



International Research Network Religion and Aids in Africa

Call for Papers

International Summer School “Religion, AIDS, and Social Activism”

Kampala, 5-9 July, 2010

In the roughly twenty-five years since the first AIDS cases emerged in Africa, we have seen that social mobilization has played a major part in addressing HIV/AIDS. Various forms of mobilization, from the community level to the transnational level, have increased public attention to AIDS, facilitated policy development, and led to increased resources to fight the disease. These efforts have ranged from township support group meetings in South Africa to global media events involving Bono. Mobilization has both relied upon and re-enforced individual and collective claims to support, treatment, non-discrimination, the fruits of scientific research, and symbolic recognition. While much of this mobilization has not been explicitly political, it has generally been labeled activism. Activism involves resistance and conflict, intertwined processes that shape public perceptions of disease, personal and collective experiences with AIDS, and AIDS policy. Moreover, such activism has been closely linked to various processes of identity formation. HIV-positivity, gender, age, and religion, for example, may underpin or spawn mobilization. Conversely, mobilization may enhance, change, challenge, or downplay such identities.

For a long period religion was relatively marginal in inspiring or contributing to AIDS activism in most African countries. While scholars of religion in Africa have repeatedly pointed to the important public roles religion played in the transitions to democracy, the role of religious organizations and communities on AIDS seems less clear. Some have been quite active since early days of the epidemic, while others have seemed reluctant to engage with AIDS. This situation has changed dramatically over the past ten years. Yet despite scholarship on AIDS activism,¹ and scholarship on religion and AIDS,² these two arenas of inquiry have not been explicitly linked. The proposed summer school will challenge participants to examine ways that religion, religious identity, and religious organizations engage in activism, as defined above.

¹ See, for example, Patricia Siplon and Raymond Smith. 2006. *Drugs into Bodies: Global AIDS Treatment Activism*. Westport, CT: Praeger.

² See, for example, Becker & Geissler, eds. 2008. *AIDS and Religious Practice in Africa*. Brill.

Religious belief, identity, and organizational structures have been factors mobilizing many Africans to act on AIDS, from Catholic provision of home-based care in Zambia to Muslim *marabouts*-state cooperation on rural AIDS education in Senegal.

The *International Research Network on Religion and Aids in Africa* is proposing a Summer School for **Ph.D.-students** working on these issues. The Summer School provides opportunities to explore new connections between activism, AIDS, and religion in Africa. The school will explore these interrelations with regard to the following issues:

Religion and Resource Mobilization: Strategies and Conflicts

Social AIDS activism is about symbolic recognition, resistance to political power, and access to resources. In fact, social movements and activist groups must generate resources in order to advance their causes. These resources often include money, solidarity and support for their goals, organizational networks, and cultural resources such as prior activist experiences and knowledge about how to organize collective action. Seen that way, resources are crucial in terms of defining the outcomes of activists' struggles. Which resources do religious AIDS activists access and deploy? How is religion involved in mobilizing volunteers? What alliances do churches and other religious bodies create in order to promote their concerns? Do they get into conflict with other activist groups, for instance, over issues of resource diversion? Is resource allocation to religious organizations by states a result of activism and 'contentious politics' or the outcome of states' enlistment (or cooptation) of religious groups into governmental projects?

Religion and the frames of social activism

Collective action frames are essential for creating a shared understanding of social problems within activist circles and for linking their concerns with those of larger populations on whose behalf they mobilize. Frames attach specific meanings to events and issues. The summer school will examine how religious traditions (Christianity, Islam, and African traditional religions) understand activism and AIDS. How do activists with apolitical theologies engage the conflict and resistance inherently involved when one makes claims for AIDS support, treatment, or resources, even if at the local level? Similarly, how might African traditional religions understand activism, given their emphasis on positive communal relations and spiritual balance? While religious organizations utilize the word "advocacy" in their mobilization efforts, they are less likely to use the term "activism" or call themselves "activists." Yet it is known that religious motivations greatly underpin a fair share of what is happening in the sector of AIDS volunteerism and that these activities are informed by religious notions of social justice and charity. What are the larger symbols associated with the activist terminology and how does religion intertwine with such symbols to lead to unique forms of mobilization? Additionally, how does religion incorporate activist vocabularies, styles, and repertoires or develop its own terms and modes of mobilization? How do religious and secular frames on AIDS activism shape collaboration or conflict between the secular and the sacred? How do these frames shape the strategies and tactics that religion incorporates in activism?

