

# Christian Fundamentalisms and Women's Rights in the African Context: Mapping the Terrain

## Christian Fundamentalisms and Women's Rights in the African Context: Mapping the Terrain

Jessica Horn

### Introduction<sup>1</sup>

"If Pentecostal churches continue to grow in numbers and activism, the long-range political impact of Africa's vibrant Pentecostal community will become increasingly difficult to ignore." *The PEW Forum on Religion and Public Life*<sup>2</sup>

"The time has come for us as a women's movement and as feminists to talk about our non-negotiables and the fact that we should not let the church define our rights." *Solome Nakaweesi-Kimbugwe, Ugandan feminist and human rights defender*<sup>3</sup>

This case study explores the dynamics of Christian fundamentalisms in sub-Saharan Africa and the impacts of fundamentalist doctrine, advocacy and mobilization on women's rights in the African context. It aims to begin to elucidate the ways in which activists understand and define Christian fundamentalisms, highlight the agendas and some of the impacts of fundamentalist activity on women's rights in different contexts, understand the strategies used by fundamentalists, and consider possible counter-fundamentalist strategies that can be pursued. The case study focuses on fundamentalism in Pentecostal and charismatic Christianity, as well as fundamentalist actors in mainline Protestant churches. The working definition of religious fundamentalism used here is a morally conservative ideology based on, and justified by, a particular interpretation of scripture that seeks to promote and establish itself as hegemonic. While there is a great deal of debate among African feminists and other progressive activists around the growing impact of Christian fundamentalisms, there has been comparatively little research and written analysis on the agendas, trends and mobilizing tactics of Christian fundamentalist actors. In this context, this case study aims to contribute to the process of mapping the terrain and identifying potential areas for further research and strategic action.

This case study draws on interviews with seven African activists and academics working on and/or affected by Christian fundamentalisms,<sup>4</sup>



as well as the relatively limited written material on contemporary Christian fundamentalisms in Africa. Religious belief and practice across African countries is dynamic and diverse. However there are also many common strands, aided by the fact that Christianity is global in nature, and by the fact that fundamentalist clergy actively network with, learn from, and replicate discourses and mobilizing strategies applied by fundamentalists in other countries, in particular by the Christian right in the United States.

Assessing the perspectives of the activists and academics interviewed, my conclusion here is that religion is a *vehicle* rather than the root cause of fundamentalist doctrine. In the African context, religious discourses and institutions have been used opportunistically by politicians and extreme conservatives in civil society as a means of pushing their political, ideological and economic agendas on a range of issues from staying in power, to becoming wealthy, to maintaining legal and social gender inequality. The new wave of African Pentecostalism and its charismatic derivatives in particular have proved a useful tool to this end because of four key characteristics: a mass popular base (crucial for mobilizing political pressure and votes); a theology that focuses on and celebrates prosperity and accumulation of capital (and can thus facilitate both wealth accumulation and lucrative corruption); a lack of regulation given the absence of a centralized religious authority and weak non-profit oversight mechanisms in the respective countries; and the lack of a hermeneutic tradition and/or critical debate about scripture, both of the latter two characteristics enabling the doctrine to spread largely unquestioned.<sup>5</sup> For politicians, the draw in aligning themselves with Pentecostal and charismatic churches and their influential pastors is the sheer number of people involved in the churches, which constitutes an important base of votes. The fact that the constituencies of these churches are predominantly economically disenfranchised women and men with limited access to information or social and political capital means that they can also be drawn to the church through promises of improvement in their material conditions.

### A Note on Naming Christian Denominations

There is a lack of consistency and clarity in the naming of the different Christian religious movements and institutions in Africa in both the academic literature and in public discourse. This is due in part to the staggering variety of permutations of Christian churches in contemporary Africa, and the fact that many of these churches are non-denominational, grafting elements of different Christian and non-Christian traditions as needed. It is common for people to use the terms “born again,” “Pentecostal” and “evangelical” interchangeably when referring to the growing strands of evangelical Protestantism.

Evangelism, or the practice of proselytizing with the aim of conversion, is in fact practised in many forms of Christianity, and not exclusively by charismatics or indeed moral conservatives. In this case study I have chosen to use the terms Pentecostal and charismatic, guided by the following definitions:<sup>6</sup>

**Pentecostalism:** a Christian religious movement that places special emphasis on the direct personal experience of God. Most denominations believe in the practice of baptism of the Holy Spirit (which bestows powers including prophecy, miracles and faith healing onto believers), evidenced by speaking in tongues. Pentecostalism is said to have originated in the teachings of U.S. Midwestern preacher Charles Parham and then African American preacher William J. Seymour, who sparked the Azusa Street Revival in Los Angeles in 1906.<sup>7</sup>

**Charismatic:** a form of Christianity emphasizing a direct relationship with God and manifestations of gifts of the Holy Spirit, such as miracles, prophecy, healing powers and speaking in tongues. It grew out of Pentecostalism but then spread to other denominations including mainline Catholic and Protestant churches. Many African charismatic churches are non-denominational.

### Fundamentalisms in Context

“Religion [in Africa] is a marketplace; it is about what works.” *Dora King*<sup>8</sup>

### The Birth and Growth of Christianity in Africa

In order to understand the dynamics of Christian Pentecostal and charismatic fundamentalisms in Africa, it is critical to understand the history and contemporary dynamics of Christianity in the region. It is not possible to provide a comprehensive history of a highly diverse religion across an enormous region here. However, I have attempted to highlight key trends that help to situate contemporary Pentecostal and charismatic Christianity and the fundamentalist actors within them.

Christianity was first brought to Africa in the 1st and 2nd centuries, resulting in the establishment and spread of Coptic and Orthodox churches in the North and Horn of Africa. However it was Portuguese explorers and colonists who laid the foundation for the spread of Christianity in sub-Saharan Africa in the 15th century. Both Catholic and Protestant Christianity spread across sub-Saharan Africa from the 16th to 19th centuries through European colonization and missionary activity led by Europeans and later their converts, including evangelized slaves. European mission schools educated generations of African elites in Christian theology, and supported evangelical efforts across the

continent, which gained momentum in the 1900s as Europeans deepened their political and economic hold on the continent. The mainline Protestant churches, including the Anglican Church, established themselves firmly in British colonies, and have remained as influential actors in post-independence African states. The political stance of these churches and their clergies are varied, and include both outspoken, progressive clergy as well as extreme conservatives. The conservative movement among Anglicans is increasingly supported by Christian right allies in the United States seeking to undermine the power of progressives within the Anglican Communion, using debates on same-sex marriage and the ordination of gay clergy to foster dissent. An example of this trend is the move by three parishes in the Diocese of Los Angeles to move to join the Anglican Church of Uganda in a protest over their bishop's support for the rights of gay Christians.<sup>9</sup>

In the early 20th century, largely in response to the Eurocentric focus of mainstream European churches, a wave of African religious leaders began to found their own churches, focusing on "indigenizing" Christianity and creating syncretic forms of worship that incorporated elements of African ritual. These institutions were later collectively called African Independent Churches (also known as African Instituted Churches or AICs). The AIC movement gained momentum in the 1930s and grew in the years leading up to independence from colonial rule. Academics have argued that the "Africanization" of Christian ritual practice drew many into the churches and provided for familiar ritual practices and forms of social relationships.<sup>10</sup> AIC churches include the Zionist Churches<sup>11</sup> in southern Africa (introduced to South Africa in the early 1900s by American missionaries from the Christian Catholic Apostolic Church) and the Kimbanguist Church, founded by Congolese Baptist catechist Simon Kimbangu in 1921 and now found in neighbouring Zambia and other countries where Congolese followers have emigrated and settled. AICs are organized formally under the Organization of African Instituted Churches (OAIC), founded in 1978 in Cairo with a registered headquarters in Nairobi, Kenya. The OAIC has a formal relationship with the World Council of Churches. The group sees its mandate very much as an affirmation of African autonomy, valorizing "African" models of community, redistribution and knowledge as central to the ways in which this strand of Christianity operates.<sup>12</sup>

Pentecostal churches appeared in Africa in the early 20th century, soon after their birth in the United States. The early churches included the now "mainstream" Assemblies of God and the Apostolic Faith Mission of Africa.<sup>13</sup> While North Americans and Europeans brought this new form of belief and worship to Africa, it was African evangelists who quickly took it up. Indeed as early as 1914 the Liberian Pentecostal preacher William Wade Harris travelled across the west coast of Africa

on a conversion mission.<sup>14</sup> However, the surge in Pentecostal and other charismatic churches emerged in the 1970s, spurred in part by American evangelists targeting Africa as part of their agenda of saving souls. They expounded a form of prosperity theology that proved appealing to Africans dealing with economic disenfranchisement in the post-independence era. Without an orthodoxy or centralized governance structure, Pentecostalism and charismatic Christianity also presented a platform for Africans themselves to found churches and begin to fashion new forms of worship and church structures. Unlike earlier waves of African Christian leadership drawn from social elites, the new Pentecostal and charismatic churches have been led by people from across the class spectrum, including lower socio-economic classes. As pastors have amassed wealth, some have also focused on expanding their infrastructure of influence among African elites, including founding universities<sup>15</sup> and drawing high-ranking government officials and business leaders into their congregations.

