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- 1 In many parts of rural Africa, religious institutions form the most important sites of political organisation and practice¹. This article is concerned with offering an examination of the institutional dimensions of this observation by looking at the role of a Pentecostal church in a village in eastern Uganda. The development of these churches, which started in the mid-1970s, has affected not only the spiritual and economic well-being of individual villagers; it has also brought about deep changes in the wider political landscape. Though Pentecostal churches espouse an ideological commitment to a clear separation between the life of the “saved” and the ways of the world, the practical division, in this instance, is much less clear: church members remain significant players in customary institutions, the court system and the village council. It is instructive to view the church as one arena among many, and the significance of Pentecostalism from a local-level perspective is related as much to its ability to transform village politics as it is to its ability to transform religious beliefs².
- 2 In the sub-parish under study, Pentecostal churches are part of the human and physical infrastructure of the village, dealing with a range of concerns also addressed by government and customary institutions. In many cases there is no easy separation between what transpires in one institution and another. Churches are places where help can be found during the planting season, where one can build up support for an impending court case, or where one can take the first steps on the path to becoming a “big man”. As such, there are practical intersections with the work of clan committees, the local court system and the village council. The case analysis shows how “born-again” Christians inter-relate their membership of the church with the wider local institutional landscape of the village: their decision to become “born again” does not mean to be divisive or exclusionary. This is as much an observation as it is an argument, and the intention of this essay is to situate the church in the local political field. If one takes the

village as a site of inquiry, then it is possible to relate the daily life of churches to the ebb and flow of other institutional arrangements.

- 3 The Pentecostal Assemblies of God (PAG), the particular denomination of the village church discussed in the article, is an older, relatively conservative Pentecostal church. Its political significance in the sub-parish is related to its interaction with other local-level institutions, more than the lines it draws towards vertical networks or the global community. Investigations of the significance of Pentecostalism in rural parts of sub-Saharan Africa are relatively few, and the most important studies of Pentecostal churches focus on charismatic congregations attracting wealthy patrons in urban centres, or on poorer congregations in peri-urban areas (Ukah 2004; Corten & Marshall-Fratani 2001; Englund 2003). Birgit Meyer's work on Pentecostalism in Ghana discusses the way the past is reinterpreted through the religious lens, with its emphasis on rebirth and spiritual renewal (Meyer 1998). Rijk van Dijk's work on transnational Pentecostal networks, and Harri Englund's study of Christian independency in Malawi investigates the global reach of Pentecostalism in view of local transformations (van Dijk 2002; Englund 2003). Less is known about the way Pentecostalism shapes politics in poor rural communities³. Investigating the ways in which a village church informs and transforms local politics provides the focus for the article.

Pentecostalism in the Local Political Field

- 4 In colonial and post-colonial Uganda, organised religion has played a critical role in national politics. Indeed, missionary churches predated the arrival of colonial agents, and Uganda is unusual for the active role played by European missionaries throughout the 1870s and 1880s, well in advance of the Imperial British East Africa Company (Hansen 1984)⁴. At Independence in 1962, religious divisions helped shape national politics, with the Democratic Party (DP) having a strongly Catholic following, and the Uganda People's Congress (UPC) an Anglican base. Indeed, so ingrained was this confessional divide that the acronym DP came to stand for *Dini ya Papa* (religion of the Pope) while UPC supporters were labelled the "United Protestants of Canterbury" (Mittelman 1975: 65). In the Teso region the apportioning of government resources to the sub-county and parish levels was also viewed through a confessional lens⁵. Parishes were seen as either Catholic or Anglican, and the distribution of one project or another would alternate on a confessional basis. Ngora, the sub-county in which the sub-parish of Oledai falls, was a mission centre for the Mill Hill Fathers (Roman Catholic) and the Church Mission Society (Anglican) and competition between the mission churches was fierce. This confessional imprint persists in the organisation of district politics, despite the "Movement system" of Yoweri Museveni which has sought to suppress competition in the political sphere.
- 5 And yet these confessional biases do not divide the political landscape of the village. What is less dwelt upon in the literature, and what is the concern of the article, is the significance of churches at the village level, where competition over state power is less intense. In the sub-parish of Oledai it was difficult to detect the importance of district- or national-level politics in the way political actions were pieced together. The political significance of religion mattered mostly in terms of the institutional spaces churches provided, as it was in these spaces that villagers built up reputations as leaders, or negotiated a land dispute. Politics was of a micro-political variety, and the village a relatively bounded political field. Political activities related more to the congruence of various local-level spaces than to networks connecting the local to the non-local.

