YOUTH RELIGIOSITY AND THE AIDS PANDEMIC
- FAITH, FRIENDS, AND FAMILY VIRTUES IN UGANDA

Introduction

During the past two decades young people in Africa have increasingly received attention within social science and development aid. In East and Southern Africa, a main factor has been the rapid spread of HIV and the impact of AIDS on society. In the early days of the AIDS pandemic, research and international aid focussed on AIDS orphans, that is on the children below 18 years of age who had lost one or both parents to the disease (see e.g. Hunter 1990, Barnett and Blaikie 1992). This attention reflected humanitarian interventions to mitigate impact of the demographic re-configurations, as mortality rates among adults in their productive age led to disproportionate numbers between adult caretakers and children in need of care taking (Christiansen 2003). The epidemic emerged around the time of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), an international recognition of the particular circumstances, needs, and entitlements of people below the age of 18. The simultaneity of this international recognition (accompanied by substantial research funding) and the socio-economic consequences of AIDS shaped the contours of an emerging field of research and advocacy on childhood in Africa that has advanced concepts such as 'orphans' and 'child headed households' (Christiansen et. al. 2005). While younger children have mainly been conceptualized as victims of HIV/AIDS, older children have also been approached as social actors who contribute to the continual spread of the HIV virus. This difference is related to the empirical fact that the 15-24 years olds account for at least half of the newly infected (UNAIDS 2004, 2005, 2006) and to the general tendency to ascribe more agentive abilities to 'youth' and 'young people' than to 'children' (Utas 2003).

It is the ambiguous conceptualization of young people, as victims and agents, which inform efforts to involve youth in the work towards preventing the spread of HIV and mitigating the negative impact of AIDS. Drawing on the human rights framework, development agencies refer to young people's rights to partake in matters regarding their own lives and entitlement to grow up in safe spaces of socialization and develop skill. These programs are implemented through a range of civil society organizations, including Christian churches.[1] In fact, in East and Southern African countries churches are key civil society actors working with young people's welfare in relation to HIV/AIDS. With reference to the Bible, Christian organisations agitate young people to adhere to the morality and behaviour outlined in the 'path of God', i.e. to abstain from sexual activity until marriage and be faithful within marriage, and that youth should be assisted to help themselves escape poverty. Human rights and Christian doctrines are rather different frames of reference, yet both form the basis for many development funded programmes that approach young people as a social category with rights and responsibility for their own lives, yet in order to live such 'good lives' i.e. being

---

[1] Since the Structural Adjustment Programs in the 1980s, donor agencies have substantially increased allocations to civil society organisations (Semboja and Terkildsen 1995). For the changes taking place within the Christian denominations in Sub-Saharan Africa leading to the emergence of faith-based organisations see Gifford (1994).

accountable for own actions and able to hold others' accountable for their livelihood, young people are regarded to be in need of knowledge, guidance as well as material support.

With a focus on young people's appropriations of governmental and faith-based ideas of 'empowering' youth in order to prevent further spread of HIV and produce responsible adult citizens, the paper will discuss the importance of morality and self-control in Uganda today. It will show that young people largely consent to the lower social positioning of youth as they regard themselves as persons still in the making, and how this positioning is a comfortable point from which to criticise the older generations for not maintaining family solidarity and providing sufficiently for the younger generation. However, the weaker social positioning leaves few spaces for youth to voice such criticism, amongst these the social space of Christian youth groups. Based on drama developed by a Catholic youth group, I will illuminate how youth combine cultural values, Child Rights and Christian morality to present the selfishness and low morals of the older generations and themselves as keeper of morality in the interests of society as a whole. I will argue that youth perceive of their agency in religious terms as they seek God rather than government for social being and becoming, and it is through faith and fellowship that youth negotiate associational life in their own terms and they attempt to re-establish family virtues.

Point of departure is that youth is a social position, which is internally and externally shaped and constructed, as well as part of a larger societal and generational process, a state of becoming. Youth is thus both social *being* and social *becoming*, as a position in movement (Vigh 2006). In order to understand the ways the category of youth is socio-politically constructed as well as the ways young people construct counter-positions and definitions, attention must be given both to the ways youth are positioned in society and the ways they seek to position themselves in society (Christiansen et. al. 2006). The developmental and religious perspectives of youth is as a social category somehow unattached from the general societal fabric and generational dynamics, and whose calamites can be treated in relative isolation, yet, as will be described, young Ugandans stress the importance of being socially embedded and depended upon the older generations.

The paper draws upon ethnographic research carried out in Busia District located in the south-eastern corner of Uganda since 1998, especially four months during 2003-2005, where I conducted fieldwork for a research project about the social consequences of Christian churches providing material and moral support to the younger generation, which is otherwise central aspect of reciprocity between kin and for intergenerational relations. The study focussed amongst other on two non-governmental programs that provided 'orphans' and 'child domestic workers' with secondary or polytechnic education (Christiansen 2005 and forthcoming articles). Both programs were implemented through a Catholic church and provided some students boarding facilities at a Catholic mission or at a Catholic boarding school. It furthermore involved a survey and group interviews with students enrolled at a low-cost secondary school in the district centre, and interviews with project staff, local leaders, parents and grandparents about support to the contemporary generation of young people. Amongst the unexpected findings was young people's agreement to youth as a social category of whom no-one expect much except that they act responsibly and develop into productive adults, while, at the same time, individual youth pro-actively negotiate associational life in their own terms. Such negotiations are motivated by experiences of neglect from family members and take

shape of seeking divine support and social relations created through education and fellowship whilst keeping distance to certain kinsfolk.

Young Lives in Uganda

During the late 1970s, people living south-west of Kampala observed high mortality rate among adults who became 'slim' before they passed away. When the armed conflict against the Obote II government came to an end in 1986 this disease was diagnosed as HIV. The guerrilla leader who had taken over power, Yoweri Museveni, was soon to recognise the seriousness of this disease (possibly motivated by the fact that among the infected were soldiers in his army) in the restoration of a country that had been going through political turmoil for about 15 years. With strong moral and financial support from national as well as international stakeholders, the president encouraged active engagement of all sectors in Uganda to combat the spread of HIV and mitigate the effects of AIDS (Parkhurst and Lush 2004, Christensen and Janeway 2005). When the prevention campaigns began in the 1980s with the slogan of 'love carefully', the Christian denominations for instance joined hands with the secular campaign under the motto 'love faithfully' (Seidel 1990, Allen and Heald 2004). The political will to make the fight against AIDS a task for the whole nation has proved successful, as the prevalence rate has dropped from about 14% in 1995 to 7% in 2006 (UHSBS 2006). Despite the success, more than 2 million Ugandans have been infected with HIV of whom 1 million have died and another 1 million are today living with the infection (ibid). The epidemic thus continues to place an immense burden on micro-level of households and family networks as well as on macro-level of the country's national resources, capacity and productivity.

