



## **Youth Religiosity and Moral Critique: God, Government and Generations in a Time of AIDS in Uganda**

Catrine Christiansen\*

### **Abstract**

This article stresses the centrality of youth questions in Uganda, whereby HIV, religious and political issues are contributing to changes in the societal landscape. The ‘youth question’ has become a very important focus in developmental aids, but its conceptualization still remains ambiguous. It is this ambiguity in the conceptualization of young people, as victims and agents, which informs efforts to involve youth in the work towards preventing the spread of HIV and mitigating the negative impact of AIDS. The article demonstrates that young people largely consent to the lower social positioning of youth as they regard themselves as persons still in the making, and they find this positioning a comfortable zone from which to criticise the older generations for not maintaining family solidarity and providing sufficiently for the younger generation. Based on a drama developed by a Catholic youth group, it shows how youth combine cultural values, child rights and Christian morality to present the selfishness and low morals of the older generations, and themselves, as keepers of morality in the interest of the society as a whole. 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. The concept used in this article tends to define ‘youth’ as a category of social being and social becoming where sexuality is becoming part of political discourse.

### **Résumé**

Cet article met en exergue la centralité de la question de la jeunesse en Ouganda, un pays où la religion et la politique contribuent au changement de la société. La question de la jeunesse est devenue un point très important dans l’aide au développement, mais sa

---

\* Centre of African Studies, University of Copenhagen, Denmark.  
Email: cac@teol.ku.dk

conceptualisation reste toujours ambiguë. C'est cette ambiguïté dans la conceptualisation de la jeunesse comme victime ou agent qui est à la base des efforts qui visent à impliquer les jeunes dans les efforts pour la prévention de la propagation du VIH et la réduction des effets néfastes du SIDA. L'article démontre que les jeunes dans leur majorité consentent à leur position au bas de l'échelle sociale et se considèrent ainsi comme des personnes qui n'ont pas fini de grandir. Ils se cantonnent ainsi dans une zone de confort d'où ils peuvent critiquer leurs aînés pour n'avoir pas maintenu la solidarité familiale et s'occuper suffisamment bien de la jeune génération. Se basant sur une pièce de théâtre jouée par une troupe de jeunes catholiques, l'article montre comment les jeunes combinent les valeurs culturelles, les droits des enfants et la moralité chrétienne pour mettre à nu l'égoïsme et la décadence morale chez les plus âgés, et se montrer eux même comme étant les gardiens de la moralité au profit de la société en général.

Les agences du développement, se basant sur les droits de l'homme, revendiquent le droit des jeunes à prendre part aux actions qui concernent leur vie et leurs droits, leur épanouissement dans des espaces sécurisés de socialisation et le développement de leurs talents. Le concept utilisé dans cet article définit la jeunesse comme une catégorie d'êtres sociaux et socialisables dans un contexte où la sexualité est devenue une partie intégrante du discours politique.

### Introduction

Many institutions in Africa today have units for youth. Governments, for example, have established units within ministries that also deal with gender, sports, or social development, and in countries, such as Uganda, the 'youth' have been allocated seats in parliament and youth councils have become part of the government structure. In religious organisations, especially the Christian ones, youth have their own groups to study the Bible, do music and drama, and generate a small income. Most remarkable, since this has greatly promoted youth in both political and religious institutions, is the recognition by development agencies of youth as a target group for aid and the thereof creation of youth projects. Although governments, religious organisations, and development agencies have paid attention to issues of youth for a much longer time, since the 1980s, these institutions have become much more oriented towards young people. This has made ideologies *for* youth much more visible in the public sphere and given space to ideologies *of* youth within these institutions.

The spread of HIV and the consequences of AIDS have influenced the ideologies *for* youth in East and southern Africa. The epidemic emerged in the 1980s, around the time that the UN ratified the Convention on the Rights

of the Child (CRC) spelling out the particular circumstances, needs, and entitlements of any person below 18 years. Drawing upon the CRC, development agencies emphasise young people's rights to take part in matters regarding their own lives and entitlement to grow up in safe spaces of socialisation and develop skills. The developmental perspective often treats youth as constituting socio-culturally reified and autonomous groups, and, as a consequence, HIV/AIDS projects tend to approach youth as 'a parallel stratum that is somehow unattached from the general social fabric and generational dynamics, and whose calamities can be treated in relative isolation and thus with relative ease' (Christiansen et. al. 2006:18). Most HIV/AIDS projects are implemented through government institutions and civil society organisations such as churches. With reference to the Bible, churches integrate HIV prevention into theological doctrines about sexuality and marriage and hence encourage young people to abstain from sexual activity until marriage and be faithful in marriage. Some churches, or priests, also advice young people to use condoms in order to protect themselves from a life-threatening infection. Human rights and Christian doctrines are rather different frames of reference, yet both of them contribute to the ideological basis of development projects that give information, guidance and material support to 'empower' youth to take 'responsible' actions.