- 6 The literature on local-level politics in the Teso region relies on the ethnographic work of Joan Vincent, dating from the 1960s⁶. The key concepts developed through Vincent's analysis—the village as political field, the rise of “big men”, the plurality of political spaces at the local level—are the building blocks of the analysis presented here. While Vincent does not dwell on the role of churches in her ethnography, the general point she makes concerning the number of institutional arenas at the local level—moots, village courts, the co-operative society—and that these arenas provide the spaces within which significant political actions are put together, still holds. One can add to the framework developed by Vincent, the institutional space opened up by village churches. Religious institutions appear to be more significant politically in the present than in the past: the collapse of the cash-crop economy in the 1970s and early 1980s dismantled the work of co-operative societies, and the violence of the late 1980s encouraged something of a spiritual revival. More generally, one can detect the increasing absence of the developmental state in the politics of the village, despite the push since the early 1990s towards decentralisation and democratisation at the local level⁷.
- 7 As Bierschenk and Olivier de Sardan (1997: 441) have commented, “this absence of the state does not mean that an absence exists in its place”; and this article draws on a literature which emphasises the continuance of governance at the local level through the work of village courts, clan committees and churches (Thiele 1986). Bierschenk and Olivier de Sardan are also making a methodological point in suggesting that the study of local-level politics in rural Africa is best organised through exploring and comparing the full range of public spaces and positions of eminence in a given area. If one applies this comparative perspective to the study of local-level politics in the Teso region, it is possible to relate the presence of the new PAG church to the work of other village institutions. As Swartz (1968: 1) observes, local-level politics should be thought of as “incomplete”, as something best investigated through a number of different spaces, shaped by horizontal as well as vertical linkages. These linkages help explain the inter-relationship of different institutional spaces, placing an analysis of churches alongside village courts and clan committees.
- Pentecostalism, “Rupture” and Context
- 8 Pentecostal churches have made enormous inroads into African political life over the past two decades, representing, perhaps, the most significant ideological and political reformation on the continent (Gifford 1998). Though it is impossible to reduce the complexities of doctrine, organisational structure, economy or membership to a few brief paragraphs, one way in which Pentecostalism coheres as a religious category is the way in which Pentecostal churches emphasise the transformative power of personal salvation. Brigit Meyer (2004: 453) in a review of recent literature on Pentecostal churches and African Independent Churches suggests that “much current research on PCCs [Pentecostal Charismatic Churches] explore the personal, cultural, political, social and economic dimensions of being born again”. In the majority of these studies the spiritual and personal revolution brought about by being “born again” in the Holy Spirit, becomes an avenue for inquiry. Pentecostal churches are often marked out by their focus on visions, prophecies, testimonies and fighting demonic and ancestral spirits (*ibid.*).
- 9 A significant contribution made within this literature concerns the way Pentecostal Christianity challenges accepted notions of community, kinship and tradition. Becoming born again means joining a new community, one bound by faith. Within this community there is often strong opposition to past relationships, as these relationships are often

seen as a vehicle for sin or personal misfortune. Brigit Meyer (1998: 318-319) writes of Pentecostal discourse in the context of Ghana as fostering the idea that being “born again” means making “a complete break with the past”. Church members are permitted to cut familial and kinship ties, in the knowledge that they are leaving behind the worship of ancestors, familial gods or the use of traditional medicines. This leads to radical social actions, precipitating a retreat into the community of the saved. Meyer suggests that in attacking the past, Pentecostalism also changes the way the past is understood, making it a morally suspect category: the possibility of ill-health, or of being susceptible to witchcraft are taken as signs that the past is “catching up” with you, that you have not fully committed yourself to a life in Christ.

- 10 The use of healing ceremonies, the stories contained in miracle testifyings, and the popularity of exorcism all symbolize the ways in which Pentecostal churches attempt to drive the past out of the present, making a community of believers opposed to many aspects of their own society. But as Paul Gifford (1998: 170) comments, Pentecostalism differs not only by denomination, but also by location, and “born-again” Christianity in Uganda may be less exclusionary than the churches that have come under study in West Africa. The fact that the Ugandan state asks international religious organisations to carry out development work alongside evangelism encourages a certain level of integration. And in terms of the spiritual aspects of Pentecostalism, Gifford takes up J. D. Y. Peel’s observation that the religious beliefs of the Baganda (the largest ethnic group in the country) are “strikingly less ‘magical’” than those of west Africa (*ibid.*: 168) ⁸.
- 11 Where Pentecostalism in Oledai has most obviously taken up this idea of “withdrawal” was during the chaos of the civil war that developed in the late 1980s. Being “born again” served as a legitimate reason for withdrawing from the political sphere. As much of the violence of the civil war was intra-communal, rather than directed towards the government, Pentecostalism, with its relatively radical social attributes (bans on alcohol, polygyny, cigarettes, marrying “out”) meant that one could claim to be an outsider and remain in the village. Getting “saved” isolated oneself from rebels and government soldiers, and the church recorded significant growth during this period.
- 12 The 1990s, a decade of relative peace and stability, has helped settle the PAG church into the life of the village. In the sub-parish, the church no longer serves as a place of withdrawal, it is not an isolated arena separate from the rough and tumble of village politics. Rather, the church has become one of a number of arenas where villagers piece together political actions. This does not mean that the distinctiveness of Pentecostalism, the belief in personal salvation, is of no consequence, rather that the particularities of the church are significant in new ways. “Born-again” Christianity, with its prohibitions and rule-based culture, confers a distinct identity on its members, offering up new ways of approaching political questions in the village.