The Museveni government has restored peace and stability in most of the country and there has been considerable progress in terms of economic growth and development, yet the quality of life for many, especially in the rural areas, has not improved substantially. Prosperity is evident in the cities, but only 12% of the population is urban. The structure of the economy is still dominated by a largely subsistence agricultural sector and there are growing unemployment and underemployment levels. Available data indicate that many Ugandans are not accessing essential services such as health care, education, water and sanitation, and information (Okuonzi 2004). With the introduction of Universal Primary Education in 1997, significant strides have however been made in primary school enrolment. By 1999, 74% of all girls and 77% of all boys were attending primary school (Deninger 2003).[2] The social development sector is heavily under-funded and lack capacity to provide social protection for the young citizens who make up the majority of the population *and* of those who live in 'absolute poverty' (Christiansen and Whyte, forthcoming). The demographic composition that 0-14 years old make up 52% of the total population reflect a continuing high fertility rate of 7.3 children per woman, high mortality rate in the adult population (life expectancy is 42 years), and prolonged armed conflict (in the northern region). While the social sector is particularly restrained due to low governmental investments, the general weak state institutions are as well results of reduction in public institutional capacity under the Structural Adjustment Programs and poor governance (Semboja and Terkildsen 1995).

With the instalment of the National Resistance Movement (NRM) as government and a new constitution in mid-1990s, politically marginalised groups were recognised as

---

[2] In education there is a relatively high school drop out rate, which stood at 39% for girls at primary six level in 2001 compared with 33% for boys (Deninger 2003)

important actors in society. Together with women and the disabled, youth were secured seats in parliament and Youth Councils were established at diverse political levels. The explicit recognition of youth has made the concept associated with NRM. The political system did, however, change into multi-party democracy in 2005, and it is still a debate whether or not Youth Councils can work in a multi-party context. The association between youth and one political party has become an issue which youth organizations are aware of, for instance, in relation to marking the International Youth Day (12 August) in 2006. Several youth organisations, which claim to be non-political, non-religious, and non-ethnic, did not participate in what they regarded as government-supportive, at the same time as some government-supportive organizations threatened to boycott the celebration as protest against government proposal to scrap the Youth Councils.

Besides youth wings within the political parties, secured seats for five youth in parliament, and mobilization of youth in times of presidential elections, young people are not considered important political players. Instead, political reasoning for attending to youth commonly mention the demographic fact that 75% of the population is below 30 years of age (noteworthy 53% is below 15 years of age), and the intersection of demography with social problems. This was clear in interviews given for the International Youth Day 2006, which had the theme *Tackling Poverty Together: The Role of the Youth in Wealth Creation*[3]*,* where key politicians associated youth with crime, armed conflict, idleness, gambling, prostitution, early marriages, stagnation in unemployment (and high demands for few jobs available), poverty, marginalization e.g. from national economic empowerment programmes aimed at helping poor groups through micro-finance, and the continual spread of sexually transmitted diseases, especially HIV/AIDS.[4] In order to 'tackle poverty together', government aims at empowering young people through provision of role models, creation of employment and train youth to be innovative job creators (preferably in small-scale industrial production), modernisation of agriculture, improve youth access to factors of production, and information about sexual reproduction and human rights. The 'role of youth in wealth creation' is to comply with the programme elaborated *for* them, which is intended to make youth a transitional stage that enable the individual to enter an adulthood of material well-being and responsible citizenship free of AIDS.

During the 1980s, political conceptualization of youth and HIV/AIDS were not the only phenomena spreading across Uganda. Charismatic Christianity stimulated renewals in the main Catholic and Anglican Churches, and the founding of numerous new denominations (Gifford 1998).[5] These renewals emphasize the individual who makes a personal commitment to God, and through strong faith and tight fellowship lives according to the divine tenets and experiences fruits of the faith. While the message of individual salvation had been a part of pietistic fellowships in the Anglican Church since the 1930s, the Charismatic message was preached to the whole nation and with radical different practice (see also Gifford 1998). This orientation towards self-control for divine grace was thus gaining strength about the same time as the principal prevention method, the so-called ABC-model: <u>A</u>bstinence until marriage, <u>Be</u> faithful to your partner or <u>C</u>ondom use. Church leaders further moralised this call for the individual to change behaviour by promoting 'A' and 'B' leaving aside the 'C' (Seidel 1990, Allen and Heald

---

[3] The second part of the theme was a reformulation of the UN theme 'Tackling Poverty Together: Young People and the Eradication of Poverty'

[4] See The New Vision (pages 33-40) and The Daily Monitor (pages 9-12 and 25-27) on 12 August 2006.

[5] A similar renewal emerged among the about 12% Muslim Ugandans (Chande 2000). This paper focuses solely on Christian denominations.

2004). While the religious-moral perception of HIV infection applied to the unmarried as well as to the married, young people were soon to become prime objects in faith-based prevention work.

According to the 2004-2005 national sero-behavioural survey, 2.6% of young females aged 15-19 are infected and the prevalence for women peak at 12% at the age of 30-34, whereas the prevalence among males only reaches above 2% at age 20-24 and the highest prevalence attained is 9% at 35-44 years of age (UHSBS 2006). Since the primary path of HIV infection is heterosexual intercourse, the figures reflect that both male and female Ugandans initiate sexual activity during their teenage years. In fact, at the age of 16, one in every three young males and females has had their sexual debut and, by the age of 24, 98% of the females and 92% of the young males have ever had sex. The biggest gender difference is at 19 years of age, where 80% of the females and 65% of the males have ever had sex. Such gender difference is probably related to marriage patterns where more than half the females (56%) age 19 have married compared with only 7% of males. Young female sexual activity often leads to pregnancies and every third female aged 15-19 is pregnant or a mother (DHS 2001). While teenage pregnancy and fertility rates are related to level of education, it is significant (especially for future prevention work) that HIV prevalence generally is *highest* among the most educated and wealthy (UHSBS 2006).