There are a number of African mega-churches (defined as having services attended by over 2,000 people) founded by Pentecostal and charismatic pastors, with regional and international branches, and church buildings that can accommodate thousands to tens of thousands of worshippers.<sup>16</sup> Some have close links to U.S. evangelical Protestants such as Benny Hinn of Benny Hinn Ministries and Rick Warren of the Saddleback Church.

The new wave of African Pentecostalism and charismatic belief is characterized by three key elements:<sup>17</sup> the idea of needing to be born again in order to enter the Kingdom of Heaven (the process of consciously accepting and declaring Jesus as one's saviour); the baptism of the holy spirit (the process of the holy spirit descending into the body of a believer and giving gifts of the spirit, evidenced by speaking in tongues); and the ritual of deliverance (the exorcism of satanic demons). Many academics trace the origins of deliverance to colonial missionaries, who characterized the rituals and spiritual traditions they encountered in Africa as demonic and associated with the realm of the devil. This idea has been revived, reinterpreted and expanded by African Pentecostal and charismatic pastors who argue that all of Africa's ills, including poverty, disease and dirt, stem from the fact that Africa's forbearers practised demonic traditions. They claim that anyone who has participated in traditional rituals (including initiations, harvest rituals and traditional healing), or whose ancestors have participated in these rituals, has been contaminated by demons. The only way to expel the demons is to go through deliverance. Deliverance rituals often involve a physical purging, including vomiting and frothing at the mouth, and can take many years to complete, depending on the nature of the demons believed to inhabit a person. An additional characteristic of a number

of African Pentecostals and charismatic churches is the embrace of prosperity theology. Whereas the older churches (including AICs and older Pentecostal churches) characterized Christianity as a religion of the poor, valorizing Jesus as a saviour of the poor and respecting austerity, the new-wave Pentecostals put forward the idea that God wants all believers to prosper and valorizes a focus on wealth accumulation as well as conspicuous displays of personal assets, particularly on the part of the clergy. It promotes, in essence, a form of Christian consumer capitalism.

Many of the Pentecostal and charismatic churches active in Africa today are founded by Africans. Mega-churches tend to be transnational in character, with pastors establishing bases in their local areas and spreading to neighbouring countries or even to Europe and North America. Unlike most of the mainstream churches, many Pentecostal and charismatic churches acknowledge that women can also receive gifts of the spirit, including powers such as prophecy and healing. Some believe that women can be ordained as pastors. Thus while the majority of Pentecostal and charismatic leaders are men, there are also a notable number of women emerging as church leaders, including in husband and wife teams.<sup>18</sup> These churches tend to be conservative in their views on the family and sexuality, although not all necessarily subscribe to extreme conservative or fundamentalist views. However their presence in both urban and rural areas and their diverse class membership provides a mobilizing infrastructure that can and is being used to turn a mass base in favour of conservative political and social ideals.

Over the past 30 years, there has been a rapid expansion of Pentecostal and other charismatic churches across Africa, with a corresponding growth in their membership base as Table 1 suggests. In Zimbabwe, South Africa, Ghana, Democratic Republic of Congo, Angola, Zambia and Uganda, Pentecostals and charismatics make up over 20% of the total population. Pentecostals and charismatics make up around 56% of the Kenyan population.<sup>19</sup> In Nigeria, Africa's most populous nation, 30% of the population belongs to Pentecostal or charismatic churches, while 60% of Protestants and 30% of Catholics attend charismatic branches of their mainstream churches. Nigeria has also been a principal exporter of the new brand of charismatic Christianity. Revivals and faith healing sessions organized by Nigerian pastors are now a ubiquitous presence in many African cities as well as European and North American cities where Africans have settled.<sup>20</sup>

**Table 1**<sup>21</sup>

Religious Affiliation	%
Africa's Christian population (2005)	46.0
Africa's Pentecostal population (2005)	12.0
African Christians who are Pentecostal (2005)	16.6
African Christians who are Pentecostal (1970)	4.8
African Christians who are Pentecostal (1900)	<1.0

In terms of the gender breakdown in the membership of these churches, most of those I interviewed indicated anecdotally that women make up a large proportion of Pentecostal and charismatic congregations.<sup>22</sup> Targeted church outreach to women has facilitated this. Many Pentecostal and charismatic churches organize prayer groups and other worship and community-service activities that target young and older women and encourage them to outreach to others.<sup>23</sup> Statistics from Kenya, Nigeria and South Africa also suggest that Pentecostal and charismatic women are more likely to be involved in women's groups than women belonging to other Christian denominations.<sup>24</sup> In Uganda, women's rights activist Solome Nakaweesi-Kimbugwe notes that many young women are joining Pentecostal and charismatic churches. She explains that "young women are trying to redefine themselves, and go to the churches to seek [a] sense of identity... Young women are worried about their careers, new relationships ... [For them,] the church is a place to find solace. Christian fundamentalist churches [are] very active in universities and recruit there."

While Pentecostal and charismatic beliefs have gained currency at a popular level, they have also made notable entries into state policy in Africa. Indeed, the politicization of personal religious conviction has been obvious and public in a number of countries. The often-cited example is of Frederick Chiluba (president of Zambia from 1991-2002), a self-identified born again Christian who declared Zambia a Christian nation in 1992 (despite the presence of other religions, including a range of traditional religious institutions). Anti-secularist views regarding the state are common among African Pentecostals. The PEW Forum estimates that 48% of Kenyan Pentecostals, 58% of Nigerian Pentecostals and 45% of South African Pentecostals believe in the need to legally declare their countries Christian.<sup>25</sup> In addition to domestic lobbying, foreign Christian actors, particularly conservative evangelists from the United States with the financial influence to secure meetings with African heads of state and senior officials, are also encouraging changes in national policies.<sup>26</sup>

## A Compelling Theology: Spirit, Hope and Money

“Everybody wants to prosper... and Swaziland has [the highest rate of HIV in the world] so people would want to be healed.” *Nonhlanhla Dlamini*<sup>27</sup>

“People jump on the bandwagon if it meets their needs.” *Dora King*<sup>28</sup>

The growing appeal of Pentecostal and charismatic churches is often explained by the fact that they function on a discourse of hope that explains personal disenfranchisement and offers the enduring possibility of salvation. As King suggests, in the post-conflict context of Sierra Leone, “[Pentecostalism] offers a worldview that explains and diagnoses the conditions in which most [people] find themselves.”<sup>29</sup> All of those interviewed for this case study spoke about the realities of poverty, HIV and AIDS, and other crises that have left people feeling helpless, desperate and in need of a belief that change is possible. The churches also provide a sense of community, through celebrations and fun activities like youth camps, and by incorporating music and dance into worship. The methods of worship, including all-night prayer meetings, healing sessions and speaking in tongues, provide catharsis and a release from the worries of the week. Many of the mega-churches provide outreach services for marginalized women and for children, similar to those provided by progressive NGOs. Equally important however is the discourse of prosperity theology, a powerful draw for people grappling with economic disenfranchisement and difficulties in meeting the daily needs of their families. Churches preaching a gospel of prosperity promote wealth accumulation, provide hope for the congregation to overcome their material poverty through prayer, and provide links into business networks within the church community. Finally, the churches themselves have proven to be lucrative ventures for pastors who may not have had the extensive political or economic capital needed to start a mainstream business. As Dora King comments, “if you are an entrepreneur and have the gift of the gab, then you can start a Pentecostal church!” Through the interviews I was not able to ascertain whether conservative discourse was itself a pull factor for church attendance. However, I would hazard to argue that once people become a part of these churches, they are bombarded with an ultra-conservative discourse of morality which many adopt wholesale as part of “belonging” to a moral community that is meeting their material and emotional needs.

While moral conservatism is a hallmark of Pentecostal and charismatic churches, Dora King argues that in the context of Sierra Leone, some of these churches are providing a space for women to articulate agency, however circumscribed. Unlike many mainstream churches, women are “empowered” to have a direct relationship with God and can receive gifts of the Holy Spirit, including significant powers such as prophecy and healing. Women can also be ordained and start their own churches. As a

result, some women are actively using the church as a space for personal empowerment.

## Pentecostals, Charismatics and Fundamentalism in Africa

### Defining Religious Fundamentalism

In the study of religion, fundamentalism is commonly defined as a literal and uncritical belief in scripture. Within Christianity, it is attributed to an early 20th century Protestant movement in the United States that sought to uphold the “fundamentals” of the Christian faith, including the infallibility of scripture and the precedence of religious teachings over science.<sup>30</sup> In popular parlance however, the term has acquired a more politicized meaning and is used to refer to Christian actors who may not necessarily identify as fundamentalist in theological terms. The African activists and academics interviewed in the course of this research defined religious fundamentalisms in the following ways:

“A belief that the Bible is inerrant, that there can be no contradiction in the scripture, and where it may exist, [it] can be reconciled.” *Dora King, scholar of religion*

“[It is] the exaggerated and quite irrational belief in, and conformity to, doctrine. [Fundamentalists] have a tendency to believe that their own religion is the only right one and use it to define everyone else’s being.” *Hope Chigudu, women’s rights activist*

“A set of narrowly defined beliefs (that are not necessarily in the Bible) of charismatic leaders that are then turned into a doctrine that a group of people follow. Religious fundamentalism, it seems, also assures followers that it is through that particular path that they are going to get to heaven.” *Winnie Sseruma, HIV and AIDS activist*

“[The practice of] institutionalizing religion and making it an apparatus to monopolize and manipulate the socio-political and economic climate to their advantage. This translates to control of sexualities to suit their agenda... They present their model as the only correct model and deny, [define as] taboo, [or] criminalize any and every other model.” *Dorothy Aken’Ova, women’s and sexual rights activist*

“[It is] the narrow view of religious movements, [the] unreasonably strict order and application of religious [doctrine].” *Rev. Rowland Jide Macaulay, clergyman and sexual rights activist*

“Fundamentalism is doing anything to an extreme and not having any room for debate or dialogue. Their view of the world is [the] only one view.” *Solome Naakawesi-Kimbugwe, women’s right activist*

All definitions emphasize a doctrinal rigidity and lack of space or tolerance for debate, diversity, dissension and critique. In her definition, Aken’Ova links this explicitly to the process of politicizing religion, using it as a tool to advance a particular ideological or material agenda. Others imply this in the responses they gave to questions regarding how Christian fundamentalists are having an impact on women’s rights.

