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## When the Cross Hides the Flag: Postmodern Pentecostalism and the Fortification of Neo-liberal Capitalism in Uganda

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### Abstract

To a large extent, the liberalness of Protestant Christianity has been central in the entrenchment of colonialism in Africa. Although Uganda became a British protectorate in 1894, the Anglican missionaries from the Church Missionary Society arrived in Uganda in 1877 and through their association with the British Empire, they ploughed the ground for colonial capitalism. The Cross as a Christian symbol was used to conquer the spirit and mentality of African rebellion against imperialism. The moralities in the Ten Commandments such as do not steal and not kill helped the British colonialists to rob resources, kill and enslave Africans with impunity. In 1962, British colonial capitalism went out of Uganda through the door only to come back through the window in what is now called neo-colonialism. To date, the Ugandan economy continues to be funded by Britain and Uganda (satellite) became a consumer of European goods (metro-pole). This paper argues that from 1986, a new kind of capitalism fronted by the Prosperity Gospel and spearheaded by the USA took root in Uganda. In this sort of capitalism, the Prosperity Gospel is used to hide the flag of American neo-liberal imperialism. The paper contends that although Neo-Pentecostal churches in Uganda have been used as an opium to cushion the masses from the neo-liberal evils of land-grabbing, corruption, unemployment,

dictatorship as well as army and police brutality, they have become an instrument for perpetuating these neo-colonial vices.

## **Introduction**

In the last two decades, Uganda has witnessed an upsurge of neo-liberal capitalism (Wiegratz, 2010:124). Unlike the 19<sup>th</sup> century organised capitalism, which allowed the state to regulate markets, this new kind of capitalism also called disorganized capitalism (neo-liberalism) makes the state and the people pawns of the market (Hayek, 1994; Friedman, 2002). Accordingly, the state is restricted from development and promotion of social justice as these roles are relinquished to the market. The neo-liberal spectator state must only play regulatory roles that facilitate the operations of the scientific market (Harvey, 2007:23). These regulatory roles include: enacting laws to enable markets equilibrate perfectly, protecting private property and use of the police and military to crush any opposition against neo-liberal capitalism.

Olumide Victor Ekanade argues that:

Neoliberalism is rooted in the classical liberal ideas of Adam Smith and David Ricardo. Both viewed the market as a self-regulating mechanism tending towards equilibrium of supply and demand, thus securing the most efficient allocation of resources. These British economists and philosophers considered that any constraint on free competition would interfere with the natural efficiency of market mechanisms, inevitably leading to social stagnation, political corruption, and the creation of unresponsive state bureaucracies. In modern times, neo-liberalism emerged as a synonym for the mainly externally directed attempt to remove the state from the economy. The World Bank's Berg Report claimed that many of Africa's economic problems emanated from excessive inefficient state intervention in the economy (Olumide, 2004:4).

According to disorganized capitalism, the provision of accessible and affordable health care, water and education are illegal because anything else may be injurious to operations of the liberal market. In addition, the provision of subsidies to farmers and the establishment of silos (food reserves) is against neo-liberal market forces. In its literal sense, neo-liberalism '*scandalizes*' the poor and deifies the rich and greedy. Neo-

liberalism is at variance with Christianity and its founder the Lord Jesus Christ who preached against greed and materialism (Luke 12:15) just like his apostles (1 Timothy 6: 5-11; James: 5:1-5). Therefore the solid alliance between the Prosperity Gospel which claims to be a better and original brand of Christianity (analogous to the form of Christianity as recorded in the Acts of the Apostles) with the neo-liberal Uganda state baffles and boggles the mind.

The way Anglican Protestantism was used to hide the imperial roots and motivations of Britain is similar to the way the Prosperity Gospel has been used to hide the ramifications of neo-colonialism which is fronted by Christianity in Uganda. The Prosperity Gospel diverts the consciousness of Ugandans from seeing America as abyss of neo-liberal avarice and covetousness. Instead, America is envisaged as the centre of godliness, righteousness, success and prosperity. In this form of religion, it is believed that a successful and blessed man and woman of God is the one who has been to USA and has connections therein (The New Vision, 2008). Consequently, a Ugandan who wants to prosper must get connections to USA.

### **Neo-Pentecostalism and the Capitalistic Material Prosperity Gospel**

Neo-Pentecostal churches (Prosperity gospel churches) were established in the 1980s, and are quite different from classical Pentecostal churches (Bremner, 2013:13; Isiko, 2019:101). Their major tenets include charismatic leadership, focus on material prosperity, miracles, and healings which “they borrow, theologically and culturally from American Pentecostalism” (Isiko, 2020:616). This paper uses the terms Neo-Pentecostalism, Prosperity Christianity and Postmodern Pentecostalism as interchangeable concepts. The paper also treats Neo-Pentecostalism as a New Religious Right Movement.