As in other African contexts, youth are generally perceived to make up the majority of members in the Charismatic churches. In the language of central Uganda (Luganda), the people and the churches are termed as Balokole, which literally means 'the saved ones' due to the orientation towards salvation of the individual person. Across Africa, Charismatic Christianity has been argued to attract youth with the message of salvation as redemption from tradition, gerontocracy, poverty, and polygamy, and with the practice of protection, deliverance, lively liturgy with electronic devises and dancing, global networks, and tight fellowships that may supplement kinsfolk for urban migrants (see e.g. van Dijk 1992, Maxwell, Meyer, Marshall-Fratani, Gifford 1998, Diouf 2000, Lauterbach 2000). While most factors apply to the Ugandan context, as will be illuminated in this paper, it is important to note that the majority of youth belong to the mission-based (Anglican) Church of Uganda and (Roman) Catholic Church - and not necessarily to the 'saved' or Charismatic fellowships within these. In spite of the rapid spread and influence of Balokole churches, the religious landscape continues to be dominated by the Catholic Church (about 45%) and Church of Uganda (about 30%), and merely about 10% belong to Balokole churches. The visibility of youth in Balokole churches may reflect a combination of demography (age group above 50 years make up 5% of total population), liturgy (the laity can take up extensive, more visible roles than in church hierarchies with ordained clergy), and outspoken youth among early preachers (van Dijk 1992), rather than a massive shift in religious belonging among the younger generation.

Busia District, which is located in the south-eastern corner bordering Kenya and home to a quarter of a million people is an interesting case due to its dynamic constitutions of religious organisations and it is a crossroad for the spread of AIDS. Since the reopening of the border late 1980s, Balokole preachers have crossed from Kenya and planted churches in the district before moving further westwards towards the capital. The HIV-prevalence is about 10%, thus somewhat higher than the national level, which is possibly due to the constant flow of money and people in the border town and as the fishing villages along the shores of Lake Victoria make fertile grounds for transactional sex (Obbo 1993, Talle 1995). The sexual option poses particularly young people at risk, as

their access to resources through family networks or employment is very sparse. The cost of living has by far exceeded the income from small-scale farming and most families are affected by AIDS in terms of reduced labour, increased expenses to medicine and burials, emotional stress, and often dissonance between family members. The district administration has been functioning for nearly a decade, yet the 1990s decentralisation process did not succeed in bringing state institutions closer to the people, in the sense of improved citizen access to social service (see also Jones 2005). According to the national budgets in 1999, Ministry of Gender, Labour and Youth were allocated 1-2% of national budget and the district budget support to Community Development Office was in 1999 below 0.5% (Odongkara 1999). The social sector institutions are thus severely under-funded and as a consequence still leave two out of five positions vacant, and the two officers with no transport to perform work beyond the outskirts of the district town. In the civil society sector - funded through international donors - the total financial resources in 2004 was about US$ 800 000 and allocated through CBOs, NGOs, and FBOs into 644 project groups.[6] About 30% of the financial resources was allocated through 50 projects that had components of religion and HIV/AIDS, whereas the projects on HIV/AIDS without a religious component was limited to about 5% of the financial resources and allocated through 16 projects. There are few NGOs or other resourceful civil society organisations, and as religious organisations are traditional important actors in the social fabric, church-based aid have furthered the importance of faith and religious organisations for youth access to resources and social networks. To day churches may thus be sites for faith practice in fellowship and for providing education or other training, assistance to people infected and affected by HIV/AIDS, and, often activities for youth such as sport, music, drama, Bible study, and income generating activities.

Moving between mixed messages

The Christian landscape in Busia district can fairly neatly be divided into three denominations of respectively Catholic, Anglican, and Balokole, yet the sheer number of about 660 churches[7] (i.e. buildings with a preacher, a congregation, and liturgical practice) established without any coordination/registration at district level, changes one's imagination to a jungle when attempting to get an overview of the local religious topography. The multiplicity of Christian messages on HIV/AIDS and what youth should do in order to avoid infection may also appear more like a jungle within which paths may seem right, yet they may lead one astray. As a young woman, saved in Church of Uganda, explained to me "to day you go to a crusade and you hear the preacher say something and he convinces you, on Sunday you go to your own church and the preacher convince you about something else. Now, which one is right?"

In order to get an overview of church distribution in Busia District, a mapping was initiated in five out of ten sub-counties in February 2006 and it is, at the stage of writing, in its final stage. The mapping scheme focussed on fellowships within each church, activities for youth, activities on HIV/AIDS, and involvement in development projects.[8]

---

[6] The figures are based on a mapping that I carried out in collaboration with the District Community Officer during 2004. Caution should be taken as the assistants are still in process of checking the self-reported figures. The exact figures are expected towards the end of the year.

[7] Based on figures from five out of ten sub-counties, there are an estimated 70 Catholic churches, 90 Anglican churches, 400 Balokole churches, 90 New Apostolic Church (a Protestant church with doctrines and practice similar to the Anglicanism), and about 10 churches belonging to Jehovah Witnesses, Seventh Day Adventists, and Salvation Army. In comparison there are 10 mosques.

[8] An assistant has carried out structured interviews with pastors and other leaders in the respective 382 churches.

Below is one extract of the responses in each of the three denominations within a rural parish, which will reflect a range of positions in the local Christian landscape, which young people are familiar with. These extracts present agreement as well as the abovementioned plurality of attitudes and practices towards issues related to HIV/AIDS. Main topics of disagreement are in relation to condom use and curability of AIDS. It is important to note that disagreements are expressed between denominations and within the two mission-based denominations.

Responses to the question: How does the church address the continual spread of HIV?