In the context of a sexually transmitted disease, the problematic of illness also feeds into ideologies *of* youth and youth ideology concerning sexuality. This article will attend to how young Ugandans navigate political and religious ideologies *for* youth, especially the ideas of making youth 'responsible citizens' by avoiding HIV infection, and show the importance that young Ugandans place on morality and self-control in their ideologies *of* youth. Based on an understanding of youth as both social *being* and social *becoming*; a position in movement (Vigh 2006), the article will underline that young Ugandans view themselves as persons-in-the-making for whom self-control is a key element in the striving for social becoming. To these young Ugandans, growing up in a society marked by AIDS involves finding ways of abstaining from sex until marriage and/or navigating the ideologies between abstinence only and condom use. Is it better to know how to use a condom in case one cannot abstain 'full time' or would that knowledge make one careless about having sex? Should a teenage boy carry a condom in his pocket to protect himself from infection in case he cannot resist having sex with his girlfriend or will the condom itself tempt them to have sex? Different from the developmental and religious perspectives of youth as a social category somehow unattached from the general societal fabric, young Ugandans stress the importance of social relations to help them 'live responsibly'. Similar to

other young Africans, the Ugandans turn to age-mates, not the older generations, but, different from youth explicitly resisting gerontocratic control (see e.g. van Dijk 1992), the Ugandans express a yearning for engaging with the older generations. According to the young Ugandans, the main reason for not turning to older people, especially the parental generation, is that older relatives are unable or unwilling to support their social becoming. The young Ugandans are not rebellious, they are disappointed – about what they see as neglect of family solidarity and care for the younger generation. The weak social positioning leaves few spaces for the youth to voice criticism, but one such space is interviews with a foreign researcher, another one is Christian youth groups. Based on interview extracts and a drama performed by a Catholic youth group, I will illustrate that young people combine cultural values about generational relations, child rights and Christian morality to present the alleged selfishness and low morals of the older generations and themselves as keepers of morality striving for a better society. Within this Christian context, youth perceive of their agency in religious terms, as it is through faith and fellowship, that they negotiate associational life in their own terms and attempt to re-establish family virtues.

This article draws upon ethnographic research carried out in south east Uganda since 1998, especially four months during 2003-2005 where I studied the patterns of bringing up young people in different settings: rural homes, a rural (Catholic) mission, and two boarding schools in smaller towns. I was particularly interested in the care-taking relations between kinsmen in a society marked by AIDS and in the implications of church-based aid projects providing education for young people affected by AIDS on the beneficiaries' kin relations.<sup>1</sup> The study involved about 70 young people in the range of 12 to 20 years of age, living in a rural area or in a small town, and who received financial support for their education from either relatives or an aid project. A closer look at the informants shows that family members paid the secondary education for 20 young people living at (a rural) home and for 18 young people boarding at a low-cost secondary school in the district centre; whereas aid projects gave vocational education and boarding at a Catholic mission to 21 former 'child domestic workers', and secondary education and boarding at a private school to 10 'orphans'. The data collection consisted of a survey among all the students, 10 group interviews with altogether 34 young people staying at the mission or at the low-cost boarding school, 15 individual interviews, and participant-observation, mostly at homes and at the mission. It also consisted of interviews with project staff, local leaders, parents and grandparents and a survey among 21 elderly people about bringing up young people in a time of AIDS. The main research site is Busia District, and the article also draws on a district-wide mapping of development projects in

2004, including government programmes and the variety of non-governmental organisations, as well as on a mapping of the youth activities in the religious institutions in the district in 2006.<sup>2</sup>

The article will first introduce to the political and religious ideologies *for* youth in Uganda and then show how young people navigate the ideological pluralism on sexual behaviour. It then moves on to the expressions of young people's ideology *of* youth and moral critique of the elder generations. The final section will reflect upon the correspondence between the ideologies *for* youth and the ideologies *of* youth that are created in the interplay between sexuality and sociality in the context of AIDS in Uganda. The key argument is that the ideologies *for* youth approach youth as a social category somehow unattached from the general societal fabric and whose calamities can be treated in relative isolation, whereas the ideologies *of* youth stress that they are firmly embedded in society; dependent upon others and keepers of morality, striving for a better society.