## Resource Mobilization

Without a centralized national or global fundraising structure, these new brands of Pentecostal and charismatic churches are, for the most part, funded by their congregations. This is particularly the case for the marginal and non-denominational churches. The construction of church buildings, financing of community outreach activities, and the salaries of church clergy are all paid from these offerings. Pentecostal and charismatic churches commonly require church members to declare their monthly income and then give 10% of this income to the church (a practice known as “tithing,” referenced in the Old Testament) as a minimum contribution. Driven by prosperity theology, pastors can demand significant offerings in exchange for the promise of God multiplying one’s wealth. It is common practice in these churches to require that followers give paper money rather than coins, regardless of individual economic circumstances.<sup>31</sup> It is also common to have multiple collection rounds during church services and for the pastor to call on the congregation to step up and present increasingly large donations. The larger churches also raise money through revivals, often held in stadiums, mega-church buildings or other large venues, where entrance fees are charged. In addition, and in keeping with prosperity theology, members who feel that a pastor’s prayer has resulted in a miracle may give significant cash or in-kind donations to the church.<sup>32</sup>

Faith-based groups fall under non-profit or charity tax laws, and as such they do not pay tax on revenues. Anecdotes from the interviews suggest that there is a general lack of regulation of the income received by Pentecostal and charismatic churches, particularly among those that are not affiliated to a religious governing body. In Sierra Leone, some Pentecostal churches have formal boards that register the money taken in collections and decide on the distribution of those funds across the church’s activities, including into the salaries of the clergy.<sup>33</sup> This system is clearly open to manipulation, given that anyone (including relatives) can serve on church boards and given that there is no

centralized authority monitoring conflicts of interest or the incomes and expenditures of these institutions.

It is hard to draw accurate conclusions about the nature and extent of external funding of Christian fundamentalist activity across Africa, largely because there has been relatively little research and documentation on this, and because the donors themselves tend to give anonymously or in ways that are difficult to track. From the interviews it would seem that the most common origin of external funding is from institutions in the United States that support the growth of conservative Christianity and an ultra-conservative stance on issues of the family and sexuality. There is evidence to suggest that the U.S. Christian right and U.S. Christian fundamentalists are providing targeted financial support to key African clergy and churches in both the mainline and charismatic Protestant traditions.<sup>34</sup> This support has focused on pushing a homophobic legal agenda, using the issues of sexual orientation and same-sex marriage, which are already contentious in the church and society, as a way to gain political and popular leverage. African feminists and progressive women’s rights activists have identified this trend as a growing concern given that the conservative push on sexual orientation is part of a broader agenda to re-entrench the heterosexual nuclear family, with all the implications around issues of women’s rights to divorce, reproductive choice and sexual autonomy.

Alongside support from private and faith-based donors, there is also evidence to suggest that the U.S. government under the administration of George W. Bush (2001-2009) supported a number of ultra-conservative religious actors in Africa through its HIV and AIDS funding program launched in 2003, the President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief or PEPFAR. The program was widely criticized by women’s rights and health advocates for its conservative ideological stance that included restrictions on using funds to support sex workers and requirements that large proportions of the funds for education and prevention be directed toward abstinence-based programming.<sup>35</sup> The political nature of some of the relationships formed through this funding is evident. For example, the Makerere Community Church in Uganda, a student-focused Baptist church, runs an abstinence-based HIV and AIDS program which allegedly received PEPFAR funding during the Bush administration. During the 2004 U.S. presidential elections, the church’s influential pastor Martin Ssempe ordered students attending the church to fast and pray for George Bush’s victory in the polls.<sup>36</sup> Although the PEPFAR program is now under review in the Democrat-led Obama administration, the impact of years of support for conservative faith-based groups is still being felt.

## Christian Fundamentalisms and Women's Rights

"With the War on Terror, America has tried to label Muslims as more backward, etc., but for me in the work that we do about liberating women, about choice and autonomy, the most dangerous ones are the Pentecostals." *Solome Nakaweese-Kimbugwe*

While Christian fundamentalists have varying degrees of leverage and organizational capacity across African countries, the impact of their discourses and active advocacy in undermining women's rights in Africa can indeed be mapped. The impact is most evident in countries such as Uganda, Kenya and Nigeria where Christian fundamentalist actors are either directly linked to, or are members of, national governments and have been able to consolidate formal political power bases.

Broadly speaking, one of the main impacts of Christian fundamentalist discourses on African women's rights has been the reinforcement and re-popularization of a heteronormative, marriage-normative, submissive model of womanhood. The focus of moral sanction is almost exclusively on women's bodies and sexuality, including issues of reproductive choice, sexual orientation and expression, sex work, and comportment and dress codes. Within the churches, women are generally discouraged from wearing "inappropriate clothing."<sup>37</sup> Strict controls on women's sexual and reproductive choices are enforced in church-based institutions. In Nigeria, Covenant University (a private Christian university, founded by the mega-church Winners' Chapel) caused controversy in 2007 by introducing a policy of compulsory HIV and pregnancy testing prior to graduation. The policy was revoked following challenges by human rights groups and national regulators.

The following anecdote cited by Hope Chigudu<sup>38</sup> provides insight into the ways the charismatic discourses on sexual morality and gender are received and interpreted by church members themselves. She quotes a woman participant in a workshop on HIV and AIDS, held in a mining town in Zimbabwe, who raised her hand to speak about "women who dress in a provocative manner" to "attract our husbands":

If they are raped and get pregnant it is their fault; they asked for it. These women are murderers. They should be killed. Such women are abhorrent to God. If any woman kills a baby, born or not born, we shall mobilize for her to be sent away from the village and never step anywhere near our church. God is on our side, we who believe and trust in him. These women, they will all burn in hell, eternal furnace ... We are living in the end time, when the Son of God will return ... The righteous will enter heaven; the sinners such as the prostitutes in our midst will be condemned to eternal hellfire.

In some instances, Christian fundamentalists work in collaboration with cultural fundamentalists and cultural fundamentalist discourses to reinforce the moral weight of their arguments. This has been clearest around issues of human rights and sexual orientation, which have been vigorously defended by African feminists, LGBTI rights activists and vocal supporters in other human rights movements. The phrase "un-African and un-Christian" has become a rallying cry for politicians across the continent in their efforts to introduce homophobic legislation or censor lesbian and gay rights activism. Interestingly, the colonial and Northern missionary origins of Christianity in most of Africa are often ignored in favour of a characterization of "African" morals and traditions as Christian morals and traditions.<sup>39</sup>

In the realm of state policy, all those interviewed noted that Christian fundamentalists almost always target issues of women's bodily integrity and autonomy. In Uganda for example, Pentecostal churches mobilized their congregations to sign petitions against the ratification of the African Union Protocol on the Rights of Women as a protest against its provisions around reproductive health and rights.<sup>40</sup>

This raises the question of why Christian fundamentalists focus so heavily on issues of women's rights. Those interviewed are unequivocal in their assessment that the sexism of Christian fundamentalist doctrine in Africa is simply an extension of an attempt to maintain patriarchal control and power in all domains. For Nonhlanhla Dlamini, Swazi fundamentalist churches forward a sexist doctrine "because as a country [Swaziland is] highly patriarchal, and for quite some time, men have enjoyed the benefits of ... a patriarchal culture and they don't want to let go." Commenting on individual fundamentalist pastors in Uganda, Solome Nakaweese-Kimbugwe notes that "we are dealing with chauvinists who are using the state to advance their own interests." To Rev. Rowland Jide Macaluay, there is no difference between patriarchal discourses and Christian fundamentalism. He comments that "in my view, [religious fundamentalism] is an extension of unnecessary domination of women and marginalized groups such as gays and lesbians." Hope Chigudu adds that women themselves are a crucial constituency and membership base for the churches, and that their subjugation is necessary for the success of those churches. She notes that "a submissive woman makes a better follower and is a pillar to the building of the Christian movement." Dorothy Aken'Ova points out that women's rights issues "are an easy rallying point for other fundamentalisms. They always find this a common ground and trade off women's rights in exchange for other interests."