> "Too much lust of what one does not have, too much drinking alcohol, over dancing at night, and over staying at cultural ceremonies such as last funeral rites. Poverty can make the rich infect the poor" (Catholic catechist)

> "Poverty has led to continual spread of HIV/AIDS. Too much lust among the people, ignorance about the dangers of HIV/AIDS, and too much drinking alcohol has also led to the continual spread of HIV/AIDS" (lay reader and head Christian in Church of Uganda)

> "People are not faithful especially the married. People are rebellious towards the word of God. Poverty is another cause and people have too must lust of what they do not have. TASO has led to continual spread of HIV/AIDS. When they test people and they get to know that they are infected, they now start infecting others. " (Balokole pastor)

The causes given for the continual spread are a mixture of poverty, social ills, and low morality. 'Over dancing' and 'over staying' are similar to the 'too much' as indications of socially sanctioned behaviour - including obligations such as funeral attendance - yet when the behaviour becomes immoderate, it may turn morally unacceptable. Somehow along the same line, while it might be understood that economic desperation can lead to behaviour that exposes one to rich of HIV infection, it is morally condemned to expose one-self because one wants to have 'what one does not have'. It is the gradation of difference that makes the moral difference.
The claim that some people use their knowledge of own HIV-positive status to deliberately infect others is associated with local notions of human beings as potentially evil and anti-social to the extent of taking away life. In a local Christian universe such behaviour is not just sinful, it is interpreted as rebellious to God who created life - from a secular point of view, it is a serious crime. The Christian and the secular NGO approaches to the continual spread of HIV are rather alike: the spread is fostered because people do not control their own behaviour, and in due course expose themselves and others. Structural issues of economic poverty, gender and generational inequalities, are commonly included yet the approach to prevent further spread is individual behaviour change *and*, if possible, social and economic development.

Against this background the churches seek to protect members from infection by informing about the dangers of HIV/AIDS, encourage to not get involved in practices perceived as risky, to be faithful to one another, and stick to the word of God. Within the Church of Uganda and Catholic Church, Christians are sometimes also encouraged to use condoms, an issue I return to below. Responding to how churches seek to prevent *young* members from getting infected led to answers such as the following:

> "We encourage abstinence from sex until when one feels he/she is ready for marriage. We encourage people intending to get married to be prayerful so that God reveals the right woman for a particular man, but we don't go for blood tests" (Catholic catechist)

"We tell the young to abstain from sex until they feel ready for marriage, and to those who want to get married we tell them to go for blood tests to establish their status" (lay reader and head Christian Church of Uganda)

"We tell the young people to abstain from sex until they feel ready for marriage. We tell those who want to go in for marriage, to go for blood tests, and stick to the word of God" (Balokole pastor)

Abstinence until marriage is the clear message all churches - and for that sake Muslim organizations - adhere to as the most certain way to avoid infection. In a context where the main spread of the virus is through sexual intercourse, abstaining from sex before marriage seems a logical advice. Along the same lines to make 'the marital test', the blood test that reveals if the future bride and groom are both HIV negative, seems a rather logical measure to prevent infection within marriage. Yet, as non-religious family planning organisations have documented in amongst other USA where "abstinence until marriage" was developed, praxis tend to escape logic. If one is looking for logics, perhaps one should remain within the world of ideas, and attend to the connection between emphasis to abstinence and theologies of salvation as well as the general Catholic and Protestant doctrines to preserve sexuality for the marital union. The Christian consensus turns, on the other hand, into discussions when asked about condom use.

"We discourage condom use for it promotes sexual immorality and even for family planning it is not allowed for it is like murdering. It is against bible doctrines" (Catholic catechist)

We promote condom use within marriage for family planning purposes and it is allowed for the young people for it prevents infections and early pregnancies" (lay reader and head Christian in Church of Uganda)

"We do not encourage condom use for it promote sexual immorality, but it is okay within marriage for family planning purposes. We do not inform young people about condoms for this would increase their sexual immorality" (Balokole pastor)

This mixture of messages brings confusion among young people as to whether or not it is sinful to use condoms. Whilst the Balokole attitude is straightforward dismissal, youth belonging to these churches hear condom use is not sinful from other pastors, discussions with friends, participation in NGO programs such as Straight Talk at school, or read it in newspapers. Young Catholics may know the church doctrine against family planning, yet they may not connect the use of condoms with reproduction. During interviews with students in secondary schools a Catholic female narrated:

"During mass Father (parish priest) made it very clear that to use a condom is like to prevent God from doing His work on earth, so we should never use one. Even married people should not use them, but, if they have too many children and they are very poor, then it can be good that they stop producing for some time...after service, when some of the youth (group) boys talked with Father, I saw him (the priest) give them condoms. I then thought about it, and I know they also have condoms at the (Catholic) clinic (next to the church). Now, I really wonder what to believe..."

The story spurred a discussion among the gathered youth, and when I replicated it in interviews with youngsters as well as with adults, the topics emerged were about responsibility, self-control, and knowledge. Young informants took positions such as the following ones:

"The priest has to say that, because that is what the Bible says, but he knows that people die, and he is a good person, so he tells them how they can live and not die...abstinence is of course the best, but who can abstain full time?" (Anglican male)

"I think that priest really wants people to take responsibility. He knows young people just practice sex here and there, so he tells them that such is against God's law. But, he also knows that young people are stubborn, so he gives them knowledge to at least take care of the life that God gave each and every one of them" (Catholic male)

"He is just making everyone confused. That is a very bad priest. How can he go about making everyone confused? No, what he says inside the church is what he should practice outside...otherwise how should anyone know what to do?" (Balokole female)

"When he gives those young people condoms, he is telling them 'you just go ahead'...he is making them have sex. They will have sex with the first girl who crosses the road. If they stayed (away) from temptations, they would not be craving for sex" (Balokole female)

According to the former two statements the priest helps the young males to take responsibility of their life and enable them to 'live and not die' whereas the two latter statements stress that young people remain confused or simply see condoms as encouragement to 'make them have sex with the first girl who crosses the road'. While the former perspective perceive young males as social beings with a sexual life and who, with sufficient knowledge and right measures, are able to take care of themselves, the latter perspective depict young males as unable to move beyond confusion or to control themselves in a given situation. In other words, the former perspective ascribes young males more agentive power to act responsibly.