### **Political and Religious Ideologies *for* Youth**

The coming to power of the National Resistance Movement (NRM) in 1986 and the adoption of a new constitution in 1996 brought marginalised groups political recognition. Youth, like women and disabled people, secured seats in parliament and youth councils were instituted at all political levels. In spite of these actions, young people are not important players in Ugandan politics. Instead, the main reasons why politicians attend to youth issues are the demographic facts that 75 per cent of the population is below 30 years of age, and there is an intersection of demography with social problems. This was clear in speeches and interviews presented in the daily newspapers in relation to the International Youth Day 2006. The Ministry of Gender, Labour and Youth had made the theme for the day '*Tackling Poverty Together: The Role of the Youth in Wealth Creation*'.<sup>3</sup> Politicians associated youth with crime, armed conflict, idleness, gambling, prostitution, high unemployment, poverty, and the continual spread of HIV.<sup>4</sup> 'Tackling poverty together' meant that the government would 'empower' young people through appointing role models, creating jobs, modernising the agricultural sector, training youth to create jobs, and providing information about reproductive health and human rights. 'The role of youth in wealth creation' was to comply with the government programme elaborated for them, which would lead to an adulthood featured by material well-being and a society free from AIDS.

The political ideology *for* youth spells out that youth should protect themselves from infection and, if infected, not spread the virus. There is a perception that young people are 'at risk' of infection as both male and female Ugandans become sexually active during their teenage years and sexual

intercourse is the primary path of HIV infection (Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBS) 2007),<sup>5</sup> and, at the same time, young people are 'a risk' to society because if the HIV prevalence continues into the next generation, it will prolong the immense burden that AIDS places at the level of households and family networks as well as at the level of national resources, capacity and productivity.

While youth have been a key target group for HIV prevention campaigns in Uganda, the fight against AIDS has been framed as a task for the whole nation. When the epidemic emerged in the late 1980s, the country had started recovering from 15 years of armed conflict and the new government proved its worth by uniting the people against the new enemy. Also internationally, President Museveni was praised as the first African leader to publicly recognise the epidemic, and it was with strong financial support from national and international actors that the president encouraged all sectors in Uganda to fight against the spread of HIV and mitigate the effects of AIDS (Parkhurst and Lush 2004, Christensen and Janeway 2005). The multi-sector approach in Uganda proved to be successful as the prevalence rate has dropped from about 14 per cent in 1995 to 7 per cent in 2006 (UBS 2007, Parkhurst and Lush 2004).<sup>6</sup> However, in spite of the success, more than 2 million Ugandans have been infected with HIV, 1 million have died from AIDS, and another 1 million are today living with the infection (UBS 2007).

The prevention campaigns began in the 1980s with the slogan 'love carefully', and the Christian denominations joined hands with the secular campaign under the motto 'love faithfully' (Seidel 1990, Allen and Heald 2004). The principal prevention method was the so-called ABC-model: Abstinence until marriage, Be faithful to your partner or use a Condom. Church leaders further moralised this call for the individual to change behaviour by promoting 'A' and 'B', leaving aside the 'C' (see also Gusman 2009). The religious-moral perception of HIV infection applied to both the unmarried and the married, but young people – almost per definition unmarried – became a main target group in faith-based prevention work.

The political will in Uganda to instigate HIV prevention campaigns is well-known, yet it is less known that the campaigns spread across the country at the same time of a religious ideology, which gained tremendous popularity: Pentecostalism. The links between Pentecostalism and understandings of AIDS in Uganda are significant because the HIV campaigns, encouraging individual behaviour change in relation to sexuality, corresponded with the Pentecostal claims to both individual and social behaviour changes. The key message in the HIV campaigns became a part of the Pentecostal request for breaking away from 'cultural' practices in relation to alcohol, marriage patterns, gender and generational relations, as well as to practices associated with death, misfortune and social discord. Pentecostal pastors requested

members to stop cultural practices that the mission-based churches had tried to change (e.g. funeral rites and widow inheritance) or reluctantly accepted (e.g. polygamy).<sup>7</sup> Both the HIV campaigns and the Pentecostal gospel were based on an orientation towards the ability of every individual to control his or her behaviour – to be physically ‘safe’ from HIV infection and spiritually ‘saved’ (Gusman 2009:73). Moreover, the Pentecostal gospel claimed that conversion would enable an individual to control him- or herself. The central tenet of Pentecostal theology is that each individual must accept Jesus Christ as one’s saviour, or, as it is also phrased, every individual must become ‘born again’ (Maxwell 1998:353, Meyer 1998:318). To proclaim salvation is considered an assertion of faith and this ‘second birth’ promises to transcend the human imperfection that is intrinsic in the human condition (Englund 2007), and strengthen the person’s relationship with God. The relationship between the individual and God forms a key for understanding Pentecostal notions that conversion can enable a person to control one-self (see also Christiansen 2009c). In other words, to be ‘saved’ can make one ‘safe’ from sexually risky behaviour.