## Reinforcing Impunity on Violence against Women

Some of the most explicit examples of the use of Christian discourse to undermine women's rights are in the legitimization of violence against women by clergy and politicians aligned with Christian fundamentalist ideas. This legitimization takes a number of forms. The discourse of men being God-appointed heads of their households is used by some pastors to justify domestic violence and marital rape. Speaking about Swaziland, Nonhlanhla Dlamini notes that "one of the things our religion is teaching is that once you are married, you are automatically consenting to sex so there is no reason to say no, whatever the situation." She describes the ways in which pastors excuse domestic violence by preaching that "if your husband is abusive it means that you have not prayed enough... You have got to pray, you have got to fast, and if you do that honestly and truthfully then the Lord will answer you." Hope Chigudu<sup>41</sup> describes the narrative of domesticity that frames women's identities: "The role of women in Christian fundamentalist homes is generally well defined: wife, mother and homemaker. Often, [women] are not allowed to work outside the home and are vulnerable to abuse [that is] condoned, or at best dismissed, by the clergymen they may ask for help."

Support for a norm of submissive womanhood is shared by conservative women clergy and not limited to men. For example, Pentecostal pastor Jessica Kayanja of Girl Power Ministries in Uganda advises women through her website: "The first ministry ever given to women was marriage. The greatest spiritual help that you can ever give your husband is unconditional agreement. The husband is the head of the house and as a wife you should submit to his direction. Quit nagging and complaining and resort to prayer in times of disagreement."<sup>42</sup>

The use of religious discourse to legitimize domestic violence has also occurred in the realm of government policy. During parliamentary debates on the introduction of domestic violence legislation in Zimbabwe in 2006, Timothy Mubhawu, MP for the opposition Movement for Democratic Change, made a presentation in which he stated, "I stand here representing God the Almighty. Women are not equal to men. This [Domestic Violence Bill] is a dangerous bill, and let it be known in Zimbabwe that the rights, privileges and status of men are gone."<sup>43</sup> In Uganda, Christian groups joined Muslim organizations in lobbying Parliament to reject the draft Domestic Relations Bill in 2005, which contained legislation against marital rape, polygamy, female genital mutilation and bride price.<sup>44</sup>

Hope Chigudu points out that pastors in many churches in Zimbabwe are excusing rape by characterizing it as a sign that the rape victim is being called by God to be born again. She comments that, "when a woman is raped, she is told that her rape might be the means that God

will use to bring her to him." In their interviews, two activists referred to cases of pastors using their authority to claim that God is working through them in requiring that young women have sex with them, as part of rituals of deliverance or faith healing.

There are also examples, however, of Pentecostal and charismatic churches actively opposing selected forms of violence against women, in particular "harmful traditional practices" such as female genital mutilation (FGM). In Sierra Leone, there is vocal opposition to FGM within Pentecostal and charismatic churches. FGM is practiced by the majority of ethnic groups in Sierra Leone as part of initiation rites into secret societies and as an integral aspect of the passage into normative womanhood. To Pentecostals, the ritual of cutting the genitalia is a form of blood sacrifice and signifies a "point of contact" where satanic demons are able to enter and possess the person being cut. It should be noted that the opposition to FGM does not necessarily derive from a commitment to gender equality, but rather a concern to end all forms of traditional ritual that are construed as "demonic." While not premised on support for women's bodily integrity as such, the end conclusion of the argument against FGM has attracted women who can use religious justifications to avoid the perpetuation of this form of violence.<sup>45</sup>

## Rallying Hate and Homophobia

Advancing homophobia and introducing or strengthening legal restrictions on same-gender sexual activity and marriage has become a key target and rallying point for Christian fundamentalists in Africa across denominations. Since the mid 2000s, efforts have been underway in Uganda, Nigeria, Rwanda and Burundi to introduce harsh laws against same-gender relations and to ban same-sex marriage. Christian clergy such as charismatic Pastors Martin Ssempe and Stephen Langa in Uganda and Anglican Archbishop Peter Akinola in Nigeria have been vocal proponents of this legislation, in partnership with key politicians. The arguments against homosexuality as "un-African" and immoral are invariably accompanied by an affirmation of conservative "family values."

There is anecdotal evidence to suggest that homophobic physical and psychological abuse also takes place in churches, although research has yet to be conducted in this area. A Ugandan lesbian activist recounted to me an experience in her church where the pastor called on her to come to the front of the church, saying that he could see in her a spirit dressed as a man that needed to be exorcized. He and a number of other male clergy proceeded to strip her naked, burn her clothing, and then perform a "laying on of hands," touching her between her legs and on her breasts. This was of course a form of sexual assault as well as homophobic

violence (and, one could argue, cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment) that went completely unchallenged by the congregation.

While the homophobic agenda has implications for both women and men, it remains a key concern for women's rights activists and indeed has become a battleground for African feminists and progressive women's organizations.<sup>46</sup> Individual feminists and feminist organizations have been among the most vocal in the region in arguing for and defending sexual rights, including choice of partner. They have also been directly targeted in the form of personal attacks and censorship from fundamentalist clergy and associated state actors.<sup>47</sup> In addition, the conservative religious backlash on sexual orientation forms part of a broader strategy to re-entrench the heterosexual nuclear family as normative, with all the problematic implications around women's autonomy in marriage, rights to divorce, reproductive choice and sexual autonomy overall.

### Roadblocks in Tackling HIV and AIDS

A third arena that has been systematically targeted by Christian fundamentalists is the issue of HIV and AIDS. All African countries have been affected by the HIV and AIDS epidemic, and in countries in eastern and southern Africa with high prevalence rates, almost everybody has a friend or family member who has been infected with HIV. As mentioned above, the need for solace, support and hope in the face of HIV has driven many people into Pentecostal and charismatic churches. However, fundamentalist clergy have also used HIV as an opportunity to entrench moral arguments around appropriate sexuality. Those interviewed commented on the fact that Pentecostal and charismatic churches tend to preach abstinence until marriage and frown on condom use in the context of marriage, regardless of the realities of married people's sexual lives.

The anti-condom stance is problematic for married women who either suspect or know their husbands are HIV-positive. Coupled with the discourse of men's God-given role as the head of the household, discouraging condom use undermines married women's ability to either prevent or live positively with HIV. Swaziland, for example, has the highest rate of HIV infection in the world. However, despite knowing about and being affected by this, many pastors continue to preach against condom use within marriage. They argue instead for the importance of women serving their husband's sexual needs, regardless of whether this may result in new HIV infections or secondary infections. Nonhlanhla Dlamini explains that "if you are sick [i.e., HIV-positive], the pastor says that you must pray to God to heal you and make you feel better, so that then you can satisfy your husband sexually, because that is one of your main responsibilities."

The belief in faith healing has proved devastating in the context of HIV and AIDS, where Pentecostal and charismatic pastors are calling on HIV-positive people in the congregations to either avoid or stop taking their anti-retroviral (ARV) medications. One of the activists interviewed lost a relative to premature death because the family member followed a pastor's guidance to abandon ARV medication. This story is not uncommon. Nonhlanhla Dlamini explained the argument behind this, saying that "[HIV-positive people on anti-retrovirals] are told that you can't combine God with something else. If you are taking treatment then it means that you don't trust the power of God. You have got to stop taking the treatment and see the word of God working in you." While both women and men are called on to give up their medication, it is probably true that in practice more women are affected by this given the fact that HIV infection rates are higher in women<sup>48</sup> and that more women than men attend Pentecostal and charismatic churches.

The responses of Christian fundamentalist groups in Africa to HIV and AIDS cannot be divorced from global HIV and AIDS policy and financing, in particular the policy and funding of the George W. Bush administration and its President's Emergency Program for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR). In its first phase (2003-2008) and with oversight of the Bush administration, PEPFAR channelled money to faith-based institutions, programming and responses, and emphasized a conservative Christian moral discourse around sexuality, including promoting abstinence-only programs and heteronormativity. A number of researchers have uncovered explicit links between U.S. government funding and changes in national HIV and AIDS policy in Uganda.<sup>49</sup> This may well be set to change under the Obama administration, with both the president and the new national policy lead on HIV and AIDS, Dr. Eric Goosby, stating an intention for a "pro-evidence" and less ideological approach to HIV and AIDS response in PEPFAR's second phase (2009-2013).<sup>50</sup>

### Fundamentalisms in the "Gender Sector"

It is clear that Christian fundamentalists, particularly from Pentecostal and charismatic churches, have an anti-feminist agenda and are having an impact on women's rights in different countries. However in the course of this research I had both formal and informal discussions that pointed to the fact that there are also a number of actors within the gender equality sector who are members of these churches and have yet to critique their beliefs, particularly around issues of sexuality and sexual and reproductive autonomy. What was once a very secular culture of mobilizing around gender equality, rights and development in Africa is increasingly becoming framed by religion. It is now common practice in many African countries for meetings on women's issues to be prefaced by a prayer (usually Christian despite the presence of people from other faiths).<sup>51</sup> The emergence of religion in previously secular spaces of mainstream women's organizing and the selective use of Christianity to block discussion on sexual and reproductive

rights can in part be explained by a lack of conceptual clarity and political commitment to feminist principles that has come with the “professionalization” of activism via NGOs and the creation of the gender sector. The “NGO-ization” of the sector has meant that there are now many people working on women’s rights and gender equality who neither are necessarily progressive nor necessarily believe in the legitimacy of women’s autonomy as a human right. Platforms such as the African Feminist Forum, a regional network of individual feminists, have tackled this issue head-on by articulating membership criteria that include respect for sexual diversity and for sexual and reproductive choice, while also making space to build solidarity across and regardless of sexual identities.<sup>52</sup> This position has also been upheld and developed in affiliated national feminist forums in Nigeria, Uganda and Senegal.<sup>53</sup>

### Consolidating Christian Fundamentalist Power: The Case of Uganda

From the interviews, it was evident that Christianity has taken on different forms in different countries. Politicized fundamentalist doctrine has similarly attached itself with varying degrees and varying levels of effectiveness in different national contexts. Three of the activists interviewed were familiar with the Ugandan context and together built up a picture of the ways in which Christian fundamentalists have embedded themselves in institutions of formal political power and decision-making.