The Political Setting of a Sub-parish in Eastern Uganda

- 13 The rise of Pentecostalism in Teso region over the past twenty years has been synchronous with a civil war, with the liberalising agenda of structural adjustment, with a commitment to decentralising government services, and with an emphasis on participation and community empowerment in the work of development agencies. Of these different “events” the dominant historical reference point is the civil war. The influence of state reforms and development programmes has been diffuse, of far more importance to the few middle-class Iteso, living and working in the towns and trading centres ⁹. For poorer people living in rural areas, the trickle-down of government

programmes or resources can in no way compare with the over-arching impact of the insurgency. The legacy left after the insurgency, in terms of political, economic and physical insecurity is inherent in the work of local-level institutions, churches included. It is possible to discern, since the end of the insurgency in 1992, the ways in which political participation has oriented itself towards questions of political authority, rather than development. Villagers have revived the office of the village chief, as well as the work of the clan committees, despite reforms aimed at liberalising and democratising the local political landscape.

Economic Decline

- 14 As Richard Werbner (1984: 157) observes, conflict and conflict management are common concerns in the study of village politics in rural Africa. The significance of violent conflict as an organising element in local politics is pronounced in Teso, where villagers are still coming to terms with a string of calamities reaching back across three decades. The collapse of the economy began in earnest in the 1970s with a combination of Idi Amin's assault on Uganda's Asians, his economic isolation in the region, and the falling global prices for Uganda's main export crops (Southall 1980: 631-632) ¹⁰. Cotton, which had been the main cash crop in the Teso region since the 1910s, depended on a system of ginneries, wholesalers and agricultural input vendors, most of which were Asian-run and Asian-owned. The "Economic War" and the Africanisation of the economy dismantled these structures, and the concentration of the cotton industry in a few government-run co-operatives was disastrous. The massive decline in production from 78,100 tonnes of cotton for export in 1971 to just 1,200 thousand tonnes by 1981 indicates the scale of collapse (Edmonds 1998: 102).
- 15 Equally disastrous was the wholesale attack on the institutional norms of the civil service, and there was a steady militarisation of all of the branches of the state (Kabwegyere 1995: 218-233). In a certain sense there was some continuity with the policies of the first Obote government (1962-1971). Obote had replaced a multi-party electoral system with a one-party state, and an elected presidency with Presidency-for-life. Under Amin, however, the state's domination over the economy accelerated these processes with the monopolisation of marketing boards in the cash crop sector, and control over the right to trade through licenses and the Departed Asian Custodian Board, leading to the creation of what Brett (1992: 18) has termed "a statist siege economy". What marked out the Amin government, most of all was the level of violence the army and the security forces were prepared to use against the civilian population. The use of the state apparatus against whole sections of the population, usually along ethnic lines, brought into being what John Saul (1976) has described as the "unsteady state".
- 16 And yet for the Teso region, the political violence of the Amin government was not quite the disaster it was for other parts of the country (Brett 1995: 138-139). The initial shock of the collapse in the cotton system could be offset by the large stocks of cattle, which villagers had accumulated during the boom decades of the 1950s and 1960s. The subversion of the Ugandan state, particularly in terms of the misuse of the army and the security services, were more obviously felt in other parts of the country (*ibid.*). Teso was not seen as a major threat to the interests of the Amin government, and was set apart from the state-sponsored violence that devastated the Acholi and Lango regions to the north and the Baganda region to the south (Southall 1980: 633). Only the flight of Amin's soldiers, as they deserted their military stations in 1979, brought insecurity to the region. The breakdown in public order allowed various groups in the east of the country to arm

themselves with weapons that formerly belonged to the government, and de Berry records a series of cattle-raids in the east of the region in 1979 and 1980 (de Berry 2000: 66).

- 17 Teso escaped from the Amin years with most of their cattle stocks intact, and would live through the five years of the second Obote government (1980-1985) relatively isolated from the civil wars that continued to rage in the south of the country. As such, Teso is set apart from the grand narrative of post-colonial Uganda, which argues that the 1970s were years of retreat and collapse, barely improved upon by Obote's second period in office. In this master narrative the 1990s become the years of reconstruction, democratization and development. This is not how Uganda's post-colonial history is remembered among the Iteso. Though Phares Mutibwa dates Uganda's economic, social and political recovery to 1986, the year when Yoweri Museveni took power, marked the beginning of a seven-year civil war (Mutibwa 1992).

Political Collapse

- 18 In 1986 Karamojong warriors began to loot the cattle stocks of the region —estimates put the number taken at 500,000 heads of cattle (Henriques 2002: 18). This action destroyed what remained of the region's wealth, and the cattle-raiding extended as far south as present-day Pallisa, some 200 kilometres from the central belt of Karamoja ¹¹. Not only were cattle lost, but ploughs, hand hoes, stores of grain and flour were stolen or sacked. Many Iteso blamed the new government and the National Resistance Army (NRA) as they had disbanded local-level security structures in the region. There is also strong evidence that the government and the army were complicit in the raiding. The cattle-raiding stoked popular opposition towards the new government, which could find leadership in the military and political figures who had been thrown out of power ¹².
- 19 By the end of 1986 political leaders from the Teso region began visiting trading centres to mobilise support for a rebellion against the new regime (de Berry 2000: 67). The cattle-raiding meant there was little trust in the new government. The rebel movement, popularly labelled the Force Obote Back Army (FOBA), came to be known as the more substantial-sounding Uganda People's Front (UPF) led by Peter Otai, an exiled defence minister from Obote's second government (*ibid.*) ¹³. The military wing of the UPF, the Uganda People's Army (UPA) was the nominal organising force behind the rebellion, and sought to overthrow the government of Yoweri Museveni.
- 20 The rebel movement never came close to achieving its goals. As the seven-year war wore on, it was confined to the region, destroying what was left of the local economy. From 1986 up to 1993, a confusing array of rebel groups, political factions, and opportunists fought out what appeared to be local political conflicts. Any veneer of military co-ordination under the leadership of Peter Otai did not correspond to the actual experience of war. In popular recollections the rebellion was more like a civil war, which took on a highly local character. In the villages, chiefs, councillors, clan elders and religious leaders were targeted by young men from within the area. A war against the central government became a local war against the leadership of local-level institutions. To compound the experience of collapse the NRA waged an aggressive counter-insurgency against the rebels, a "scorched earth policy" which only added to the distress of the rural population (Vincent 1999: 122; Zistel 2000: 27). For six months starting in the spring of 1990, the government concentrated half the region's population in internment camps ¹⁴.