Pentecostals are known as *Balokole*, which means ‘the saved ones’ in Luganda, and refers to the understanding that conversion to Pentecostalism entails acceptance of Jesus Christ as one’s saviour. Across Africa, Pentecostal Christianity has attracted young people with the message of salvation as a break away from tradition, gerontocracy, and poverty; electronic devices and lively liturgy, global connections, and tight fellowships offering urban migrants a new family (van Dijk 1992, Maxwell 1998, Meyer 1998, Marshall-Fratani 1998, Gifford 1998, Diouf 2003, Gusman 2009). Most Pentecostals in Uganda are young people, but, most young Ugandans are not Pentecostal; they are Catholic or Anglican. In spite of the influence of Pentecostal churches, the religious landscape continues to be dominated by the Roman Catholic Church (about 42 per cent of the population) and the Anglican Church of Uganda (about 35 per cent), with about 11 per cent being Pentecostal, and 12 per cent are Muslim. Youth are however very visible in Pentecostal churches due to a combination of demography (youth make up 75 per cent of the population), organisation (anyone can start a church), and liturgy (lay people take up more visible roles than in church hierarchies with ordained clergy).

Writing on large Pentecostal churches in Kampala, Gusman (2009) describes ‘the Joseph Generation’, the notion of a revolutionary movement made up of young people morally pure and able to reverse the moral ‘corruption’ of the parental generation. Presenting itself as a revolutionary movement opposed to the older ‘corrupted’ generation, the Joseph Generation ‘is a creative way of interpreting the Pentecostal idea of breaking with the past (van 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)' (ibid:68). In the rural east Uganda, there is also a notion that the youth are morally pure and the parental generation is morally 'corrupted', but, as I will illustrate in this article, this notion is shared among young people across the Christian denominations, not confined to Pentecostals, and, more importantly, the youth stress their dependence on, not their independence from, the older generation. Before moving on to the ideologies of youth, let us look into how young people navigate the ideological pluralism on sexual behaviour in a time of AIDS.

### **Moving Between Messages**

When some churches promote abstinence only and other churches encourage condom use, they are giving rise to confusion among young Christians on how to be a good Christian and safe from HIV. Further confusion is caused by different views among clergy and lay leaders in some churches.

As mentioned earlier, I carried out a mapping exercise in order to get an overview of the views on 'appropriate' methods of HIV prevention and of HIV/AIDS related activities in religious institutions in south east Uganda in 2006. In the following, I present one response from each of the main denominations (Catholic, Anglican, and Pentecostal) in a rural parish reflecting the various positions in the local Christian landscape. Responses to how churches encourage young members to avoid infection included the following ones:

We encourage abstinence from sex until when one feels he or 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 lay priest).

We tell the young people 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 (Anglican lay priest).

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 (Pentecostal pastor).

While all churches promote abstinence until marriage, there are diverse views on whether or not young people should be encouraged to use condoms:

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 lay priest).

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 (Anglican lay priest).

We do not encourage condom use for it promotes 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 (Pentecostal pastor).

This mixture of messages brings confusion among young people. Although most Pentecostal pastors promote abstinence only, young Pentecostals hear other clergy encourage condom use, read NGOs advertise condom use in newspapers or participate in some of their activities, and they discuss with friends at school, at work, or in church. As mentioned above, clergy within a church may hold different views on condom use, and, to make matters further complex, the same clergyman may express different views in different situations. During an interview with students in a secondary school, a Catholic female said:

During mass Father (Catholic 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 boys from the youth group talked with Father, I saw that he gave them condoms. I know they also have condoms at the (Catholic) clinic (next to the church). Now, I really wonder what to believe...

The incident presents a priest balancing between church doctrine, poverty, and interests in protecting 'his' young members from HIV infection. When I told the story in interviews with other young people, it spurred discussions about responsibility, self-control, and knowledge. Young informants took positions like the following ones:

The priest has to say that people should not use condoms 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 the 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 one of them (Catholic male).

That is a very bad priest. He is just making everyone confused. 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? (Pentecostal female).

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

According to the former two statements, the priest helps the young males to take responsibility of their life and enables them to 'live and not die' whereas the two latter statements stress that young people get confused and see condoms as an encouragement to 'have sex with the first girl who crosses the road'. The difference is to some extent along denominational lines, since Catholic and Anglican churches tend to take the former position whereas Pentecostal churches tend to take the latter one. The Pentecostal idea that ambiguous messages will make young males go astray is not confined to youth or issues about sexuality.<sup>8</sup> However, as Gusman writes, confusion is a recurrent word' in the discourse of the young Pentecostals and they try to follow 'safe guides' for staying free from AIDS (Gusman 2009:79). Below are some examples of how young Christians in a rural context explain try to 'steer from temptations':

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...If I am patient, God will reward me with much goodness (Pentecostal male)

At school some girls are very smart. They have smart shoes, new styles, and they talk about boyfriends or those men who give them these good things. How can I not want that? Of course I do, but if you get pregnant school is over, if you get AIDS, life has finished before you even started it...They say that if you start having boyfriends it is very hard to stop, so, for me, I ask God to help me not walk along that road...my friend helps me to stay firm (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 the girls together...it helps because when they are there you don't suddenly have sex, you can control...if you are alone with one 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).

