it.'" Another student said that conversion to Pentecostalism means, "We don't drink, we don't use drugs, we don't have sex before marriage, and in this way we don't have distractions, and we don't throw our money out with beers, *waragi*,³¹ and girls." Conversion thus becomes a resource for salvation and personal realization: becoming a *mulokole* is seen as an effective strategy to rise above a situation of moral impurity.

While young people are the target of these messages, they are actively involved in teaching and elaborating these messages about how to live a Christian life and resist temptation. Through promoting the Joseph Generation discourse, young people are situating themselves vis-à-vis the older generation and challenging gerontocratic authority. Many of the young *balokole* I talked to came from Roman Catholic, Anglican, or even Muslim families, who often hadn't agreed to their conversion: in some cases, they tolerated the new faith; in other cases, this was a source of conflict and even of breaking of ties with the family and the village. This situation is in fact commoner for young *balokole* who migrated to Kampala, leaving the village and finding in a religious congregation an ideal setting to establish links in the urban context. As Ivo Quaranta (2004) has pointed out, young people in Africa, with no access to the traditional powers, see their opportunities in the open market, in migration to towns, and in making choices in a competitive religious market. Neotraditional elites look at the young generation as embodying immoral and savage forces, able to disrupt the social order (Quaranta 2004). By embracing Pentecostalism, young Ugandans reverse the accusation of immorality and disorder against the previous generations, accused of being responsible for the spread of the virus and the poverty of the country.

In times of AIDS, it's unsurprising that accusations of immorality center on sexuality. The emphasis on abstinence as the only successful way to combat the epidemic can thus be seen as a way to be set free from traditional authority: control over sexuality is taken away from adults, accused of not having been able to control their own sexuality correctly, and it is granted to the religious community, which has the responsibility of controlling the behavior of young believers. As is shown in the next section, young *balokole* are of course not free from temptations: they go around in Kampala schools preaching premarital abstinence; but at the same time, some of them, confidentially, admit the difficulties in respecting this commitment, and even that "abstinence is more an ideal than a reality," as a member of KPC said. The gap between discourse and practice is recognized by many, but it is usually referred to a generic "other." Because of the strong control congregations have on their members, it is almost impossible for Pentecostals to admit openly to having engaged in a sexual relationship.

A Clash of Messages

How effective are approaches to HIV prevention that focus on sexual morality? There is little consensus among scholars. Some argue that FBOs have been central in education and prevention programs, and suggest that the capillarity of the presence of these institutions may be an important resource in African countries (Chikwendu 2004; Green 2003). However, there is a dearth of real evidence connecting religious membership to the risk of contracting HIV (Garner 2000), partly because of the difficulties in collecting data on this subject: Joan Sadgrove (2007) has demonstrated how important it is for a *mulokole* to "keep up appearances," with the consequent tendency to hide or deny "wrong" behavior.

Young people are the group to which prevention messages are mostly directed. Because of the heterogeneity of voices, they are reached by a clash of alternative and contrasting messages, creating confusion. Religious institutions, and especially the PCCs, preach the abstinence-only strategy to students and young people in different contexts. The main message conveyed is that abstinence not only is the way to be really safe, but that it is also cool, something to show with pride. On the other hand, the worldly attitude, for young men, is to display sexual power, to go dancing in clubs, regarded by the *balokole* as products of the devil, "where 'sexual sin' is as common as a bottle of Guinness" (said a member of KPC). So, if the past for the *balokole* is something to leave behind so as to get rid of the demonic chains (Ntegeka 2004), modernity itself, to which young people aspire with the conversion to Pentecostalism (Dijk 2000), contains a dark and dangerous side. Conversion thus implies a "moral fracture" (Boutter 2002) among *balokole* and "the others."

One of the main objects of the contention between the two worldviews is sex and HIV prevention. Martin Ssempe, with his group of the CAWA Ambassadors, is the most active in promoting the abstinence campaign. MCC, his church, every Saturday night organizes a rally—called Prime Time—at the swimming pool located inside the campus. The space around the swimming pool is crowded with students, about two thousand every week, dancing with Christian rock, clapping at the performance of famous local artists, shouting "amen" and "hallelujah" during Ssempe's preaching, and signing "abstinence cards" distributed by the ushers. The presence of Christian artists is a vehicle to show young people that being cool is possible, even when one is not drinking beer and having sex. During the Abstinence Pride March, organized in October 2006 in Kampala, Papa San, a star of Jamaican reggae who had converted to Pentecostalism in 1997, was the symbol of this campaign to promote the idea that abstinence is cool. This campaign explicitly and repeatedly opposed the marketing and distribution of condoms.