- 21 The years of insurgency coincided with a rapid growth in PAG membership. This growth was for practical, as well as spiritual, reasons. The idea of “salvation” as a way of leading a better life (and afterlife) was only part of the stories told by church members. In addition, villagers argued that those who joined the church were less likely to be conscripted into rebel groups, and less likely to be harassed by government soldiers. The different-ness of Pentecostalism placed the church membership outside the social and political conflicts that drove the rebellion. Rebels were in the business of targeting local “big men”, none of which were to be found in the Pentecostal churches. It was mostly poorer, older villagers who chose to get “saved”, as they felt that the church offered a way into a new sort of spiritual community. It can be argued that the early history of the PAG church relates directly to Meyer’s observation that the doctrine of Pentecostalism draws strength from the physical and spiritual “break” Pentecostalism tries to make with the past (Meyer 1998: 317-318). In the internment camps many Catholics and Anglicans joined Pentecostal prayer groups, and many converted to the new “born-again” church.

Restoration

- 22 What has been most striking about the PAG church in the 1990s is the way it has become an ordinary, everyday part of village life. In the decade following the insurgency the church has been incorporated into the local political landscape. Being a “born-again” Christian is less contentious than one would expect given the church’s many prohibitions, including banning on the consumption of alcohol, and the opposition to polygyny. This pattern of increasing incorporation is surprising given the accounts of Pentecostal congregations found in other ethnographies, where the church is typically presented as a closed off institution, opposing the actions of others, and offering a self-contained community (Meyer 1998; Laurent 2001) ¹⁵.
- 23 Despite the different-ness of Pentecostalism, other institutions have made room for the particularities of the PAG church. The fact that Pentecostal Christians do not drink alcohol has been accommodated in the way courts cases are settled and burials conducted; drinking beer is no longer obligatory when signing off on a legal agreement, and black tea is served (alongside beer) at funerals. These changes are due, in part, to the conservatism of the PAG church, which is less interested in publicly attacking the actions of “un-saved” people than other strands of “born-again” Christianity. It is also the case that the growing familiarity “un-saved” villagers have with the ways of the PAG church helps to make it less remarkable. The grass-thatched church has been part of the village for more than a decade, and church membership has opened out to include some of the more politically prominent people in the village, including the vice chairman of the village council. The mainline Catholic and Anglican congregations, which were at one time hostile to the PAG church—not least because the Pentecostal church poached some of their most diligent members—have come to their own accommodation. Leaders in the mainline churches appear to welcome the spiritual revival brought about by the PAG church, as Catholic and Anglican churches have instituted their own charismatic groups appropriating many of the practices found in the PAG church.

Two Examples of How the PAG Church is Part of the Village

- 24 The sub-parish of Oledai consists of 126 households. A fifth of the sub-parish population attends the PAG church ¹⁶. The presence of the PAG in the region can be dated back at least as far as the 1960s ¹⁷. Other villagers are affiliated to the Catholic or Anglican churches and there are no traces of organised religion from the pre-colonial, pre-missionary era,

though witchcraft still plays its part in the life of the village¹⁸. For a period of eighteen months, starting in late 2001, information was collected on the workings of local-level institutions. The initial concern of the research was to collect data on the village council system, to understand the effects of government reforms on village politics. The research was based on the idea that politics at the local level stays close to those places where the authority of the state was most present; this meant that religious institutions were relegated to the social sphere.

- 25 In the course of living and working in the area it became increasingly apparent that churches were of more importance in explaining political developments than government reforms. Churches shared many of the historically prescribed functions of government and customary institutions—settling cases, managing marital conflicts, organising help—and a clear separation into political, economic and religious categories did not capture the multiplexity of relationships which explained how political actions were pieced together. It was not only the case that church members sat on clan committees, local government courts or burial societies, but also that church members drew on their participation in the church in the way they approached and appropriated other institutions.