The ability to control oneself, to not give in to temptations, is a recurrent theme when talking with young Ugandans about their life situation and their striving for social becoming. For these young people, their personal relationship

with God is key for 'staying firm' and free from AIDS. Yet, as they all describe, desires for material things and physical pleasures make it difficult to 'stay firm with God'. Although conversion ideally transcends the human imperfection that is intrinsic to the human condition, Pentecostals recognise that in practice they are not without fault. It is notable, however, that young Pentecostals (and other young Christians) underline their fears of failure, i.e. not being able to control oneself. This tendency could be related to the widespread notion of youth as a life stage where people are in much need of information, guidance, and material support to live responsibly. Church leaders, NGO staff, teachers, and parents reproduce this notion that young people need guidance and discipline to control themselves, especially in relation to sex.

Although the young Christians accept this ideology *for* youth, I argue that their underlining of fears of failure does not only reflect confusion, uncertainty of themselves or 'flexibility of youth', it reflects a more general critique of the circumstances within which they are growing up: a society marked by poverty, family disunity, weak state institutions, and HIV/AIDS. From the viewpoint of young people, the epidemic is a symptom of the 'moral corruption' of the parental generation (see also Gusman 2009) as is the lack of solidarity between family members. Many young informants express disillusion about absent fathers, mothers caught in strife with co-wives, death of one or both parents, and still relatives do not 'come in' with assistance. Most of the young interviewees said that they only trusted one person who would do everything she could to help: the mother. However, the mother is the principal caregiver, but most women in the parental generation are small-scale farmers unable to give financial support to education, for example. Other family members, who have the financial resources for the younger generation to acquire educational skills that may lead to a salaried income and social mobility, often do not provide what the young people perceive they are morally entitled to (see also Christiansen, Yamba and Daniels 2005). It is in this social context of young people's experience of being left on their own that we should understand their weaving threads about making God present in their lives to safely navigate temptations. Similar to Mats Utas' (2005) research on young people's narratives about navigating social relations during the civil war in Liberia, these Ugandan youth, at one and the same time position themselves as *agents*, responsible for attempting to stay free from AIDS, and as *victims*, exposed to HIV infection due to lack of family unity, mixed messages on HIV prevention, and constrained socio-economic circumstances.

### **Ideology of Youth: Moral Critique of the Parental Generation**

By underlining the notion of youth as victims of circumstances, the young Christians express a moral critique of the parental generation. This critique is a central aspect of the ideology of youth in rural east Uganda and very similar to the discourse of the Joseph Generation in urban Kampala. In this section, I will illustrate that the rural youth – contrary to the urban youth who see themselves as a revolutionary force that can build a Christian country in opposition to the father's generation – emphasise their dependency upon the older generation and thereby place themselves firmly within the society; not as a social category whose calamities can be treated in relative isolation.

In group interviews, young people were very critical towards their own parents, as the extracts below attest to:

My father is polygamous, he has 3 wives and 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).

My mother left when I was still young...my 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 me food, I go hungry...just because you have not worked, you can't eat, and yet in most cases I have spent the day at school...there is no-one I can go to, we migrated from my father's area and the mother is nowhere to be seen (Pentecostal male).

After my father died, they [the in-laws] chased my 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 for bringing it into the home. We [siblings] all went with my mother and try our level best to survive, but these days she is very ill...we don't see them [paternal in-laws] anymore...I don't think they will come until they smell dowry (Catholic female).

Poverty, unstable conjugal relations, 'bad hearted' step-mothers, and rivalry between co-wives over the scarce resources of a man who took on wives in the hope of prosperity, but failed to produce anything but mouths to be fed, are common elements in young people's blame on the parental generation for creating dissonance and carelessness between relatives today. Young informants told unexpectedly many stories about older relatives whom they suspect wish them to fail, want to cause them harm, chased them away from their home, or took actions towards killing them. As Bledsoe (1995) has argued from Sierra Leone, children are symbols of adult relations and hence taking care of other people's children are barometers of the relations between the children's parents and the care taker. The 'usual suspects' are stepmothers and other kin in the paternal lineage with whom one competes

over resources. In this context, becoming 'saved' is about divine protection from one's own weaknesses as well as from other people's thoughts and actions.