Christian fundamentalisms in Uganda have grown under the regime of President Yoweri Museveni, with the sheer duration of Museveni’s rule (now over 20 years) allowing a remarkable consolidation of Christian fundamentalist power in key institutions including the government and the state-run Makerere University. Museveni took power in 1986 with a left-leaning set of colleagues schooled in African socialism at university and in their rebel training in the “bush” in Tanzania while preparing to liberate Uganda from the regimes of Idi Amin Dada<sup>54</sup> and Apolo Milton Obote.<sup>55</sup> Uganda was and still is, legally speaking, a secular country. However, it is increasingly framed by the president, key members of parliament (MPs) and religious leaders as a “Christian nation” despite the presence of a range of religions practised by Uganda’s citizens. While Museveni is said to have been “born again” as a young man, progressive Ugandans note that his more recent vocal embrace of Pentecostal Christianity has deliberate political ends, aimed at sustaining a popular voting base and, at least during the George W. Bush administration, at enhancing relations with the United States as a major bilateral donor, trading partner and necessary ally in Uganda’s foreign policy and domestic development agenda.

Once lauded for his forthrightness in tackling HIV and AIDS in the 1990s, including his active promotion of condoms, Museveni made a “U-turn” in 2004 to embrace the policy of “abstinence until marriage.”<sup>56</sup> This policy shift came only a year after the PEPFAR initiative was launched, with its heavy focus on abstinence-based prevention. President Museveni has also publicly expressed his homophobia, affirming the criminalization of homosexual practice and supporting the 2005 constitutional amendment to ban same-sex marriage, referencing Christian morality as justification. He has also given public encouragement to Ugandan clergy for their activism against the recognition of gay clergy and same-sex marriages in Anglican Communion, framing homosexuality as “Western decadence.”<sup>57</sup>

The first lady, Janet Museveni, is a staunch Christian and a vocal defender of conservative Christian values. She became involved in HIV and AIDS activities in the 1990s through private efforts in NGOs, and later through the Office of the First Lady. Janet Museveni claims to have received a calling from Jesus to run for political office, and was elected to Parliament in the 2006 general elections; in 2009 she was appointed Minister of State for Karamoja Affairs by the president.<sup>58</sup> In her work as an official spokesperson on HIV and AIDS, Janet Museveni has championed “abstinence until marriage” education, led thousands of girls and young women in a “virginity parade” and called for a nationwide “virgin census” in 2004.<sup>59</sup> A portion of the PEPFAR funding received by the Ugandan government was channelled through her office to HIV and AIDS programs that target youth with messages about abstinence until marriage. Billboards co-sponsored by USAID and the Office of the First Lady promoting abstinence have been erected nationwide.<sup>60</sup> Privately, Janet Museveni and her daughter Patience Museveni Rwaboogo run their own charismatic church with a congregation drawn from the Ugandan political and business elite.

Another key player is Minister of Ethics and Integrity (former State Minister for Information) Dr. James Nsamba Butoro. Butoro has been a key actor in banning events organized by Ugandan feminists, in particular the progressive women’s rights NGO Akina Mama wa Afrika. This includes the banning of a local staging of the play *The Vagina Monologues* in 2005 when he was minister for information. Support for the ban was received from 18 influential church leaders who united under an informal coalition for “morality, ethics and integrity in Uganda.”<sup>61</sup> Butoro also ordered the banning of a workshop in 2008 on the human rights of sex workers organized by Akina Mama wa Afrika in partnership with the Open Society Institute of East Africa and Open Society Sexual Health and Rights Program. He commented to the media that “Uganda [has] made a decision that homosexuality, prostitution and those things are not our way of life. Anyone who violates them

really will deserve what they get.”<sup>62</sup> As part of his ministerial role, Butoro is responsible for matters relating to the regulation of religious institutions. However, he has for the most part ignored abuses within the religious sector. When asked by a local journalist whether the government should do more to control economic abuse in Pentecostal churches, he responded that “the issue of accountability should be left to the congregation” and that “it is important that the government respect religious institutions because they are doing commendable work in the country. We serve the same constituency...”<sup>63</sup>

Another influential player is Pastor Martin Ssempe, founder of both the Makerere Community Church (based at Uganda’s largest government university) and the Campus Alliance to Wipe Out AIDS, which targets university students. He has made vocal statements against condom use, questioning their reliability and even symbolically burning and praying over a box of condoms.<sup>64</sup> According to a Human Rights Watch investigation into activities of the church, “[staff said that] the mission of the church ... was to train youth at elite universities today to replace leaders in secular governments with Christian fundamentalists. Staff members said that Ssempe received considerable financial support from U.S.-based churches and American evangelicals.”<sup>65</sup> Researchers from Human Rights Watch also claim that he and Janet Museveni have links to ultra-conservatives in the U.S. Congress.<sup>66</sup> In tune with the statements of Minister Butoro, Pastor Ssempe frequently appears in the national media to comment on activities of women’s rights groups and to call for government sanction of their work. During the controversy around *The Vagina Monologues*, he read the entire original play privately and then read sections of it in the media as evidence of the moral degeneracy of the play and its Ugandan organizers. He has also made public attacks against individual feminists, questioning their moral standing and personal characters. The moral rigidity of fundamentalist actors like Pastor Ssempe is not without its double-standards or public critique. In the wake of the banning of *The Vagina Monologues*, Sarah Mukasa remarked ironically, “... someone called up one of the TV stations to ask the ‘good’ Pastor Ssempe why his church is littered with condoms every time he has night prayers. I have never seen a man look as pitiful as did that man.”<sup>67</sup>

Policymakers, fundamentalist clergy within Uganda, and U.S. Christian fundamentalists have co-strategized in the past decade to tighten policy and legislation against sex work and homosexuality, and to crack down on activists defending full equality and the rights of these marginalized groups. In 2005 the Ugandan Parliament agreed to introduce legislation banning marriage between people of the same gender. Influential pastors such as Rick Warren of the Saddleback Church<sup>68</sup> have met with Ugandan political leaders to voice their support for homophobic policies. In March 2009 homophobic U.S. evangelicals<sup>69</sup> and the Ugandan Family

Life Network (led by Pentecostal pastor Stephen Langa) co-sponsored a workshop entitled “Seminar on exposing the homosexual agenda,” which aimed to build momentum among church leaders and within government to introduce harsher legislation against homosexuality and against activists who defend LGBTI rights.<sup>70</sup> The organizers also met with politicians to encourage the development of tighter legislation. In partnership with Pastor Martin Ssempe, they instigated a media witch-hunt, including sponsoring a “formerly gay” Ugandan to identify gay and lesbian individuals and spread false information in the media about alleged gay “recruitment” practices and western financing. This led to the arrests of a number of people for alleged homosexual acts. The Family Life Network also encouraged mass anti-gay mobilizations culminating in the request that Parliament draft new legislation. A private members bill, entitled “The Anti-Homosexuality Bill” was tabled by MP David Bahati in the Ugandan Parliament on October 14th 2009. The bill forwards the argument that tougher legislation against sexual acts between people of the same gender is needed as a means of preserving the traditional family and upholding public welfare. The bill proposes the death penalty for some categories of homosexual sex, states that Uganda must withdraw from all international human rights treaties and conventions that support sexual rights and the rights of gay people, mandates extradition for Ugandan citizens facing trial for “homosexual acts” abroad, and criminalizes those who fail to “report” people performing homosexual acts. It also criminalizes all institutions (including NGOs and private businesses) that support equality for LGBTI people.<sup>71</sup> When it was tabled, the bill received vocal support in Parliament from Minister of Ethics and Integrity Butoro. Although at the time of writing the bill is still under review by the Ugandan Parliament, the extreme tone of its content nevertheless provides an indication of the extent of legally sanctioned homophobia that is sought by fundamentalist actors. The emphasis on criminalizing advocacy for LGBTI rights points to an agenda of controlling the actions of progressive civil society, and suggests a broader goal of silencing progressive voices, not least in the lead up to a controversial presidential election in 2011.

### **Mobilizing and Advocacy Strategies of Christian Fundamentalists**

While Christian fundamentalism has played out in a variety of ways across Africa, fundamentalist groups apply a number of common strategies, which are summarized here.