Becoming a “Big Man”

- 26 Joan Vincent writes of leadership in the area as a piecing together of political roles across a number of institutions. Following from the work of W. Watson, Vincent (1971: 283) discusses the rise of “big men” in a particular parish, suggesting that it was the result of “spiralist” practices: “[P]rogressive ascent through a series of positions in one or more hierarchical structures.” In Vincent’s analysis the possibilities for advancement depended on personal attributes, connections and the manner in which an individual carries him or herself in the village. In Oledai sub-parish churches provide an arena where such an ascent begins¹⁹.
- 27 The following example concerns the way the church serves as the starting point for a rise through the village hierarchy. The case involves a husband and wife who are able to draw on their membership in the PAG church as a way of building up their chances of becoming “big men” in other institutions. As a result of their actions, the husband became the vice-chairman of the village council, a member of his clan committee, and a youth leader of the local PAG congregation. His wife became the treasurer of the village water user committee. What was striking was how the PAG church fed into a long-established pattern of spiralism.
- 28 The chronology behind this rise is interesting in that the first institution in which the household gains a position is the church, with the husband taking up the post of “assembly youth leader”. The church becomes a stepping-stone towards more powerful positions on the village council, clan committee or water user committee. When compared with other local-level institutions it is worth noting that the PAG church is relatively open to ambitious younger men seeking to move up through the village hierarchy. There are a large number of roles and positions within the church, and the church encourages initiative, making it possible for those with ambitions to gain a foothold on the ladder of local-level institutions. Whereas Pierre-Joseph Laurent’s study of the Assemblies of God in rural Burkina Faso demonstrated how a church serves as a self-sufficient community, in opposition to existing customary and political structures, the PAG church in Oledai provides an alternative scenario, where the church becomes one

of a number of hierarchical structures through which progressive is possible (Laurent 2001: 270-271).

- 29 The recent past is important in explaining the political value of taking up the position of youth leader. As assembly youth leader the husband's work is valuable because it relates, in the local imagination, to the experience of the insurgency. As assembly youth leader, he has the difficult task of going out into the sub-parish and talking to younger men about such matters as personal salvation, respect for one's elders and the need to stand up to those who would be violent. These values are not easy to sell among such men, many of whom remember the insurgency—despite its violence—as a period of opportunity, a time when they were able to challenge older men. The assembly youth leader's attempts at mediating between older and younger generations makes him politically important. The fact that he appears to be respected by younger men adds to the esteem in which he is held in the village.
- 30 A further reason why the PAG church provides a good starting point from which to enter village politics is because Pentecostal Christians have a reputation for honesty. The church relies on a rule-based culture that sets church members apart from the norms or conventions that govern the actions of other villages²⁰. The distinctiveness of Pentecostalism is important in that it helps to broaden out the possible repertoire of political actions available in the village. A consequence of the different-ness of Pentecostalism is the way church members are able to develop a different sort of reputation, one that emphasises adherence to rules and the importance of codifying what is, and is not, morally acceptable behaviour.
- 31 An example of the way this rule-based culture was brought to bear on the reputations of individual villagers came in the way the church handled an adultery accusation against the assembly youth leader. Early in August 2002 the youth leader was accused—by a fellow church member—of committing adultery. The adulterous act was committed with an “unsaved” woman (on this the church membership was unclear as to whether this made his actions more or less sinful). During one of the Sunday services the pastor announced that he wanted to know if it was true that someone from within the congregation had committed the sin of adultery, and the assembly youth leader confessed. As penance he was asked to stand outside the church for several Sundays, demonstrating his isolation from God.
- 32 This punishment was a public humiliation for the vice-chairman, a humiliation not eased by the fact that the church was situated next to a number of drinking huts. Several other big men who had not joined the church would come and sit outside the shebeens and mock the vice-chairman of the village council for agreeing to stand outside the church. His submission before church authorities was seen as faintly ridiculous and he was the punch line of many jokes²¹.
- 33 And yet, the act of submitting before the church demonstrates the way Pentecostalism allows for new sorts of reputations to develop within the village. The culture of humility within the church marks an obvious difference from the worldly ways of other politicians. In the particular case of the assembly youth leader, a positive consequence of being publicly humiliated was that he developed a different, more honest, reputation than other “big men”. He was less open to accusations of corruption or self-interest, and this had consequences both for his personal standing as well as for the institutions in which he held office. As vice-chairman of the village council he was able to broaden out the legitimacy of the institution because he was seen as a more humble and

straightforward man, a man who could be brought to account. A similar logic lay behind the appointment of his wife to the politically contentious position of treasurer of the village borehole committee: her reputation as a committed Christian meant that she was a good choice for looking after the money collected from those who used the borehole.

- 34 What is significant about Pentecostalism, therefore, is the way it has added to, rather than subtracted from, the political arena of the village. The rule-based culture of the church legitimates new sorts of actions in public life and new ways of approaching questions of leadership, money keeping and conflict management. Prohibitions on alcohol, polygamy and marrying “out” open up, for the moment at least, a repertoire of political actions unavailable before the advent of Pentecostalism. The “born-again” vice-chairman of the village council has a particular sort of reputation for personal accountability, and for being courageous enough to speak with young men on politically sensitive issues. All of which can be related to his active membership in the PAG church. What is important to recognise is that this reputation extends across the political field of the village, and is not simply confined to the internal workings of the church.