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. AIDS seems to be a catalyst for domestic conflicts and expose weak relations of social security among kin, which young people take as evidence that 'today, everyone is on his or her own', 'there is no family unity, even clan elders just eat' and that the parental generation is 'wicked and spoiling our lives'. The problems at home and within the extended family make young Ugandans speak of nostalgia for a lost family solidarity – not, as in Kenya, of a lost modernity (Prince 2006). From a youth perspective, the older relatives are selfish, greedy and have low morale; as stated powerfully in the above quotation: 'when they smell dowry, they will come'.

While the weak social positioning of youth does not leave much space to express criticism, young people can give their critical voices public expressions within church contexts. Christian churches are organised into a number of fellowships that meet during the week for prayers, practice or practical work. Youth groups are common fellowships, like the choir, and sites for keeping young people busy with education such as Bible study, life skills or debate as well as with leisure activities, such as sport, music, and drama. These groups can form space for linking youth with local society, the nation-state and Christianity (Bjerk 2005).

Catholic youth groups usually perform a drama for the congregation at the end of a school term. It is a tradition that displays youth are socially positioned to entertain (Durham 2006), and, on a side note, the continuous intertwining of education with religion in Uganda. The priest or another adult leader guides the youth group and may suggest the theme for the dramas. In Lumino Parish, a strong Catholic parish bordering Lake Victoria, for example, the church had external funds to educate 'child domestic workers' and, as part of the church educating the community about children's rights (following the UN Convention on the rights of the child), the priest assigned the youth group to make a drama within the theme. About 20 of the 300 beneficiaries were boarders at the Catholic mission and with time they became part of the youth group. The young people developed a two hour drama, which they performed for about 500 people from the congregation and the local community.

The drama opened 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. The children remain in the care of the step-mother. The new wife goes to a traditional healer to buy 'love magic' (herbs) that will make the husband fall so much in love with her, that he will not notice that she mistreats his children. The father is blinded and the children are miserable. The children steal money from him, and they leave home to live in the streets surviving on casual work. The youngest child dies. The new wife then becomes ill from the 'love magic' and she goes to a medical doctor, but he cannot diagnose the illness. The woman is seriously ill and the distressed husband takes her to a pastor, who advises him that the woman will be cured from the witchcraft if he proclaims salvation and apologise to the first wife. The man becomes saved and writes a letter apologising to the first wife and the children. Then he kills himself. After this dramatic end, the young people sang a song about saying 'no' to boy/girlfriends and only saying 'yes' to friends who will help them prosper.

The audience laughed at the scenes where the second wife tricked the husband with love magic and whenever the traditional healer – portrayed as a filthy, uneducated, and greedy man – was on stage. When the child died in the street and, later on, when the man killed himself, the audience was completely quiet. Afterwards the audience applauded the youth for a powerful performance.

In this drama, the youth elegantly integrated children's rights about parental responsibility for their offspring into 'domestic citizenship' (cf. Das and Addlakha 2001), that is, one could recognise that children have rights and obligations by virtue of belonging within a kinship network. The values, resources and expectations within the domestic arena are realised through relationships with kin, rather than through one's rights as an individual citizen of the state. Family support may thus have to be mobilised; 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 2008). By drawing on cultural values of family unity, Christian values of monogamy, and developmental ideas of child protection, the young people dramatised that low morals among parents can have fatal consequences on both children and adults. The husband's recourse to suicide was particularly powerful because there is a taboo against suicide in the local culture and it is considered a grave sin in Roman Catholicism. The young actors did not challenge the parents' authority, but by focusing the drama solely on morality, not social ills like poverty or corruption, the youth conveyed a clear request that parents must change behaviour – possibly the most repeated message at a time of AIDS and Pentecostalism.

The youth ended the performance with a song presenting themselves as morally upright and, as they expressed in the song, it is through faith and friendship that young people try to 'stay firm' and strengthen unity in the interests of society as a whole. By addressing the basis of a healthy society through cultural values, Christian concepts, development and government priorities, the youth appropriate an authoritative voice. The drama can thus be seen as giving young people authority similar to what Bjerk has found in Lutheran youth choirs in Iringa town in southern Tanzania (2005). In the Tanzanian choir songs, however, young people present a new Christian theology in which youth, as youth, have important responsibility to play in society. While youth in Arusha, northern Tanzania, after initiation performed certain social functions, as did youth in other pastoralist societies like the Herero in Botswana (Durham 2005), 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). The young people today are thus constructing a new identity by granting themselves an analogous role to an invented historical memory; a creativity produced during a time of high youth unemployment and in a context of strong notions that unemployed urban youth is a risk to society (ibid). According to Bjerk, 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 youth presented themselves as victims of domestic confusion and mistreatment, and as agents who tried to survive in the streets, but, they only managed to a certain extent as the youngest one died. In the agricultural societies of south east Uganda, young people are expected to take on roles within the domestic sphere; they should obey and assist older relatives as well as work hard to become responsible social persons, but there are low expectations to youth contributing to community life and development (Whyte & Whyte 1998). And rather than presenting themselves as opposed to the older generations, like their urban age-mates in the Joseph Generation, the drama was like one long testimony that young people depend upon the parental generation.