This difference is to some extent along denominational lines, as Catholic and Anglican churches tend to take the former position whereas Balokole churches tend to take the latter. The idea amongst Balokole that people are not reflective agents is not confined to issues about youth or sexuality, although young people have 'weak minds', hence they are easy to lure into temptations, especially into sexual activity.[9] In daily life, however, Balokole recognise individual agency to act responsible even in situations of temptations. Among the strategies for students, at a non-religious secondary school in Busia town, to stay AIDS free were the following:

"I try to steer from temptations...when I see smart girls in church or in town, I immediately feel like I want to have what they have. Their hairstyle, maybe smart shoes or clothes...the feeling is just there. I pray to God to stay firm, oh God, I hope one day you will give me that. Taking my thoughts to God makes me not want the thing so much...if I am patient, God will reward me with much goodness" (Balokole female)

"At school some girls are very smart. They have smart shoes, new styles, and they talk about boyfriends or those men who provide these good things (for them). How can I not want that? Of course I do, but when you get pregnant school is over, if you get AIDS, life has finished for you

---

[9] During research on connections between faith and health seeking behaviour in 1999, Balokole pastors spoke from the pulpits and when visiting patients about the use of herbs as unequivocally against the will of God. When questioning these pastors how come plants, growing in the world God constructed, can be sinful, they all responded that it is not sinful to pick herbs, mix and drink these in tea. Behind the prohibition was a notion that if they allowed Christians to pick and use herbs, Christians would go to herbalists who mix herbs with ancestral spirits; the latter is perceived to be sinful. In other words, pastors prohibited against universal use of herbs because they perceived Christians were unable to distinguish picking herbs in the nature from buying at herbalists. In practice, most Balokole still picked herbs or received from friends when ill, and such practice was only testified as sinful when symptoms did not disappear.

before you even started...They say that if you start having boyfriends it is very hard to stop, so, for me, I ask God to help me not start along that road...my friend and I, we help each other" (Catholic female)

"In town there are beautiful girls, even here at school. I don't speak with them alone, not so much at least, I stay with my close friends, we talk with girls together...it helps because when they are there you don't suddenly have sex, you can control...if you are alone with one (a girl) the voice of God disappears, you just hear the heart pumping. It is not good, for you don't know what you may do...okay, it may feel real good, but you just get infected. I try always to listen to what God tells me to do" (Anglican male)

Ability to control one self, to not give in to temptations, is a recurrent theme when talking with young people about their life situation and strives towards social becoming. According to these youth, the key relationship, through which one can stay firm with patience and faith that material pleasure will be part of one's future, is the individual's relationship with God. As I have argued elsewhere, the relationship between the individual and God forms a key for understanding the Charismatic claims to certainty such as guarantee of prosperity and healing (Christiansen forthcoming). It is indispensable for the individual to 'stay firm with God', because Charismatic Christianity is orientated towards a contractual relationship with an unambiguous God, who shows His grace in worldly living to those who follow Him. It is contractual in the sense that provided the individual proclaims salvation, has strong faith, and lives appropriate lifestyle then God guarantees to provide the individual eternal well-being - starting in this life. It is important to note that within mainstream mission-based Christianity other, and more uncertain, relations between the Almighty and the human beings overshadow this rather contractual relation (Ibid).

According to cultural notions, and as the young people quoted above state, ambiguity is located in human nature i.e. one feels jealousy, desires for material things and physical pleasures although one is aware of the potential pain implied. Samia Christians generally recognise that people are potentially able to act morally as well as immorally, yet it is notable that young people add more emphasis to fears of failure, i.e. not being able to control oneself. This tendency could be related to the widespread notion - not restricted to the cultural context, since this is also common in externally (formulated and) funded NGO programs - of youth as a life stage where people are in much need of information, guidance, and material support in order to live responsibly. Church leaders, NGO workers, teachers, and parents reproduce this notion that young people need guidance for controlling themselves, especially in relation to sex.

Young people consent to this notion, yet, I argue, their emphasis on fears of failure does not only reflect uncertainty of self or 'flexibility of youth'. The emphasis is part of a moral critique of the circumstances within which young people are growing up: a society marked by prolonged poverty, family dissonance, weak state institutions, and HIV/AIDS. Many express disillusions about absent fathers, mothers caught in family strife, death of one or both parents, and still relatives decline to assist. The only person most interviewed young people trust is their mother, and she is commonly a small-scale farmer able to give emotional and moral support rather than provide financially. The mother is important for social well being yet may be unable to provide for social becoming. Other family members who could support financially - so the young people acquire educational skills, which they attribute will lead to a salaried income and a lifestyle beyond current poverty - often do not provide what young people perceive their are entitled to. It is in this social context, where young people experience being left on their own, disillusioned about lack of family solidarity, that we should understand young people weaving threads about making God present in their lives to safely navigate temptations without falling prey to own desires. Similar to Utas (2005) findings on young

people's narratives about navigating social relations during the recent war in Liberia, these Ugandan youth, at one and the same time, position themselves *as* agents, in this case responsible for attempting to stay AIDS free, and *as* victims, exposed to HIV infection due to lack of family unity, mixed messages on HIV prevention, and constrained social structures.

It is, however, the recognition of being an individual with potential to trust one-self, to act and live responsibly that dominate most young people's narratives. This hope, or confidence, to individual person's ability to act according to certain rationales mirrors HIV prevention campaigns promoting behavioural change such as the 'ABC'-model. In fact, for many youth restricted sexual behaviour - such as abstinence - is understood as part of the general demand for controlled behaviour, to which any committed Christian must adhere. The discourse and orientation towards empowerment of the individual through God is most clearly expressed by Balokole youth, yet it is as well present among committed youth in the mission-based churches. With the focus on empowerment of the individual to change behaviour in order to achieve an objective, young people's faith in the religious transformation of self seem alike developmental and faith-based approaches to youth as a social category, which can be transformed within itself through correct knowledge and morals (Christiansen et. al. 2006). Yet, as young people emphasise, they are social beings embedded in a social world where other people influence the individual's decision making, which is why good friends are important, at the same time, their lives are influenced by other people's decision. As the following section will attend to, young people apply the religious-moral discourse to criticise the practices of the older generation, which they experience fails to provide for the younger generation.