Settling a Case in Church

- 35 The PAG church in Oledai is also a place where land issues are negotiated. During the course of the fieldwork, it emerged that some members of the PAG church used the church as a sort of staging ground where they could strengthen claims before going to the village court. More interestingly other church members used the church as a court-like setting where land conflicts could be discussed during the Sunday service. The use of the church as a court is a new development in the management of land conflicts in the village, and I would like to discuss the reasons why the church is able to offer a court-like environment. The following case shows how this development is related to distinctive identity of Pentecostal Christians—the idea that conflict is ungodly, while at the same time also grounded in the political connections that embed the church within the local political field.
- 36 The case concerns the timing and scale of a son’s inheritance. In Teso it is common for the father to allocate a portion of his assets, including land and cattle, to his sons, within his own lifetime (Lawrance 1957)²². The land and cattle make the son a better candidate for marriage, as well as signalling his graduation into manhood. Inheritance is difficult to manage, particularly in places where assets are depleted or land has grown scarce; a situation that pervades the sub-parish given the impoverishment of the insurgency and the rising rural population. In this instance the son felt that his father was delaying in handing over an inheritance, and he raised his grievances with the church pastor and several other prominent Christians. As the dispute involved two “born-again” Christians, the pastor asked that the case be heard in church, first through prayers of intercession and then through a relatively formal court hearing. In this court-like arena the father and son presented their situation and called on supporters to validate their position. The pastor and church elders counselled the two parties to reach an amicable settlement, though they also suggested that the son’s claim was legitimate²³. This favouring of the son’s claim carried considerable weight, both in moral and political terms, and the father had to agree to the consensus reach in church and signed off on a settlement which allocated land to the son.
- 37 This ability of the church to take on the role of a court, is enhanced, no doubt, by the whiff of superiority emanating from Pentecostal Christians. There is a clear understanding among Pentecostal Christians that their faith makes them less fractious

than other villagers, and that they have been given certain spiritual gifts. There is also a keen interest in spotting conflicts and addressing them directly, as they are keen to show their faith in action; witness the way the church attended to the adulterous vice-chairman. As such one can appreciate that this culture of vigilance has developed mechanisms of conflict management, bringing disputes to the attention of the church authorities.

- 38 The fact that the PAG congregation serves as a court also draws on the embeddedness of the church in the village. The church draws some of its authority from the fact that church members are political actors elsewhere in the sub-parish. Those who helped negotiate the settlement included the vice-chairman of the village council and his wife, the treasurer of the borehole committee. There were also two Parent-Teachers Association committee members, one of whom was the treasurer of the village council. Another “big man”, for want of a better term, was the women’s representative on the village council. All of which meant the judgement reached in church carried the imprimatur of other local-level institutions. Moreover, the written settlement signed in church was then taken to the village council chairman, to be stamped and ratified. This meant that if the father chose to take his case to the village court he was likely to receive either the same decision, or a more punitive judgement. As such, the ability of the congregation to put together a workable settlement was related, not only on the spiritual authority or the organisational capacity of the church, but also to the relationship the church membership had to the wider political field.

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- 40 Pentecostalism, in this instance, should be seen as complicating and developing the local political field, making it an addition to the institutional landscape of the village, rather than a subtraction. Despite a doctrinal commitment to withdrawing from possible sites of corruption, church members engage actively in local politics, and use the institutional space of the church, and the particular status of being “born again” as a new way of approaching political questions. What was striking about the church in this regard, was the ordinariness of Pentecostalism; the degree to which “born-again” Christianity has been incorporated into the local political field. The tensions that existed between the church—as a certain sort of morally codified institution—and other local-level institutions were not particularly pronounced. The occasional conflicts that engaged the village pastor in disputes with other local “big men” were less common than those instances where the village council chairman came into conflict with clan elders.
- 41 In Oledai, as in much of eastern Uganda, Pentecostal Christians continue to participate in local courts, draw water from the community-managed pump, and pay fees to burial societies. This is the practical world villagers inhabit. For “born-again” Christians, the doctrine of personal salvation, the expressed belief in withdrawing from a world of sin, of making a “complete break with the past” has to rub along with the economic, social and political necessities that govern life in an income poor, rural area. Although being a member of the Pentecostal church is an important identity, belonging to such a church does not mean that church members retreat from other local-level institutions. While Pentecostalism is often presented as an exceptional faith, formed around a bounded community of believers, in this case one can see that the church is best understood as part of the local political field. The PAG church deals with prosaic, political activities—managing land conflicts, building reputations, becoming a “big man”—which cut across other local-level institutions, and church members manage problems across a number of

institutional spaces. This is not to deny the spiritual value of being “born-again”. Rather it is to suggest that in the fairly familiar environment of the village, the lives of church members cannot easily be contained within the church.

- 42 The intersection of religion and politics at the local level offers an opportunity to open out the study of local politics. The changing shape of village courts, local councils, and even development projects, are better understood when related to the changing significance of religious institutions. Greater openness to the institutional and symbolic importance of religion would help to break down the categorical divisions which have tended to sideline churches from the study of local-level politics in the past. In regarding the church as part of the village, this article suggests one way forward in the study of religion and politics on the continent.