### Conclusion

As I have shown, the spread of HIV and the consequences of AIDS have influenced the ideologies *for* youth in Uganda. Institutions of government, development and religion have formulated rather similar positions, which tend to treat youth as constituting socio-culturally reified and autonomous groups that are somehow unattached from the general social fabric, and whose calamities can be treated in relative isolation. From the perspectives of these powerful institutions, youth should be 'responsible' citizens, who

protect themselves from HIV infection and, if infected, do not spread the virus. The compatibility between the political, developmental, and religious ideologies *for* youth have been particularly visible in the HIV campaigns encouraging behaviour change, and these campaigns have fostered one dominant ideology *for* youth in the public sphere: young people should keep themselves physically 'safe' from HIV infection and spiritually 'saved'.

While young Ugandans, perhaps particularly those who are active Christians, agree with this public ideology, they also formulate counter positions criticising the parental generation for low morals and the spread of the epidemic. A second central aspect of the ideologies *of* youth is that youth are not isolated from the social fabric. This has stimulated a counter position in the shape of an urban movement, in which youth oppose the parental generation and see themselves as the builders of a Christian society; a new Uganda. This article has described a second, and perhaps more unique, counter position, as youth in the rural east do not rebel against the older generations; instead, they express a yearning for especially the parental generation to better support their social becoming. Being very much disappointed with the parental support, many rural youth turn to churches for faith and fellowship, and they perceive their agency in religious terms, seeing fellow Christians as the friends who may help them re-establish family virtues.

## Notes

1. For a discussion on the dynamics between kinship and religious networks in families affected by AIDS in Uganda, see Christiansen 2009a.
2. The mapping exercise in 2004 covered 645 'projects' (a broad variety of actors e.g. well-funded NGOs, farmer groups, women groups, youth organisations, and burial societies) in the entire district, whereas the mapping exercise in 2006 covered 385 religious institutions (about 365 Christian and 20 Muslim ones) in five out of ten sub-counties in the district.
3. The theme was a slight reformulation of the UN theme for the day: 'Tackling Poverty Together: Young People and the Eradication of Poverty'
4. See the two daily newspapers, *New Vision* (pages 33-40) and *Daily Monitor* (pages 9-12 and 25-27) on 12 August 2006.
5. It is notable that every third girl between 15 and 19 years of age is pregnant or a mother (UBS 2007).
6. For a distinction between three phases of the epidemic in Uganda see Gusman 2009.
7. For a discussion on the ways in which a blend of Christian doctrines, public health messages, and cultural practices have also informed the emergence of a new social position for widows, see Christiansen 2009b.

8. During research on connections between faith and health seeking behaviour in 1999, Pentecostal pastors spoke against the use of herbal medicine from the pulpits and when visiting patients. However, when I asked the pastors how come plants, growing in the world that God created, can be sinful, they all said that it is not sinful to pick herbs, mix and drink them in tea. The prohibition was based on a notion that if they allowed Christians to pick and use herbs, Christians would go to 'traditional healers' who mix herbs with ancestral spirits. The pastors thus prohibited universal use of herbs because they perceived Christians could not distinguish picking herbs in the nature from buying at herbalists. In practice, most Pentecostals picked herbs or received from friends when ill, and such practice was only testified as sinful when the symptoms did not disappear.

## References

- Allen, T. and S. Heald, 2004, 'HIV/AIDS Policy in Africa: What has Worked in Uganda and What has Failed in Botswana?' *Journal of International Development* 16 (8):1141-1154.
- Bjerk, B., 2005, 'Building a New Eden': Lutheran Church Youth Choir Performances in Tanzania, *Journal of Religion in Africa* 35(3): 324-354.
- Bledsoe, C. H., 1995, 'Marginal Members: The Problem of Children of Previous Unions in Mende Households in Sierra Leone', In S. Greenhalgh, ed., *Situating Fertility: Anthropology and Demographic Analysis*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 130-153.
- Christensen, A. and P. Janeway, eds, 2005, *Faith in Action: Examining the Role of Faith-Based Organizations in Addressing HIV/AIDS*. Washington DC: Global Health Council.
- Christiansen, C., B. C. Yamba, M. Daniels, 2005, 'Introduction: Growing up in an Era of AIDS', *Africa Journal of AIDS Research*, 4 (3): 135-138.
- Christiansen, C., M. Utas, H. Vigh, 2006, 'Introduction: Youth (E)scapes', In C. Christiansen, Mats Utas and Henrik E Vigh, eds., *Navigating Youth, Generating Adulthood: Social Becoming in Contemporary Africa*, Uppsala: Nordic Africa Institute: 9-30.
- Christiansen, C. and S. R. Whyte, 2008, 'Arenas of Child Support: Interfaces of Family, State, and NGO Provisions of Social Security in Uganda' In A. A. Dani, and Arjan de Haan, eds, *Inclusive States. Social Policy and Structural Inequalities*,. Washington DC: The World Bank: 295-320.
- Christiansen, C., 2009a, 'When AIDS is Part of the (Christian) Family: Dynamics between Kinship and Religious Networks in Uganda', In C. Letloff-Grandits, Anja Peleikis, and Tatjana Thelen, eds, *Social Security in Religious Networks: Anthropological Perspectives on New Risks and Ambivalences*. New York: Berghahn Books: 23-42.