Dramas between generations

"My father is polygamous, he has 3 wives...we are 29 children. He is just a farmer, in fact, all the wives are just farmers - they are poor! They can contribute nothing...it is an older sister who enrolled me and pays the school fees" (Anglican female)

"Mother left when we were still young...the dad was taking too much alcohol...for me, the stepmother who I'm staying with she mistreats me...at times she doesn't even give for me the food, I go hungry...just because you have not worked, you can't eat, and yet in most cases I have to spend my time at school...there is no-one I can go to, we migrated from my father's area and the mother is no where to be seen" (Pentecostal male)

"After he (the father) died, they (the in-laws) just chased her (the mother) away from the land... with polygamy there must be problems, all the time...this disease (AIDS) makes them (co-wives) argue over which one to blame (about who brought the disease to the home)... to day there is no unity ...we (other siblings and the mother) try our level best to survive with whatever little we can get......she (the mother) is very ill (with AIDS)...we don't see them (paternal in-laws) anymore...when they smell dowry, they will come" (Catholic female)

Poverty, unstable conjugal relations, bad hearted step-mothers, and rivalry between co-wives for the scarce resources of a man who took on wives in the hope of prosperity yet failed to produce sufficient of anything but mouths to be fed, are central when young people describe their family situation. While economic poverty is something the parents inherited from their parents and factors beyond the domestic have largely prolonged poor livelihoods, young people blame the parental generation for today's conflict and carelessness between relatives. Young informants told, unexpectedly, frequent stories about relatives of older generation whom they suspect wish them to fail, who want to harm them, to get them away from their natal home, or took actions towards killing them. As Bledsoe (1995) has argued from research on resource distribution to children

of previous unions in Mende households in Sierra Leone, children are symbols of adult relations hence childcare become barometers of relations between parents and between co-wives. The usual suspects or known actors of harmful actions are stepmothers or other in-laws to the paternal lineage, i.e. close kin with whom one competes for resources. From this perspective, salvation or other commitment to Christian faith is not limited to protect against one's own weaknesses, but certainly also protection from other people's evil eyes, thoughts, and actions.

Chasing widows and their offspring away from the land, which the woman has tilled, the sons are entitled to take over, and where they are supposed to be buried, is from a youth perspective taken as evidence that "today, everyone is on his or her own", "there is no family unity, even clan elders just eat" and that the older generation is "wicked and spoiling our lives". While accusations for being the one who 'introduced' AIDS to the family is a common cause for denying widows and their offspring the social security network that the husband's family is obliged to provide, these cases usually consist of other long-term disagreements between the wife and the in-laws. AIDS, it seems, has become a catalyst for domestic conflicts, which can leave the weaker party deprived of property and fundamental relations of social security. The institutions to protect against such deprivation are weak as the traditional authority (clan elders) have lost power to a local government system which is either ill functioning or inaccessible to poor people, and when the traditional power then takes action it fails to ensure social justice and unity. The problems at home and between members of the extended family, reduced clan authority without a replaced government system to maintain social justice, make youth speak of nostalgia for a lost family solidarity - not, as in Kenya, of a lost modernity (cf. Prince 2006). As I will return to, it is through friendship and churches that young people attempt to re-establish family virtues and unity in order "to again make family living sweet".

There is a strong sense of injustice among the young people whose lives changed much after one of both parents died from AIDS. It seems a regular occurrence that young people are deprived from entitlement to inherit land, cattle, and other property that should have formed the basis for especially the sons' livelihood, and from more well-off relatives' support to provide education or employment. People in the parental and grandparental generations, disapprove of treating the younger generation ill, of course, yet they tend to explain such practice as being due to excessive poverty to provide for one's own offspring and to disobedient youth "who stubbornly refuse to listen to advices of the older people because they think they know better". The positioning as the younger part in an intergenerational relationship only allows for the passive rebellion of not obeying the words of the elder, it rarely allows for active expressions of discontent with the perceived selfishness, greed and low morale of older relatives, such as the above quotation "when they smell dowry, they will come".

Besides frank critique in the context of interviews with a White researcher, it is in the church context that young critical voices find local expressions. Christian churches are around the globe organised into a number of fellowships, which meet during the week for prayers, practice or practical work. Youth groups are, like the choir and Bible study, standard fellowships in all denominations and organised from the grassroots to diocesan levels. Youth groups are embedded in local reality and activities reflect the social positioning of youth and these groups can form space for linking youth with local society, the nation-state and Christianity (Bjerk 2005). In the Ugandan context, youth groups are sites for keeping young people aged 15-30 busy with leisure activities, such as

sport, music, and drama. These groups are part of a church, occasionally a NGO, adults usually supervise activities, and leisure is often combined with education such as Bible study, life skills or debate. For example when a NGO implemented a development programme through the Catholic Church aimed at re-enrolling child domestic workers in the education system, the young beneficiaries had to educate the community about child labour or child mistreatment. About 30 of the altogether 300 beneficiaries were provided boarding facilities at a Catholic mission - next to the polytechnic school at which they became students - and with time they became part of the Catholic youth group. Inspired by the NGO, the parish priest decided the local church should run a campaign about child rights (CRC) and he assigned the youth group to make a drama over the theme. It is common for the Catholic youth group to perform a drama for the congregation towards the end of a school term; a practice that indicate the continuous intertwining of education with religion in Uganda (ref). In my notes the plot of the drama was summarised as below:

> The drama begins with a husband who lives with his wife and three children. They are happy. One day he brings home a second wife and this woman tricks the husband to chase away the first woman from the house. She then consults a traditional healer for herbs that will make the husband fall so madly in love with her that he does not notice that she badly mistreats the children. The father is blinded and the children so miserable that they steal money from him, and they leave home to become children living in the street surviving on small jobs. The youngest kid dies. The woman then becomes ill from the 'love magic' and as the doctor cannot diagnose the illness, the distressed husband takes her to a pastor, who advice him to proclaim salvation and apologise to the first wife in order to relieve the second wife from the witchcraft. The man becomes saved and writes a letter apologising to the first wife and children. Then he kills himself. After this dramatic end, the youth sang a song about saying 'no' to boy/girlfriends and only saying 'yes' to friends who help them prosper.