What Pentecostal leaders say is considered an absolute truth by most Pentecostals, so that a complementary approach is often not possible. When

NGOs advertise condom use, and FBOs promote abstinence only, they do not meet to create a comprehensive message; on the contrary, they are giving rise to a clash of messages that may be confusing, or, at best, they are just addressing two different targets.

Confusion is a recurrent word in the discourse of the young *balokole*, but they explain that in following the moral codes of Pentecostalism they have a “safe guide.” E, a 25-year-old girl, member of the KPC, said: “It’s a very confusing time, you know. Many people just don’t know which road they must run; they don’t have a guide in their life. When you are a born-again, you have good points of reference. For example, about sex, you know the best option is to abstain until marriage. Other people think that when you have a condom in your pocket you are safe; but it’s a dangerous idea, and it’s not God’s will.” I asked her if it is easy to follow God’s guide: “No, it’s not. Sometimes I do something and then I ask myself: ‘Is it me? I have really done this?’ But at least I do my best to follow God’s will” (E 2005).

J, a 27-year-old member of MCC, told me of his experience about fearing AIDS: “We were in 2000, my father had died from AIDS some months before. At that time, I really was a sinner: I was addicted to pornography; I used to drink, and to do other wrong things. I was losing myself, and I felt that I could easily die in every moment, that something could hit me and—bam! I would be dead. I was really near to this end, before getting saved. Then I met Jesus, and realized that what the *balokole* were preaching was right: that was my chance to survive” (J 2005).

PCCs reach a large proportion of the population, and many of my interlocutors regarded the moral approach they propose as a proper answer to their anxiety about the disease. Accounts of conversion are often dramatic, stressing the break between a sinful and confused past, and the new life in Christ. The idea of the Joseph Generation seems to generate a positive psychological attitude toward the future. In contrast, PCCs create an exclusive message, based on strict moral codes, and believers can be rejected by the congregation if a member gets to know about another member’s violation of the abstinence or faithfulness promise.³² During confidential conversations, more than one young *mulokole* told me about the discomfort this control creates in some occasions, and some even admitted this can cause dangerous behavior because they never take condoms with them, and “you know, sometimes it’s difficult to keep control” (see also Sadgrove 2007).

A demonstration that being saved doesn’t necessarily mean being safe is that several PCCs require people who want to marry to have an HIV test before the formal commitment. Some pastors refuse to marry the couple when the test reveals that one is positive. On the one hand, this reinforces church control over sexuality; on the other, it highlights an implicit admission of the existence of a gap between the religious message and the reality of people’s lives, and a certain lack of confidence in the possibility of fully respecting the moral code imposed by the church.

Conclusion

As I have shown, the growth of PCCs and their progressive involvement in social activities have been stimulated by the urgency of the HIV and AIDS epidemic, and by the adoption of political strategies with a moralistic approach: the transformation into FBOs proceeded parallel to ABC politics, and accelerated when PEPFAR funds flowed to Uganda, and the government embraced PCCs' moral attitudes, supporting AB instead of ABC campaigns.

This transformation has been paralleled by a theological shift, with the emergence of a significantly different concept of salvation, in which the spiritual ("to be saved") and the physical ("to be safe") dimensions are considered complementary sides of the same phenomenon. Here, salvation is no longer conceived as merely an individual matter. A *mulokole* has to feel part of a community of saved people, whose mission is to save the whole Uganda through a moral revolution, and to build a new, Christian, country.

This process is not without contradictions: the abstinence-only strategy, the rhetoric of the Joseph Generation, and the moral revolution show their limits when it comes to everyday life, in which structural forces may render these arguments ineffective. The same *balokole* admit that it is indeed a challenge to follow the strict morality of abstinence and faithfulness. Finally, the idea of a new Joseph Generation is potentially divisive. The empowerment of the new generation is that of young against old and of men against women: leadership is in the hands of young men, who should resist the temptations of the opposite sex.

NOTES

1. I will accept Birgit Meyer's suggestion, and use the abbreviation PCCs (Pentecostal Charismatic Churches) to refer to the heterogeneous phenomenon of the Pentecostal-like churches in Uganda (Meyer 2004).
2. FBOs are organizations that work following definite religious values, even though they are not necessarily linked to a single church. In this context, with the transformation of PCCs into FBOs, I mean the extension and institutionalization of church activities into, for example, programs of caring for people living with HIV and AIDS and for orphans, education about the virus (information and prevention programs), youth projects, schools, counseling facilities, and other such activities concerning social assistance, with special focus on children and youth. The Roman Catholic and Anglican churches have been involved in this kind of activities for long time in Uganda, but the phenomenon is recent for PCCs, which in the 1990s were focusing almost exclusively on spiritual salvation.
3. There are no precise data on the percentage of born-again Pentecostals among the Ugandan population. According to the most widespread opinion among the local media, PCCs attract about 15% of the population, while the Roman Catholic Church (about 45%) and the Anglican Church of Uganda (about 30%) still dominate the religious scene. It must be noted, however, that the "Christian circle" composed by born-again Christians (or, in Luganda, the language of