Christian fundamentalists have focused on building a comprehensive communications infrastructure, including TV channels, radio stations, newspapers, websites and blogs. The communications infrastructure

also includes popular culture such as gospel music. At a local level, this infrastructure also includes leafleting, billboards and rallies to draw people to attend revivals. Church members are themselves a central resource in disseminating messages, as suggested by Hope Chigudu:

They also have many volunteers. In Harare, we woke up one day and every tree, electric pole, etc. was all “decorated” with anti-abortion campaign posters; metal plates which could not be removed were used. They seemed to have worked the whole night. Right below my office is an anti-abortion metal plate nailed to a beautiful tree.

In some countries, Christian fundamentalists have made a direct and deliberate entry into formal party politics, giving them greater leverage over policy and decision-making on matters affecting women’s rights and autonomy.

Mobilizing women themselves against women’s rights policies has been an important tool in countries where Christian fundamentalists have targeted state policy. This includes the examples from Uganda and Zimbabwe cited earlier where women have been mobilized to lead rallies against the introduction of new protective laws or to speak out against other women and women’s rights activists. Withholding or giving partial, biased information to the women involved is central to this strategy.

True to the syncretic tradition of African Pentecostal and charismatic religion, fundamentalists have also made strategic appeals to cultural and national identity as a way of validating their ideas. With the growth in membership, Christian fundamentalists have also had success in making Christian religious practices normative, to the extent that they are becoming a regular sight in supposedly secular spaces. An example is the aforementioned practice of opening NGO meetings and workshops with Christian prayers in many countries, including Kenya, Nigeria, Uganda and Sierra Leone.

## Strategies for Resisting Christian Fundamentalisms

### Resistance by Progressive Activists

Those interviewed made a number of useful suggestions in terms of strategies to counter Christian fundamentalisms, some of which they are already employing. However, it is evident that the decentralization and sheer number of fundamentalist Pentecostal and charismatic preachers and churches across Africa makes it a tremendously complicated set of discourses and actors to tackle.

To begin, there is great difficulty in holding a set of institutions and discourses to account when they themselves do not have a regulatory authority or a centralized governance system. African governments that have the authority to regulate deliberate misinformation or abusive practices in civil society institutions, including churches, have yet to make any real efforts in this direction (for example, by sanctioning pastors who call on church members to abandon their anti-retroviral medication<sup>72</sup> or by prosecuting cases of sexual abuse within churches). This may be due to the fact that government officials are themselves sympathizers and members of these churches or, more pragmatically, because they fear losing support from the voting public if they take a stand perceived to be against the church. However there has also been very little mobilization to date by women’s rights activists to hold their governments to account for enforcing policies around the regulation of religious institutions, or for taking action in cases of individual or systematic abuse by church representatives.

In many cases fundamentalists have been able to rally women against women’s rights by selectively interpreting scientific and policy information. In response, providing comprehensive, accurate information and space for dialogue for these women is one direct way to counter this. For example, feminist activists in Uganda have used information to tackle misconceptions around the Domestic Violence Bill by calling a meeting with women who protested the legislation on religious grounds to explain its full content and implications.<sup>73</sup> The Ugandan Feminist Forum, a standing forum of individual activists, has also incorporated discussions on aligning Christian beliefs with feminist principles and on learning from the progressive tradition in Christianity, as part of encouraging Christian members to engage their prejudices. In Swaziland, the women’s NGO Swaziland Action Group Against Abuse has started to engage clergy in Pentecostal and charismatic churches, providing them with training on violence against women and HIV and AIDS, including basic counselling skills and accurate information regarding prevention and treatment.

In terms of constituency-building, there is a need to reach out to young people, in particular young women, in ways that resonate with and support their own concerns and development. Solome Nakaweesi-Kimbugwe comments that “young women have already been ‘groomed’ by these [fundamentalist] churches. As a women’s movement we are not doing enough to reach out to them, to nurture them, and build their understanding and leadership.” Nonhlanhla Dlamini notes, as an activist and as a concerned member of society, that “we have a responsibility in our young children to instil the change in them ... but [recognizing] that ... they look to their parents at role models. Children are looking at these men as their role models and their behaviour is different from what they are teaching us.”

Challenging fundamentalisms from within religious discourses is another strategy, using progressive interpretations of scripture and supporting charismatic clergy who hold progressive views about women's rights and gender equality. Dora King argues that if there is to be a pro-feminist movement in Christianity, it is most likely to come from Pentecostals given that theirs is one of the few denominations that has allowed women to be ordained and that acknowledges the possibility of all women to have a direct connection to God and receive gifts of the Spirit. However, she and others interviewed note that the lack of a hermeneutic tradition in Pentecostal and charismatic churches means that their congregants and leaders are unlikely to engage in broad-based critical reflection or debate on religious teachings. As Winnie Sseruma comments, "many members of these sects do not believe they are part of a fundamentalist sect because they spend a disproportionate amount of time praying and not enough time reflecting. Many have been told that anyone who doesn't think like them is wrong."

Not all of those interviewed agree on the usefulness of the term "religious fundamentalism" as an organizing strategy. On the one hand, some feel that being able to name the phenomenon has been a critical step in being able to address it. Hope Chigudu for example explains that the power of the term lies in the fact that "I am able to name what I see and by naming it, [I'm] able to address it or lobby. Until it was named, I had not been able to study it the way I have." For Dorothy Aken'Ova, the term has been a useful tool in helping activists "to strategize effectively for our activist work." She also notes that "patriarchy has been a very useful term too because religious fundamentalism is fueled by patriarchal values."

On the other hand, some activists feel that the term "fundamentalism" is potentially divisive and not helpful in encouraging members of Christian fundamentalist churches to reflect critically on their beliefs. Winnie Sseruma, who engages a range of faith-based groups in her work on HIV and AIDS, comments: "I do not particularly find the term religious fundamentalism useful because I think it just makes the people who join these religious sects more defensive or feel persecuted. I would prefer the term charismatic, which is usually the term given to their leaders." Rev. Rowland Jide Macaulay, himself a clergyman, expresses concern regarding the term, proposing "conservatism" as a better alternative. Overall, whether the word "fundamentalism" is used or not, it does appear to be important to clearly define the terminology being used, in as much as there are many grey areas in understanding and naming the various Christian groups themselves and the range of political views that they hold.

With all this taken into account, I would hazard to say that a key weakness in activist efforts to resist fundamentalisms in Africa might

indeed lie within the institutional work on gender equality itself. Firstly, there is a challenge to African feminists and women's rights activists to match the mass-based popular constituency-building of Christian fundamentalists. African feminist and women's rights initiatives are simply not reaching as many people as the churches, nor are they including as many women in events, information dissemination or mobilizations. Secondly, the presence of fundamentalism within the broader gender equality sector (i.e., in non-feminist institutions) is deeply problematic and has already had the effect of isolating the handful of uncompromisingly progressive feminist activists, including lesbian activists and those in support of respecting sexual diversity. It also weakens progressive responses and potential advocacy around issues of sexual and reproductive rights and family laws. The African Feminist Forum, established in 2006, and its derivate national feminist forums are providing new spaces to tackle this issue head-on.

### Dissent from Within

Drawing on the assessments of activists interviewed, I have argued here that the attraction of Pentecostal and charismatic Christianity for both their followers and for political actors is largely opportunistic. The churches provide both a discourse and a vehicle to achieve a more basic material or political aim. Given this, the churches are just as prone to losing their membership and political appeal if they fail to fulfil the purpose for which they are being used. For the common worshipper, the promise of financial prosperity is a major pull factor for membership. However, as Dora King points out, "[the new wave of] Pentecostalism is vulnerable [to demise] if the historical conditions are not conducive to people making the money they want to make." She notes that ultimately "people are not necessarily interested in doctrine; they are interested in getting their visas to the United States!" If another institution emerges that offers this potential, followers are likely to switch allegiances. The same is true for people who subscribe to fundamentalist doctrines in return for the hope and community that a fundamentalist church provides. From her experience of counselling survivors of domestic violence in Swaziland, Nonhlanhla Dlamini comments that "we have some women that have actually stopped going to church because they have been praying for over 20 years and nothing is happening, and they think to themselves 'well, I have been praying for so long and nothing is happening so maybe God does not have ears for me.'"

In Uganda, Solome Nakaweesi-Kimbugwe observes that Christian fundamentalists are beginning to get caught out by their own doublespeak, with an excessive emphasis on sexual morality and gender norms, and relative silence on issues of government corruption and the structural causes of poverty. There were a number of critical responses

from the public around the banning of the conference on sex worker's human rights by Minister Butoro in 2008. For example, a Ugandan pastor wrote in the government-owned *New Vision* newspaper: "A big moral problem that inflicts society in Uganda is not so much that prostitution is not immoral, but the high moralistic accent in our society seems to absolve those who daily swindle the public of exorbitant sums of money while they want to hunt down prostitutes!"<sup>74</sup> There were also public critiques of the fact that Minister Butoro, a self-styled defender of Christianity, failed to comment when Libyan President Muammar al-Qaddafi (a major funder of the Ugandan government) insulted the Bible during a state visit to Uganda the week before the banning of the conference on sex worker's rights. A number of scandals, including alleged acts of sexual molestation and financial impropriety, have called into question the integrity of high profile conservative pastors in Uganda.<sup>75</sup>

While it is reassuring to recognize that the power of Christian fundamentalists is not absolute, it is difficult to rely on dissent from within as a counter-fundamentalist strategy given that it is unpredictable and unmanaged. However, it might be useful to track the individuals and groups who are expressing dissenting opinions within church institutions and target them with progressive information and support.