About 500 young and adults watched the 2-hour drama, which was performed at the altar outside the church building, so the whole community was able to partake. The audience laughed at the scenes where the second wife tricked the husband and whenever the traditional healer, portrayed as a filthy, uneducated, and greedy man with odd behaviour, was on stage, and the audience was quiet when the kid died in the street and later when the man killed himself. It is by drawing on cultural values, Christian concepts, development and government priorities that youth can use the church as a context to stage an argument for establishment of social structures that foster functioning families. The family is regarded as the basic social unit in cultural, Christian, developmental as well as governmental frames of reference, thus youth appropriate an authoritative voice that addresses the basis for a healthy society. In addressing basic societal concepts, the drama has similar messages as Bjerk found in youth choirs in Evangelical Lutheran Church of Tanzania in the area around Iringa town (2005). Yet, in the Tanzanian choir songs, young people present a new Christian theology in which youth, as youth, have important responsibility to play in society. While youth in Arusha area, in northern Tanzania after initiation performed certain social functions, as did youth in some other societies such as the Herero youth in Botswana (Durham 2000), it is a historical myth that youth in the southern Iringa area were ever assigned roles such as labour force or police of the society (ibid). Hence youth construct a new identity by granting themselves an analogous role to an invented historical memory; a creativity produced during high unemployment among young people and in context of strong notions of unemployed urban youth as a distinct threat to society (ibid). It is in response to this social positioning "youth are creating a new identity, both in their own eyes and in the eyes of the church elders: as warriors fighting modern social ills rather than enemy armies" (ibid: 335). In the Ugandan drama, on the other hand, the younger generation presented themselves as victims of domestic

confusion and mistreatment, and as agents who sought to survive in the streets, yet they only managed to a certain extent (the youngest one died). The young actors demonstrated dependency of the older generation as part of telling them to take more responsibility in providing good conditions for their children. While youth in pastoralist societies with strong tradition of initiation rituals may assign community roles to age groups, such as in the case of Herero and Meru, youth in the agricultural societies of central and south-eastern Uganda are only expected to take on roles within the domestic sphere. The younger generation should obey and assist older relatives as well as work hard to become responsible social persons, whereas successful adults are expected to, in addition to uplifting kin, contribute to community life and development (Whyte & Whyte 1998).

The cultural values of family life is in the drama combined with Christian values of monogamy and prohibition to consult traditional healers and with notions of young people as social beings unable to alter adult behaviour, such as the father taking on additional wife and the mistreatment of the step-mother. This combination of restricted childhood agency and Christian morality set against parents' actions, shapes child labour to be a result of parental failure to provide children proper care and safe upbringing. Nieuwenhuys (2001) argues, based on research among NGO projects working with 'street children' in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, that it is the CRC construction of childhood as a safe space where adults to care-take children at home or at school, which can turn into blame the parental generation for not providing the younger generation such conditions. The gap between the CRC and local notions of childhood are, according to key actors in Ugandan civil society, immense, and the past 15 years implementation of the CRC has merely led to child rights being 'a parallel universe' to local reality (Christiansen and Whyte forthcoming). Yet, in this drama, the youth elegantly integrated Child Right values about parental responsibility for their offspring with 'domestic citizenship' (cf. Das and Addlakha 2001), that is, one could recognize that children have rights and obligations by virtue of belonging within a kinship network. The values, resources and expectations within the domestic arena are realized through relationships with kin, rather than through ones rights as an individual citizen of the state. Family support may thus have to be mobilized; it is not based on a legal convention, but on norms that can be disputed or may be difficult to follow for practical reasons (Christiansen and Whyte forthcoming). The young actors did not challenge the elder authority or the asymmetrical intergenerational relations, rather contrary; they dramatized a testimony about young dependency on the parental generation. In drawing on Christian values, they attested to low morals among parents and fatal consequences of associated behaviour in the suffering of both women, the death of the youngest child, and the husband's recourse to suicide. The performed testimony did not attend to poverty, corruption or other societal ills. It focussed solely on morality requesting parents to change behaviour, possibly the most repeated message during the past decade of substantial HIV prevention based on the 'ABC'. Immediately after the drama had ended with the tabooed act of suicide, the youth presented themselves by singing a song that they behave according to morality. As the youth expressed in the song, it is through faith and friendship that youth attempt to re-strengthen family virtues and unity in the interests of society as whole.

God, government and generations in a time of AIDS

HIV prevention campaigns were introduced some years after the Charismatic message had been spoken across Uganda. The late 1980s was a time where the country had

started recovering 15 years of armed conflict and where the new government could prove its worth by making all sectors in society collaborate to inform about HIV/AIDS. The president had particular interests in working with the Christian leaders, and both the secular and the religious campaigns emphasised abstinence and fidelity rather than condom use. The message of individual behaviour change in relation to sexuality became, for many people, part of the general Charismatic demand to change behaviour in relation to alcohol, marriage patterns, gender and generational relations, cultural customs and practice associated with health, misfortune and social dissonance. For most Christians, Charismatic Christianity represented a refusal of practices that the mission-based churches had sought to alter (such as funeral rites, polygamy, and widow inheritance) or had somehow had to accept (such as polygamy). Rapid spread of HIV, increased mortality rate among young adults, and the HIV prevention campaigns seemed, however, to have led the mission-based churches to further emphasise the link between living a 'proper' Christian life and avoidance of HIV infection. In other words, while the call to both social and individual behaviour change has been part of the historical churches, influx of Charismatic Christianity and emergence of HIV/AIDS appear to have intensified this message.

To day, the young generation is coming of age in a society marked by HIV/AIDS, prolonged poverty, weak and corrupted state institutions, continuous war in the northern region, and alterations in kinship patters of support. For this large young generation, these alterations have led to difficulties to locate assistance to education, land, jobs and moral support within the family networks. In a Ugandan context, where kinship networks form the basic social unit in societies with inadequate public social services, many young people experience to be left on their own. The government has made youth a socio-political category where the role of youth is to comply with the state-based programme elaborated for them with intentions to make youth a transitional stage that empowers the individual to enter an adulthood of material well-being and responsible citizenship free of AIDS. While such state-based program is known to Youth Organisations in the urban centre, to young people in the eastern periphery the state is an unreliable set of institutions that say youth is the future, the leaders of tomorrow, yet does not enable young people to move beyond the social moratorium of youth until tomorrow - or the day after.

Individual empowerment through a relationship with an unequivocal God that may foster self-control and adherence to a set of divine rules that leads to living a good life appears to be a trustworthy option for many young people. The recognition of agency is commonly expressed in the saying that God helps those who help themselves. Young Christians appropriate the HIV prevention message within this broader context of faith and individual determination to continuously make decisions according to making God present in one's life. Yet human nature is ambiguous and it is vital to be among peers who support one's endeavour to not fall prey to temptations. When acting as a group in context of Christian morality young people reinforce cultural conventions about the social positioning of youth and voice critique about the low morality of the older generations in a request to make them change behaviour. While this may be dismissed as young people are just playing (Durham 2005) it is one of the few social spaces for young people to voice critique as youth.