- Kampala region, the *balokole* 'the saved ones') is wider than these data indicate, because one can find *balokole* in the Church of Uganda too. Moreover, many believers attend either the Roman Catholic Church or the Anglican Church and one or more PCCs, but when asked, most of them tend to assert their belonging to a mainstream church.
4. On 17 March 2000, more than five hundred people burned to death in a mass suicide of the members of a cult called the Movement for the Restoration of the Ten Commandments of God (MRTC), led by Joseph Kibweteere, a former Roman Catholic priest. This happened in a church in Kanungu District, in Southwestern Uganda. Several mass graves were discovered in the following days in other parts of the country.
 5. According to the Non-Governmental Organisations Registration Amendment Bill 2001, passed by the Ugandan Parliament in 2006, all NGOs and Pentecostal churches have to register with the Internal Affairs Ministry, and to renew their working licenses first after one year, then after two years, and a last time after five years. See "NGO Registration Bill passed," by Gerald Walulya, 12 April 2006, *The Daily Monitor*.
 6. The President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) is a five-year program for a total expenditure of \$15 billion approved by the U.S. Congress in 2003, and then renewed for another five-year period in 2008. Fifty-five percent of the sum had to be used for treatments, 15% for palliative cures, 10% for orphans and vulnerable children, and 20% for prevention. The original act, the United States Leadership Against HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria Act of 2003, required that at least 33% (US\$1 billion) of the money for prevention had to be spent on abstinence programs. The new program increases the sum for abstinence and fidelity promotion, stating that at least half the sum for prevention has to be designated for to this aim (see Tom Lantos and Henry J. Hyde, *United States Global Leadership Against HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria Act of 2003 and Reauthorization Act of 2008*: <http://www.pepfar.gov/about/index.htm>, and <http://www.pepfar.gov/documents/organization/108294.pdf>, retrieved 28 July 2009).
 7. In 1966, four years after independence from British rule (1962), Milton Obote, leader of the main party, the Uganda Peoples Congress, suspended the constitution and named himself president. Starting from that moment, and until 1986, when Yoweri Museveni took control of the country from Obote's second government, Uganda passed through twenty years of different regimes (Obote, Idi Amin, and then Obote again) and of almost uninterrupted war. After 1986, Uganda had a one-party political system, with the National Resistance Movement, until 2005, when a multiparty democracy was introduced. For a better understanding of the war period and of its consequences, see Hansen & Twaddle 1989, and Prunier & Calas 1994. For changes introduced during the first decade of Museveni's rule, see Ropa 1998. Among the other decisions to provide youth with the opportunity of participating in the political arena, a percentage of seats in Parliament were reserved for them, and youth councils were established (Christiansen 2006).
 8. Cells are groups of twelve or fewer people who meet every week at one member's home to discuss religious topics and the news, to project activities, and to share a meal. The aim of organization in small groups is to help people construct strong ties with other believers, because the size of the congregation (going from the several hundreds of MCC to the ten thousands of KPC and MC) makes it difficult to make friends in church. Members of the cell support themselves in spiritual, moral, health, and even financial troubles, so they play an important role of support in the urban context, often substituting for support from kin.