### Growing the Anti-Fundamentalist Response

Although Christian fundamentalisms across Africa have been growing in strength since the 1990s, the scale of the systematic attack on human rights and on legal protections for women and for LGBTI people is only recently becoming clear with attempts at introducing homophobic legislation and the censoring of sexual rights activism. Progressive African women's organizations and individual feminist activists have been targeted for their work in supporting marginalized communities of sex workers, LGBTI women and the broader LGBTI community. Tackling fundamentalisms is, by default, on the agenda of progressive African women's organizing. There is still work to be done in uniting these efforts, gathering more information about the tactics and networks of politically active fundamentalists, and conducting further research to inform strategic action.

At present there is no comprehensive research on the impact of Christian fundamentalisms (of any denomination) on women's rights in Africa, and relatively little on the funding bases and political links of Christian fundamentalists who are targeting women's issues. In addition, efforts to resist Christian fundamentalisms have thus far primarily been reactive, with activists networking across movements and often regionally and internationally around a particular incident, like the recent mobilizations around the proposed introduction of homophobic

legislation in Uganda. However, there is also a need to consider forming a network to coordinate efforts and support individual activists across the region, given that Christian fundamentalist actors are already networked regionally and have prominent allies in the United States. African-based and foreign human rights and development donors have a role to play in ensuring that these emergency and longer term efforts are resourced and sustained, and in stepping up funding for anti-fundamentalist initiatives led by progressive Africans.

### Conclusions

This case study has attempted to provide an initial mapping of the broad and complex terrain of Pentecostal and charismatic fundamentalisms in sub-Saharan Africa. Overall, the draw of participation in churches espousing fundamentalist doctrines can be linked to a sense of desperation and need for the reaffirmation of community and hope, alongside practical material support in the face of personal loss and social and economic crises. However, there are also many actors who are using the religious platform opportunistically as a means to advance their economic and political agendas, including an agenda of maintaining patriarchal power. Women remain a key constituency in these churches, making up a considerable proportion of their congregations, and are sometimes used as the "foot soldiers" of fundamentalist political activism.

While many Pentecostal and charismatic churches and clergy are self-financing, there is evidence to suggest that some are making strategic alliances with fundamentalist Christian groups in the United States, as well as benefiting, at least until recently, from the Christian-inspired HIV and AIDS funding from the U.S. government and its PEPFAR initiative. A number of key actors in mainline Anglican churches also maintain active relationships with the Christian right in the United States. Here again, the "solidarity" is opportunistic and helps to finance the agendas—and allegedly also the private coffers—of influential African fundamentalists.

The general lack of accessible critical analysis, research, dialogue and comprehensive advocacy on Christian fundamentalisms and women's rights in sub-Saharan Africa has meant that there is still neither a united nor a very vocal counter-discourse about religious fundamentalisms in the region—and indeed, to an extent, these fundamentalist doctrines are uncritically embraced by some within organizations working on women's rights themselves. African governments have for the most part failed to confront the abuses and extremist views propagated by these churches, and in some cases, key government actors have in fact protected or promoted them.

There are a number of possible entry points to begin tackling the social and political phenomenon of Christian fundamentalisms, although to be effective the collective response will need to be rooted in, and appeal to, a similarly popular base, while also targeting Africa's decision-makers. If not, individual activists will continue to take on the task alone, and to shoulder the backlash as well.

---

### Endnotes:

<sup>1</sup> The author would like to thank Dora King for sharing her expert knowledge on Pentecostalism and its many interpretations and permutations in the African context, and for the use of her unpublished paper as a reference for this chapter. The author would also like to thank Solome Nakaweesi-Kimbugwe, Hope Chigudu, Winnie Sseruma, Nonhlahla Dlamini, Dorothy Aken'Ova and Rev. Rowland Jide Macaulay for sharing their experience and critical insights on Christian fundamentalisms and how progressive activists are working and need to work to tackle them. The views represented here, other than those directly attributed to others, are my own.

<sup>2</sup> "Overview: Pentecostalism in Africa," *Spirit and Power: A 10-Country Survey of Pentecostals*, Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, Pew Research Center, 2007.

<sup>3</sup> Interview with Solome Nakaweesi-Kimbugwe 29 Apr. 2008.

<sup>4</sup> Telephone interviews and email questionnaires were conducted with six African human rights activists (including a gay clergyman and a feminist academic) from and familiar with the national contexts of Nigeria, Uganda, Zimbabwe and Sierra Leone. The analysis also draws on the author's personal experience and work on women's rights and sexual rights in Africa.

<sup>5</sup> Interview with Dora King, 8 May 2008.

<sup>6</sup> Pew Forum, *op. cit.*: 11-12; Interview with Dora King, 8 May 2008.

<sup>7</sup> The revival, a three-year-long session of preaching and prayer, called for people to worship Christ through ecstatic expressions and speaking in tongues, as described in the biblical Book of Acts (Chapter 2).

<sup>8</sup> Interview with Dora King, 8 May 2008.

<sup>9</sup> J. Naughton, "Following the Money: A special report from the Washington Window," Episcopal Diocese of Washington website, 2006: 2.

<sup>10</sup> R. Van Dijk, "Christian fundamentalism in Sub-Saharan Africa: The case of Pentecostalism," Occasional Paper, Centre for African Studies, University of Copenhagen: 2000.

<sup>11</sup> Zionist churches do not have any relationship to the Jewish Zionist movement but rather get their name from the city of Zion, Illinois in the United States, from where the missionaries who introduced the churches into South Africa came.

<sup>12</sup> See the [Organization of African Instituted Churches](#) website.

<sup>13</sup> In Sierra Leone, the first indigenously run Pentecostal church was founded in the 1950s.

<sup>14</sup> Allan Anderson, "Evangelism and the Growth of Pentecostalism in Africa," Centre for Missiology and World Christianity, University of Birmingham, 2000.

<sup>15</sup> For example, the International Central Gospel Church, founded by Ghanaian pastor Mensa Otabil, opened a private university (Van Dijk, 2000, *op. cit.*: 13). For an analysis of campus recruitment practices of charismatics in Nigeria, see M. Gaiya, "The Pentecostal Revolution in Nigeria," Occasional Paper, Centre of African Studies, University of Copenhagen, 2002.

<sup>16</sup> For example, the Redeemed Christian Church of God, founded by a Nigerian pastor in 1952, hosts a monthly prayer session in Lagos, Nigeria attended, on its own estimates, by up to 50,000 people. The Miracle Centre Cathedral in Uganda seats up to 10,500 people.

<sup>17</sup> Interview with Dora King, 8 May 2008.

<sup>18</sup> One example from Malawi is Linley Mbeta, a young Pentecostal preacher in her 20s, who became the personal spiritual healer of dictator Dr. Hastings Kamuzu Banda (d. 1997); see R. Van Dijk, "La guérisseuse du docteur Banda au Malawi," *Politique Africaine*, 52 (1993): 145-150. Research in Nigeria, Kenya and South Africa shows that Pentecostals and charismatics are on average more supportive of women's ordination than other Christians (Pew Forum, *op. cit.*: 46).

<sup>19</sup> Pew Forum, *op. cit.*: 4

<sup>20</sup> While these churches are predominantly attended by Africans, in some countries non-Africans are also joining. A striking example is The Embassy of God, established by Nigerian Pastor Sunday Adelaja in the Ukrainian capital of Kiev, which enjoys a large membership of Ukrainians, including key government figures. See H. Fawkes, "Nigerian pastor find new flock in Ukraine," *BBC News*, 30 Oct. 2006.

<sup>21</sup> World Christian Database Survey, 2005, cited in Pew Forum, *op. cit.*

<sup>22</sup> Dora King estimates that in the churches that she visited regularly in Freetown, women make up between 75% and 80% of the congregations.

<sup>23</sup> For example, one of the founding mega-churches in the new wave of Pentecostalism in Uganda, Miracle Centre, has supported the creation of Girl Power Ministries, which is led by a woman pastor, Jessica Kayanja (wife of the founder of the Miracle Centres). It focuses exclusively on girls and women, through church services, Bible study and community outreach including a women's crisis centre. Watoto Church in Uganda (formerly Kampala Pentecostal Church), a conservative mega-church affiliated with the Assemblies of God, focuses its ministry on women and children. It mobilizes its congregation in small prayer "cells" that engage in community service in the capital. It also runs a special initiative for women in war-affected Northern Uganda.

<sup>24</sup> Pew Forum, *op. cit.*

<sup>25</sup> Pew Forum, *op. cit.*

<sup>26</sup> For example, in 2005 a delegation of 48 evangelicals including Pastor Rick Warren of the Saddleback Church in the United States met with President Paul Kagame of Rwanda and half of the Rwandan cabinet to plan for a church-led intervention for development in Rwanda. See David van Biema, “Warren of Rwanda,” *Time Magazine*, 15 Aug. 2005.

<sup>27</sup> Interview with Nonhlanhla Dlamini, 30 Apr. 2008.

<sup>28</sup> Interview with Dora King, 8 May 2008.