References

Allen, Tim and Suzette Heald
2004   *HIV/AIDS Policy in Africa: What has worked in Uganda and what has failed in Botswana?* In: Journal of International Development, 16, 1141-1154

Bjerk, B.
2005   *'Building a new Eden': Lutheran Church Youth Choir Performances in Tanzania*
        Journal of Religion in Africa 35.3, page 324-354

Bledsoe, Caroline
1995   *Marginal Members: Children of previous unions in Mende households in Sierra Leone* In: Situating fertility. Anthropology and demographic inquiry, S. Greenhalgh (ed): 130-153

Christiansen, Catrine
2005   *Positioning Children and Institutions of Childcare in Contemporary Uganda*
        In: African Journal of AIDS Research 4(3): 173-182

2003   *Reflections on the changing patterns of care for orphans*
        CODESRIA Bulletin Numbers 2,3 & 4: 94-97

Forthcoming-a
        Church-based aid to youth affected by AIDS in Uganda: on connections between church and development
        In: Religious NGOs and the Politics of Development, T. Tvedt & P. Opoku-Mensah (eds.),
        James Currey: London

Forthcoming-b
        When AIDS is part of the (Christian) Family; Dynamics between kinship and religious networks in Uganda In: Social Security in Religious Networks: Changes in meanings, contents and functions, Max Planck Institute, Germany

Christiansen, C. and S.R. Whyte
Forthcoming
        Arenas of Child Support: Interfaces of Family, State and NGO Provisions of Social Security In: From Subject to Citizen: Institutions for Inclusive States, A Dani & A de Haan (eds.), World Bank Publications

Christiansen, C., M. Utas & H. Vigh.
2006   *Introduction* In: Navigating Youth, Generating Adulthoods: Social Becoming in an African Context. Stockholm: Nordic Africa Institute: 9-30

Christiansen. C, M. Daniel & B. Yamba
2005   *Introduction: Growing up in an Era of AIDS* In: African Journal of AIDS Research 4(3): 135-137

De Boeck, Philip & Alcinda Honwana
2005   *Introduction: Children & Youth in Africa. Agency, Identity and Place* In: Makers & Breakers - Made & Broken. Postcolonial Youth in Africa, A Honwana & P De Boeck (eds.),
        James Currey & CODESRIA: 1-19

Deininger, K.
2003   Does the cost of schooling affect enrolment by the poor? universal primary education in Uganda, *Economics of Education* Review 22: 291-305

Demographic and Health Survey. Uganda 2000-20001
2001   Uganda Bureau of Statistic

Durham, Deborah
2005   *'They're Only Playing': Song, Choirs & Youth in Botswana*
        In: Makers & Breakers - Made & Broken. Postcolonial Youth in Africa,
        A Honwana & P De Boeck (eds.), James Currey & CODESRIA: 150-171

2000   *Youth and the Social Imagination in Africa: Introduction to parts 1 and 2*
        Anthropology Quarterly, Vol. 73 (3-4): 113-120

Gifford, Paul
1998   <u>African Christianity. Its Public Role</u>, Hurst & Company: London

1994   *Some Recent Developments in African Christianity*
          In: <u>African Affairs</u>, No 93, pp 513-534

Meyer, Birgit
2004   *Christianity in Africa: From African Independent to Pentecostal-Charismatic Churches*
          In: <u>Annual Review of Anthropology</u>, pp 447-74

Obbo 1993
1993   *HIV Transmission through Social and Geographical Networks in Uganda*
          In: <u>Social Science & Medicine</u>, Vol. 36, No. 7, pp 949-955

Olga Nieuwenhuys
2001   *By the sweat of their brow? 'Street Children', NGOs and Children's Rights in Addis Ababa* In: <u>Africa</u> 71 (4),
          539-557

Parikh, Shanti A,
2004a   *Sugar Daddies and Sexual Citizenship in Uganda: Rethinking Third Wave Feminism* In: <u>Black
          Renaissance</u>, Volume 6, No. 1, 82-107

2004b   *Sex, lies and love letters: rethinking condoms and female agency in Uganda* In: <u>Agenda,</u> 62, Volume 2, No. 1,
          12-20

Prince, Ruth
2006   *Popular Music and Luo Youth in Western Kenya: Ambiguities of modernity, morality and gender relations in the
          era of AIDS* <u>Navigating Youth, Generating Adulthoods: Social Becoming in an African Context</u>
          Stockholm: Nordic Africa Institute: 117-152

Seidel, Geoff
1990   *'Thank God I Said No to AIDS': on the changing discourse of AIDS in Uganda* in:
          <u>Discourse and Society</u>, vol. 1(1): 61-84

Semboya, J. and O. Terkildsen.
1995   *Service Provision under Stress in East Africa. The State, NGOs & People's Organizations in Kenya, Tanzania
          & Uganda.* London: James Currey

Talle, Aud
1995   *Bar Workers at the Border* In: <u>Young People at Risk. Fighting AIDS in Northern Tanzania</u>, K-I
          Klepp, P M Biswalo, and A Talle (eds.), Scandinavian University Press: Oslo, pp 18-30

Utas, Mats
2005   *Victimcy, Girlfriending, Soldiering: Tactic Agency in a Young Woman's Social Navigation of the Liberian War
          Zone* <u>Anthropological Quarterly,</u> 78 (2): 403-430

2003   <u>Sweet Battlefields: Youth and the Liberian Civil War</u> PhD Thesi, Uppsala University, Department
          of Cultural Anthropology and Ethnology

Whyte, Susan Reynolds and Michael Anthony Whyte
1998   *The values of development: Conceiving Growth and Progress in Bunyole* In: <u>Developing Uganda,</u>
          Holger B Hansen & Michael Twaddle (eds.), James Currey, Oxford, pp 227-244

van Djik, Rijk
1992   *Young Puritan preachers in post-independence Malawi* In: <u>Africa</u>, 62, 159-181

Vigh, Henrik
2006   <u>Navigating Terrains of War: Youth and Soldiering in Guinea</u> Oxford: Berghahn Books