- Christiansen, C., 2009b, 'The New Wives of Christ: Paradoxes and Potentials in the Remaking of Widow Lives in Uganda', In F. Becker, and P. Wenzel Geissler, eds, *Aids and Religious Practice in Africa*. Leiden: Brill: 85-116.
- Christiansen, C., 2009c, 'Conditional Certainty: Uganda Charismatic Christians Striving for Health and Harmony', in L. Haram, and Bawa C. Yamba, eds, *Dealing with Uncertainty in Contemporary African Lives*,. Stockholm: Nordic Africa Institute: 48-71.
- Diouf, M., 2003, 'Engaging Postcolonial Cultures: African Youth and Public Space', *African Studies Review*, 46 (1): 1-12.
- Durham, D., 2005, 'Just Playing: Choirs, Bureaucracy, and the Work of Youth in Botswana', in A. M. Honwana, and Filip de Boeck, eds, *Makers and Breakers: Children and Youth in Postcolonial Africa..* Oxford, Dakar: James Currey, Codesria: 150-171.
- Englund, H., 2007, 'Pentecostalism beyond Belief: Trust and Democracy in a Malawian Township', *Africa* 77(4): 477-499.
- Gifford, P., 1998, *African Christianity: Its Public Role*, London: Hurst & Company.
- Gusman, A., 2009, 'HIV/AIDS, Pentecostal Churches, and the "Joseph Generation" in Uganda', *Africa Today*, 56 (1): 67-86.
- Marshall-Fratani, R. (1998). 'Mediating the Global and Local in Nigerian Pentecostalism', *Journal of Religion in Africa* 28(3): 278-315.
- Maxwell, D., 1998, 'Delivered from the Spirit of Poverty?': Pentecostalism, Prosperity and Modernity in Zimbabwe', *Journal of Religion in Africa* 28 (3): 350-373.
- Meyer, B., 1998, 'Make a Complete Break with the Past.' Memory and Post-colonial Modernity in Ghanaian Pentecostalist Discourse', *Journal of Religion in Africa* 28(3): 316-349.
- Parkhurst, J. and L. Lush, 2004,. The political Environment of HIV: Lessons from a Comparison of Uganda and South Africa', *Social Science and Medicine* 59(9): 1913-1924.
- Prince, R., 2006, 'Popular Music and Luo Youth in Western Kenya: Ambiguities of Modernity, Morality and Gender Relations in the Era of AIDS', in C. Christiansen, Mats Utas and Henrik E Vigh, eds, *Navigating Youth, Generating Adulthood: Social Becoming in Contemporary Africa..* Uppsala: Nordic Africa Institute: 117-152.
- Seidel, G., 1990,. 'Thank God, I Said No to AIDS: On the Changing Discourse of AIDS in Uganda', *Discourse & Society* 1(1): 61-84.
- Uganda Bureau of Statistics, 2007, 'Uganda Demographic and Health Survey 2006', Kampala: Uganda Bureau of Statistics.
- Utas, M., 2005, 'Victimcy, Girlfriending, Soldiering: Tactic Agency in a Young Woman's Social Navigation of the Liberian War Zone', *Anthropological Quarterly* 78 (2): 403-430.
- van Dijk, R., 1992,. 'Young Puritan Preachers in Post-Independence Malawi' *Africa* 62: 159-181.

- van Dijk, R., 1998, 'Pentecostalism, Cultural Memory and the State: Contested Representations of Time in Postcolonial Malawi', in R. Werbner. *Memory and the Postcolony*, London: Zed Books: 155-181.
- Vigh, H., 2006,. *Navigating Terrains of War: Youth and Soldiering in Guinea-Bissau*, New York: Berghahn Books.
- Whyte, S. R., and Michael A. Whyte, 1998, 'The Values of Development: Conceiving Growth and Progress', in H. B. Hansen, and Michael Twaddle, *Developing Uganda..* Oxford: James Currey: 227-244.