<sup>29</sup> Dora King, “Religious fundamentalism as resistance to modernity,” Unpublished background paper, Resisting and Challenging Religious Fundamentalisms initiative, AWID, 2009: 6.

<sup>30</sup> [New Insights on Religious Fundamentalisms: Research Highlights](#), AWID: Toronto, 2009; King (2009), *op. cit.*

<sup>31</sup> I have heard of a Nigerian Pentecostal church in London, UK where the pastor prefaces every round of collections by saying “Jesus does not accept £10 notes,” thus requiring his congregation of low-income immigrants to give GBP 20 or more (equivalent to approximately USD 40 or more) each week to the Church.

<sup>32</sup> Dora King cites an example of a Sierra Leonean woman who donated USD 1,000 (a considerable amount in the Sierra Leonean economy) to her pastor as she felt his prayers had helped her with a major life challenge. She also cited cases of congregations raising funds to buy luxury cars for their pastors.

<sup>33</sup> Interview with Dora King, 8 May 2008.

<sup>34</sup> Naughton, *op. cit.*

<sup>35</sup> See [www.pepfarwatch.org](http://www.pepfarwatch.org) for news and discussion of evolving policies as well as extensive analysis and resources on the contents and implications of PEPFAR policies for women’s sexual and reproductive rights and autonomy.

<sup>36</sup> “The Less They Know, the Better: Abstinence-Only HIV/AIDS Programs in Uganda,” Human Rights Watch, Vol. 17, No. 4(A), Mar. 2005: 45-48.

<sup>37</sup> Hope Chigudu comments that “many [churches] still allow only loose fitting dresses with high necklines, cut no shorter than the knee, [which is] often uncomfortable for the occasion or season.”

<sup>38</sup> Hope Chigudu, “Issues of fundamentalism in Christian discourses (ideology, politics and practices) and communities, and how these may be challenged and resisted,” Paper presented at African Feminist Forum in Accra, Ghana, 17 Nov. 2006.

<sup>39</sup> The simultaneous appeal to an indigenous cultural identity and imported religious identity may appear contradictory on the surface; however, it also points to how deeply entwined Christianity is with the making of modern Africa and with normative definitions of contemporary African identity.

<sup>40</sup> Interview with Solome Nakaweesi-Kimbugwe, 29 Apr. 2008. The full text of the [African Union Protocol on the Rights of Women](#), which is the first human rights instrument to protect the right to access safe abortions, is available at the African Union website: [www.africa-union.org](http://www.africa-union.org).

<sup>41</sup> Email questionnaire response from Hope Chigudu, 10 May 2008.

<sup>42</sup> “Meet Pastor Jessica,” [Girl Power Ministries website](#).

<sup>43</sup> “Zimbabwe: Gender activists protest MP’s anti-women remarks,” *IRIN News*, 11 Oct. 2006.

<sup>44</sup> Interview with Solome Nakaweesi-Kimbugwe, 29 Apr. 2008.

<sup>45</sup> Interview with Dora King, 8 May 2008. King also points out that these same churches may not take action against other forms of violence, including the sexual abuse of women and girls within churches themselves.

<sup>46</sup> Issues of sexuality are becoming a political dividing line in African women’s activism today, with progressive women’s organizations taking a public stand to defend the indivisibility and universality of rights, including for LGBTI people, and more conservative African women and women’s organizations opting to remain silent in the face of state and church-sponsored homophobia.

<sup>47</sup> J. Horn, “Re-righting the Sexual Body.” *Feminist Africa*, 6 (2006): 7-19.

<sup>48</sup> UNAIDS estimates that 61% of the 22.5 million HIV-positive people in sub-Saharan Africa are women. See “[Fact sheet: Key facts by region – 2007 AIDS Epidemic Update](#),” UNAIDS.

<sup>49</sup> Human Rights Watch (2005), *op. cit.*; “[Condom crisis deepens in Uganda: shortages, spread to other countries](#),” CHANGE (Center for Health and Gender Equity) press release, 26 Aug. 2005.

<sup>50</sup> “[Changes afoot for US global AIDS policy](#),” *IRIN News*, 30 July 2009.

<sup>51</sup> One activist interviewed pointed out the irony of this practice saying, “The workshop will begin with a prayer about peace and harmony. And then the women will be destroying each other for the whole meeting. And then at the end there will be a closing prayer!”

<sup>52</sup> African Feminist Forum (AFF), [Charter of Feminist Principles for African Feminists](#), available at the AFF website: [www.africanfeministforum.org](http://www.africanfeministforum.org).

<sup>53</sup> Ayesha Imam, “Birthing and growing the African Feminist Forum,” *Development*, 52.2 (2009): 167-174.

<sup>54</sup> Ugandan military dictator and president of Uganda from 1971 to 1979.

<sup>55</sup> Prime minister of Uganda from 1962-1966; president from 1966-1971 and 1980-1985.

<sup>56</sup> Human Rights Watch (2005), *op. cit.*; M. Twesiime-Kirya, ““Until marriage or graduation: Abstinence-only strategies and their impact on university students in Uganda and Kenya,” Law, Gender and Sexuality Working Paper No. 1, Faculty of Law, Makerere University, Jan. 2008: 4-6.

<sup>57</sup> M. Olupot & D. Edyegu, “Museveni backs church against gays,” *New Vision*, 12 Aug. 2008.

<sup>58</sup> Karamoja is a region in north-eastern Uganda.

<sup>59</sup> Anna Louie Sussman, “Uganda’s Shift in AIDS Policy Tied to the US,” *Women’s eNews*, 21 Feb. 2006.

<sup>60</sup> Twesiime-Kirya, *op. cit.*: 5.

<sup>61</sup> Fortunate Ahimbisibwe, “Vagina Monologues rejects Media Council terms,” *New Vision*, 17 Feb. 2005.

<sup>62</sup> “Uganda prostitute workshop banned,” *BBC News*, 25 Mar. 2008.

<sup>63</sup> James Nsaba Butoro, “Tough anti-gay law due,” *Sunday Vision*, 25 Aug. 2007, cited in Sylvia Tamale, Ed., *Homosexuality: Perspectives from Uganda, Kampala: Sexual Minorities Uganda*, 2007: 37.

<sup>64</sup> Scott Long, “Letter to US Global AIDS Coordinator about ‘Abstinence-Only’ Funding and Homophobia in Uganda,” Human Rights Watch, 11 Oct. 2007.

<sup>65</sup> Human Rights Watch (2005), *op. cit.*: 45-48.

<sup>66</sup> Human Rights Watch (2005) *op. cit.*; Jonathan Cohen, “A Tale of Two Presidential Initiatives: Changes in an HIV prevention program in Uganda,” Human Rights Watch, 1 Feb. 2006.

<sup>67</sup> Sarah Mukasa, “Vagina Monologues: I am glad they have banned it,” pp. 200-205 in Patrick Burnett, Shereen Karmali & Firoze Manji (Eds.), *Grace, Tenacity and Eloquence: The Struggle for Women’s Rights in Africa*, Oxford: Fahamu, 2007: 204.

<sup>68</sup> Warren and his church have since distanced themselves from Ssempe. In light of Ssempe’s support for the Anti-Homosexuality bill tabled in the Ugandan Parliament in October 2009, Warren was asked to and did make a statement indicating that he did not support Ssempe’s position.

<sup>69</sup> The meeting was supported by Scott Lively of Abiding Truth Ministries (considered to be a hate group), Don Schmierer of Exodus International, and Caleb Lee Brundidge, an “ex-gay” man and “sexual re-orientation coach” from the International Healing Foundation.

<sup>70</sup> A report on the seminar by LGBTI activists who attended is available at the Sexual Minorities Uganda website ([Family Life Network Anti-Homosexuality Seminar: Report of the Proceedings at Hotel Triangle, Kampala, 5th-8th March 2009](#)); see also Cary Alan Johnson, “Exporting Homophobia,” IGHLCRC website, 29 May 2009.

<sup>71</sup> For analyses of the bill, see Solome Nakaweesi-Kimbugwe; Frank Mugisha, “Bahati’s Bill: A convenient distraction for Uganda’s government,” Pambazuka News, #453, 16 Oct. 2009, and Sylvia Tamale, “Why anti-gay bill should worry us,” *Daily Monitor*, 3 Nov. 2009.

<sup>72</sup> There could in fact be a useful strategic litigation campaign on this issue given that the advice of these pastors can be directly linked to church members dying prematurely from AIDS-related illnesses.

<sup>73</sup> Interview with Solome Nakaweesi-Kimbugwe, 29 Apr. 2008.

<sup>74</sup> Rev. Amos Kasibante, “Uganda’s enemy is not sex workers!” Letter to the Editor, *New Vision*, 23 Apr. 2008.

<sup>75</sup> Eunice Rukondo, “Lies, sex and hypocrisy in Pentecostal Churches,” *Sunday Monitor*, 31 May 2009.

---

### Author Bio:

Jessica Horn is a women’s rights consultant currently based in Sierra Leone. She has consulted for a range of organizations including the UN, Ford Foundation, Open Society Institute, Stephen Lewis Foundation, International Rescue Committee and Akiba Uhaki on initiatives advancing sexual rights, ending violence against women, supporting women living with HIV, and promoting women’s rights in post-conflict reconstruction. She is an active member of the African Feminist Forum and serves on the board of Mama Cash.