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NOTES

1. "Institution" is understood, in this instance, to mean "an establishment, organization, or association, instituted for the promotion of some object, particularly an object of public or general utility". Though much of the literature on institutional development follows from Douglas North's precise distinction between institutions and organisations—rules, versus bodies, of players—this formulation is too rigid for the purposes of this article.
2. In using the term "local-level politics", the article borrows from SWARTZ (1968).
3. A notable exception in terms of research of the institutional implications of Pentecostalism for rural politics is P.-J. LAURENT's (1994, 2003) work on the Pentecostal Assemblies of God in Burkina Faso.
4. "In 1877 the first group of Anglican missionaries from the London-based Church Missionary Society (CMS) arrived in the capital [. . .] a group of Catholic missionaries from the *Société de Notre-Dame d'Afrique*—the so-called White Fathers—arrived in Buganda in 1879" (HANSEN 1984: 12). The Imperial British East Africa Company only enter Uganda at the end of 1890 (*ibid.*: 15). Against this view from the centre, however, it is worth remembering that in the north and east of the Protectorate—conquered by Ganda agents in the late 1890s and early 1900s—Christianity was introduced "not by missionaries, but by an army" (VINCENT 1982: 40).
5. As J. VINCENT (1982: 36) notes, the Ganda agents who helped colonise the Teso region, brought "the divisiveness of religion [. . .] into the outlying regions of the Protectorate" in the early colonial period.
6. J. C. D. LAWRENCE (1957) concurs with J. H. Driberg's classification of the Iteso as belonging to the Nilo-Hamitic linguistic cluster. This places the Teso with the Jie, Dodoth, Toposa, Karamojong, Turkana, Murle and Suk living to the north or east of the Teso region.
7. The symbol of the Ugandan state at the local level, the parish chief, has gradually withdrawn from the local political field. This withdrawal can be seen in the unimportance of tax collection and the absence of public works, such as the digging of pit latrines, or the clearing of by-ways.
8. See also J. D. Y. PEEL (1975: 108-141).
9. Teso is the region, Iteso the people, Ateso the language, Atesot/Etesot singular feminine/masculine; Itesot a person, of either gender.
10. Despite the overall decline in the terms of trade for Uganda's main exports in the 1970s, the spike in coffee prices in 1976 served as a stay of execution for the Amin regime, bringing in much needed foreign exchange (SOUTHALL 1980: 630).

11. The Ngora area was not the first area to be raided. The part of the region bordering Karamoja was the first to be looted. By the time cattle-rustlers entered Oledai sub-parish, in 1988, Iteso as well as Karamojong made up the raiding parties.
12. The military elite was limited to a number of big families in the region, many of whom spent the majority of their political careers in Kampala. Alongside Peter Otai, there was the long-standing rivalry between Ateker Ejalu and William Omaria. Ejalu, who had been Director of Uganda Railways and William Omaria Minister of State for Internal Affairs in the early 1980s, competed for dominance in Soroti town, the political centre of the region. As if to underline the ambiguous relationship between the rebels and the government, Ejalu and Omaria would jump sides during the insurgency, with Ejalu going on to become a negotiator for the government during the insurgency and a Constituent Assembly member for Soroti county. He was replaced by Omaria in the 1996 parliamentary elections (*The New Vision*, 26/06/2001, 04/03/1996).
13. S. ZISTEL (2000: 17) questions the existence of the FOBA, that it was an ascription invented by UPC politicians in Kampala. As with other labels in the insurgency such as UPA, UPF, and there was only a tangential relationship between the idea of a centrally organised political movement, and the experience of the insurgency at the local level, which was much more personalised and informed by micro-political conflicts.
14. In Kumi district that half of the population interned in the camps. It remains unclear whether these camps were intended to protect or to punish the local population. What can be observed is that the government was ill-prepared. In the first few weeks the death rates far exceeded the average for refugee camps (DE BERRY 2000: 72). In an interview, a missionary priest who had attended to the internees in the Ngora camp commented: "At the time, [we called them] concentration camps, which is what they were, concentrating people in certain areas. That was a terrible blow on those who were caught up in it. The mortality rate was quite high in most of the camps [...] you could not travel past the camp without meeting people carrying bodies [...] That was quite a severe punishment, that's the way people saw it."
15. In other instances Pentecostal Christians use these prohibitions as a way of forging a division in the village, a division that has instrumental, as well as ideological, value. The ban on drinking alcohol becomes a way of withdrawing from certain social encounters where one can be pushed into financial or social obligations, or where heavy drinking is likely to lead to conflict.
16. The Pentecostal Assemblies of God, though a nation-wide church, continues to be concentrated in the east of Uganda. As of 2000 the membership stood at 480,000, which is 2.06% of the national population. The total Pentecostal population in Uganda being 812,583 or roughly 4% of national population (BARRETT *et al.*: 2001).
17. The Pentecostal Assemblies of God is one of the older, more conservative Pentecostal churches in Africa and the Ugandan PAG church is connected to counterpart churches in Europe, North America and Australia. Gifford dates the arrival of the Assemblies of God to 1935, when the Canadian Assemblies of God began to work on the Ugandan side of the Kenyan border (GIFFORD 1998: 155). According to A. HASTINGS, the PAG church entered eastern Uganda only in 1962, a period when a number of missionary-based Pentecostal churches were entering the country, the Full Gospel Church arrived in 1959, the Conservative Baptists in 1961, and the Southern Baptists and Elim Missionary Assemblies in 1962. HASTINGS (1982: 165) suggests that the PAG church, as well as the Southern Baptists, did well in the Teso district, in part, because the "older churches were

undeniably weak". This weakness in the mainline churches was less pronounced in the Ngora sub-county area where the Anglican and Catholic missions were based.