Religious Activism and Political Opportunities

Activism's success or failures often depend on the opportunities available in a given political environment. During the past 20 years African governments have taken diverging stances towards AIDS, and broader political circumstances have provoked, encouraged or rendered marginal the engagements of churches and religious groups on this issue. Simultaneously, access to funds has provided religious groups with opportunities for institutional growth, a fact which may put them into conflict with the state. How does religion shape the rights and responsibilities of citizens, in light of such increased state, international donor, and NGO resources for care, support, and treatment? What might be the role of religion in the development of a therapeutic citizenship for HIV-positive individuals? How do religious groups navigate their activities in the context of shifting opportunities and limitations?

Religion, AIDS and Collective Identities

Research has highlighted that activism, religious or otherwise, is never a given outcome of some structural condition. In the same vein, religious mobilization on AIDS does not naturally emerge because religious people have charitable feelings. Activism needs to be 'actively' constructed. In this context, collective identities play a major role; examining collective identities elucidates how acting together makes sense for participants and how activism is sustained over time. The summer school will investigate how religious identity, at the individual and collective levels, facilitates or hampers activism on AIDS. As a point of departure, questions arise about who defines religious identity in the context of AIDS. What is the role of power and representation in such a process? How do individuals formulate claims to support on the basis of religious membership? How might religious identity either urge or discourage activism (or both)? While religion may provide one basis for identity, it is not the only one. Gender, race, ethnicity, class, sexual orientation, HIV status, family, and national citizenship are other examples. Investigating how the intersections among various forms of identity underpin AIDS activism remains a crucial task.

The summer school wishes to address these questions from an interdisciplinary perspective that includes political science, anthropology, sociology, religious studies, and other related fields. More specifically, the interface of religion and AIDS activism provides unique opportunities to integrate the scholarship on religion and cultural change with perspectives from social movement research and transnationalism.

Logistics of the Summer School

The summer school will be sponsored by the *International Research Network on Religion and AIDS in Africa* and hosted by the *Working Group on Social and Political Aspects of AIDS* in Uganda, at Makerere University. It will be held from 5-9 July, 2010 in Kampala, Uganda.

Sessions will involve a combination of in-depth discussions with scholarly experts about their work on AIDS, religion, and activism; sessions in which participants present their own work for discussion; and interactions with religious activists and organizations involved on these issues.

The conveners are working to secure funding for selected applicants' travel and per diem.

Applicants for participation in the summer school should send the following to Amy Patterson (apatters@calvin.edu) and Marian Burchardt (burchardt@wzb.eu) by **October 12, 2009.**

- (1) Current curriculum vitae
- (2) 1 page (single spaced) statement about how the candidate's research agenda fits within the above outlined themes. The statement should clearly link the applicants' current and/or future research endeavors to one or more of the themes. It also should make clear the anticipated benefits of participation for the candidates, his/her personal scholarship, and, if applicable, his/her host academic institution.
- (3) A short (1 paragraph) abstract of work to be presented at the conference
- (4) An estimate of travel costs to Uganda. (Successful applicants may not have all of such costs covered, but the conveners need estimates to make financial plans.)

For more information, contact the organizers:

Amy Patterson, Associate Professor and Chair, Department of Political Science, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, MI, USA, apatters@calvin.edu

Marian Burchardt, Lecturer, University of Bayreuth, Institute of African Studies, burchardt@wzb.eu

Louise Nygaard Rasmussen, PhD student, Centre of African Studies, University of Copenhagen, lmr@teol.ku.dk