9. *Biwempe* 'the papyrus' indicates the PCCs built with simple materials, precarious and unstable, both from a physical and from a social point of view: many of them do not long survive.
10. When explaining the reasons for the conversion to Pentecostalism, several *balokole* referred to the physical distance of the Namirembe and the Rubaga cathedral, respectively the main Anglican and Roman Catholic churches in Kampala, positioned on the top of hills, "up there, far from us, the common people."
11. On the importance of being involved in the construction of a community to identify with it, see, for example, Bauman 2001.
12. However, while these congregations are experiencing such a process of transformation, during my fieldwork in 2005–2007, new Pentecostal churches were being established almost every week; many disappeared after a few weeks or months. The movement thus still shows a certain degree of dynamism—a quality that has been called one of the main reasons for the success of charismatic Christianity worldwide (Martin 2002).
13. One of the main points of disagreement regards the collection of data, which seems to be restricted to a limited number of areas in the country, and too focused in the urban context, while more than 80% of Ugandans live in rural areas. Recent research, carried out with a method different from the one used for UHSBS, and with a larger sample in rural areas, has given results that partly differ from the official ones (Bayarama et al. 2008).
14. Women are often in a weak position because they can hardly negotiate the use of condoms, even when they suspect that husbands may be cheating on them. As S, a Ugandan woman working with an international NGO in the field of AIDS prevention, told me: "Marriage can be dangerous; 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; moreover, men will interpret it as an admission of promiscuous behaviour of the wife. More than one woman told me she knew the husband was not faithful, but she feared he would have divorced her if she had refused 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" (S 2005).
15. See "HIV: TUKO Drives Faithfulness Crusade to the Marrieds," *The New Vision*, 17 December 2006.
16. *Zero grazing* refers to a technique of cattle-breeding in which the animal eats grass only in the small circle it can reach.
17. "Government Changing Strategy on HIV/Aids?" *The Daily Monitor*, 4 September 2005. Human Rights Watch (2005) criticizes the overemphasis on abstinence in the Ugandan strategies. See also "Young People Still Vulnerable to HIV/Aids," *The Daily Monitor*, 12 December 2006. This contrast attracted the attention of media even outside Uganda; see "The Battle over Uganda's Aids Campaign," *BBC News*, 12 April 2005.
18. Cell groups are often charged with the assistance of sick people. To give just one example, every cell group of the Kampala Pentecostal Church adopts an HIV positive woman, paying at least a weekly visit to her, bringing some money and food, and checking whether she is following the prescribed treatment correctly.
19. It is worth noting that the recent *National HIV & Aids Strategic Plan 2007/8–2011/12: Moving Toward Universal Access* corrects the ABC model in ABC+, defined as "a behavioral intervention taking into account the social, cultural and economic environments around the individual that

- influence behaviors” (UAC 2007:62). This definition introduces the idea that messages and services should be contextualized, following socioeconomic constraints.
20. The roots of the term *balokole* lay in the East African Revival, which started in 1933 at the missionary station of Gahini, in Rwanda, and quickly expanded across East Africa (Ward 1989).
 21. Watoto is a project led by KPC; orphans live in three different villages located within 20 kilometers from Kampala. Collective houses host six to eight children, with a “putative mother.” Villages are equipped with the school and the church. KPC frequently organizes tours of the three villages for people who want to know more about the project. An important part of the project is the Watoto choir, which has recorded several CDs and performed in many countries all over the world.
 22. Campus Alliance to Wipe out Aids is an FBO established by Martin Ssempe with the aim of “educating young people about HIV and convincing them that abstinence, it’s cool, because it’s God will” (Ssempe 2006).
 23. A rich literature on youth, generation, and social change in Africa has appeared since 1999 (e.g., Alber, van der Geest, and Whyte 2008; Christiansen, Utas, and Vigh 2006; Cole and Durham 2007; De Boeck and Honwana 2005), but little on the subject of youth and religion.
 24. For their assertion of premarital abstinence, the *balokole* are often considered the best group in which to find a partner for marriage. Not infrequently, people cite the will to marry a “safe” girl or boy among the motivations that brought them to embrace the Pentecostal faith. As B, a 29-year-old man employed in a bank in Kampala, told me: “This is a time when it’s very difficult to confide in a girl. Many of them have sexual relations with more than one man, and you know it’s quite common to have an official boyfriend and a ‘sugar daddy.’ Of course it is the same with boys: few of them can be really considered ‘safe.’ Young people are confused about sex and marriage, but when you start a relationship with a girl or a boy who is a *mulokole*, then you can feel more confident about her or him. That’s why I began to frequent KPC [Kampala Pentecostal Church] one year ago, and I’m now planning to marry my girlfriend” (B 2006).
 25. This rhetoric is based on the assumption that AIDS struck Uganda when it was not yet a “saved” country, and was still under satanic control; see Gusman 2007.
 26. For a similar example of a case in which the religious language becomes a way of telling something about a tragic past, see the work of Rosalind Shaw on Sierra Leone (2007).
 27. I refer to PCCs whose membership is composed mainly of middle-class people and students. Other churches, set in poor areas and with different targets, use different arguments, dealing more with everyday and familiar problems than with the national situation.
 28. Significantly, “walking in the light” was an expression already used in the East African Revival (Wild 1999).
 29. See Genesis 39:1–20.
 30. It is not unusual that AIDS is represented as a “female disease,” with men depicted as victims of corrupted and impure women (see Haram 2001).
 31. *Waragi* is a local spirit, similar to gin.
 32. The fact of not respecting the dictate of abstaining from premarital sex and of being faithful is particularly serious, and can lead to the exclusion from the congregation, as in the case of a 21-year-old woman, M, who, after getting pregnant, was turned away from one of the churches I frequented. By channeling members into congregational activities, PCCs increase the density of personal networks and, as a consequence, social support and social control among their members (Ellison and George 1994).

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