18. Pentecostal groups within the church, "prayer warriors", were charged with going into people's homes to root out curses that had led to illness, mental or physical. Over the course of several days, prayer sessions would be held to exorcise the cursed item—a stone, animal bone, or fragment of clothing—which would then relieve the family of the curse and its effects—madness, sickness, barrenness. As such there were continuous examples of the significance of witchcraft in the lives of villagers—as well as the commitment Pentecostal Christians had towards its eradication.

19. In the 1971 study of village politics J. VINCENT does not dwell on the role of churches as local-level institutions. Vincent's study dates from a time when the regional economy was focused on the production of cotton, and the political economy was more stable and predictable. The withering of the cotton economy in the 1970s, as well as the violence of the insurgency may explain the greater degree of organisational significance around churches in the present.

20. The economics of Pentecostalism in eastern Uganda in no way links the church up to the "prosperity Gospel" that is found in urban congregations in Ghana and Nigeria (HACKETT 1995, UKAH 2004). While the PAG church collected relatively higher individual financial contributions than its Catholic or Anglican counterparts, the money given was never enough to allow the pastor to consider living off his church income alone. Based on the oral statements of the church treasurers over the course of eight Sundays the PAG church had the highest average individual (a headcount was conducted at each service). While the Catholic church of St. Joseph's collected an average of 50 Ugandan shillings per congregant, and the Anglican church of St. John's 65 shillings, the PAG assembly collected an average contribution of 85 shillings.

21. Though the problem of adultery was not uncommon in the village, it was rare for the accused to face a public judgement, and unheard of for the accused to be publicly punished in this way. It was more the case that the suspicion would be left hanging in the air, unless the accusation could be used to substantiate other claims.

22. Inheritance in Teso is patri-lineal and patri-local, with all of the sons inheriting part of the father's land within his own lifetime. The land that the father is left with on his death will be inherited by the eldest son who is also expected to take on the father's debts and obligations. If the sons have not reached adulthood by the time of their father's death, the widow is expected to take a levirate, or "heir", normally the brother of the deceased, who is expected to manage the land until the son's come of age.

23. The structure and content of the court hearing, within the church, bore a strong resemblance to the way the village court worked. The mirroring of other local-level institutions both helps to legitimate the church as a court, and demonstrates the continuing practice of procedural "borrowing" across the local political field.

ABSTRACTS

Drawing on a case study of a Pentecostal church in the Teso region of eastern Uganda, the article illustrates a type of empirical analysis which places churches alongside customary and government institutions. The article focuses on the way villagers who attend the Pentecostal church continue to participate in other local-level institutions, drawing upon their membership in a “born again” church to strengthen political claims. Much of the literature on Pentecostalism in Africa discusses the role of churches in urban areas, taking the exclusionary doctrine of Pentecostal Christianity as indicative of the ways in which “born again” Christians approach politics. The examples presented in this article show Pentecostalism taking a different form, where church members continue to engage in local-level institutions such as burial societies, the village council and clan committees. Through mundane, everyday political activities, such as building up a career or managing a land dispute, Pentecostal Christians utilise their membership in church *alongside* their participation in other local-level institutions. The fieldwork is taken from a poor, rural area coping with a history of economic collapse and political violence. In this constrained environment Pentecostal churches provide one more place where villagers piece together political actions that promise the possibility of economic and physical security.

L'Église dans le village, le village dans l'Église. Le pentecôtisme à Teso, Ouganda. — Cet article, qui s'appuie sur l'étude de cas d'une église pentecôtiste dans la région de Teso, dans l'est de l'Ouganda, poursuit une méthodologie qui place les églises au même plan que les institutions coutumières et gouvernementales. Nous verrons comment les villageois membres d'une église pentecôtiste continuent de participer à d'autres institutions au niveau local et utilisent leur adhésion à une église « re-née » (« *born again* ») pour appuyer leurs revendications politiques. La plupart des études sur le pentecôtisme en Afrique se sont intéressées au rôle des églises dans les zones urbaines, montrant comment la doctrine isolationniste du christianisme pentecôtiste est révélatrice de l'engagement politique des Chrétiens « re-nés ». Les exemples présentés dans cet article révèlent le pentecôtisme sous une nouvelle forme, illustrant le fait que les membres de l'église continuent à s'investir dans d'autres institutions locales telles que les sociétés de funérailles, les conseils de village et les comités de clans. Dans leurs activités politiques quotidiennes (avancement d'une carrière, règlement d'un conflit foncier), les chrétiens pentecôtistes exploitent leur adhésion à l'église en même temps que leur participation dans des institutions au niveau local. Cette étude est le fruit d'un travail de terrain mené dans une région rurale pauvre caractérisée par une histoire de crise économique et de violence politique. Dans cet environnement difficile, les églises pentecôtistes constituent un nouvel espace où les villageois peuvent mettre en œuvre des actions politiques promettant une plus grande sécurité économique et physique.

INDEX

Mots-clés: ethnographie, ethnography, pentecôtisme, local-level politics, religious institutions, politique locale, institutions religieuses

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