According to the 2014 Ugandan census, Neo-Pentecostalism is the fastest growing religious movement in the country and commands a following of 11% of the population (DEI, 2019:7). Interestingly, the implementation of neo-liberal reforms in Uganda by Museveni’s National Resistance Movement (NRM) coincided with the upsurge of Prosperity Christianity in Uganda. One wonders as to the connection! Neo-Pentecostalism has managed to flourish in Uganda almost unabated because it has enabled the ruling neo-liberal state to hide its evil protuberances.

Unlike the Catholic and Anglican churches, Prosperity Gospel churches have been largely silent on torture in 'safe houses', dictatorship, land grabbing, nepotism and slavery. Museveni's neo-liberal state has not had a major clash with Prosperity Gospel churches. Preachers of the Prosperity Gospel are some of the ardent supporters of Museveni's dictatorship. This paper argues that when Christian churches that claim to be pure and godly makes an alliance with a corrupt, neo-liberal dictatorial state, something must be fundamentally amiss. The paper uses critical historical analysis and critical document analysis to unveil the 'skeleton' in the neo-liberal colonial cupboard.

### **The Prosperity Ethic and the Spirit of Neo-liberal Capitalism**

Under capitalism, those with capital control the law, policies and institutions in the state. In many ways, capitalism is at variance with Christianity because it promotes a status quo, where the rich become richer and the poor become poorer. In his prestigious work, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (2013), Max Weber, argues that protestant denominations such as Calvinists and Puritans enhanced the spirit of capitalism. Unlike Catholics who preached against excess materialism and the difficulty of rich people entering heaven, Calvinists argued that wealth does not exclude living saints from heaven.

According to them, saints have been predestined for heaven from the foundation of the world and nothing can change their destiny. They also opined that sin does not ban a born again saint from heaven because Jesus paid for our past, present and future sins. Therefore born again Christians who are regarded as living saints are assured of eternal security as far as their salvation is concerned.

This in principle means that accumulating wealth through unethical capitalistic means such as land grabbing, cheating customers, selling opium(crack), selling alcohol, dealing in guns and running brothels does not prevent one from entering heaven because Jesus paid for it all. Christians should thus not be afraid of indulging in capitalist greed and debauchery. This further implies that Christians can not only become Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) of capitalist enterprises but also capitalist millionaires and billionaires.

The Prosperity Gospel takes a step further in the promotion of capitalism than did Calvinism. A number of charismatic ministries cherish and subscribe to the prosperity gospel or the gospel of materialism which they have coped and pasted from American Tele-

Evangelist pastors. According to the prosperity doctrine, it is sin to be poor when God promises prosperity and abundance (Hanegraaff, 1997: 186). More so, poverty is a curse while wealth is a blessing according to these prosperity pundits. Unlike Jesus who cried out; “woe to you who are rich”, the prosperity gurus shout “woe to you who are poor” (Hanegraaff, 1997: 187-188). Like the CEOs of capitalist corporations, Prosperity pastors in Uganda control a lot of wealth in terms of media empires, mansions, schools, expensive cars and mega-cathedrals.

A number of Prosperity churches spend time preaching about money and materialism. They urge their followers to become millionaires and billionaires. Some churches have millionaire clubs and conduct millionaire crusades for their faithful. Furthermore, a number of Prosperity preachers subscribe to eternal security doctrine of State-church unity. This explains why they have regarded soldiers who participated in the Iraq war as warriors in the service of Christ. Therefore the Prosperity Gospel has made both a qualitative and quantitative leap as far the promotion of the spirit of capitalism is concerned.

### **The Transition from British Colonialism to American Neo-liberal Imperialism**

Since the 50s American strategists started putting strategies in place to dismantle the old colonial structures of the 1885-85 Berlin Conference in the Great Lakes Region among other places in the developing world (Layne and Schwarz, 1993; Chomsky, 2003). The Great Lakes Region was of particular interest to them because they wanted to control the mineral wealth in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) by creating African allies that would make this dream a reality. Today, these strategies have resulted in alliances with ‘statesmen’ such as Yoweri Museveni and Paul Kagame. Reading between the political developments in the ground, it would seem that the American Strategists had calculated how the genocide in Rwanda was going to create a new balance of power in the region. This explains why USA paid a deaf ear to calls from conflict monitors that genocide was looming inside Rwanda.

According to Helen Epstein (2017):

officials at the US embassy in Kampala knew that weapons were crossing the border, and the CIA knew that the rebels’ growing military strength was escalating ethnic tensions within Rwanda to such a degree that hundreds of thousands of Rwandans might die in widespread

ethnic violence. However, Washington not only ignored Uganda's assistance to the Rwandan rebels, it also ramped up military and development aid to Museveni and then hailed him as a peacemaker once the genocide was underway.

Therefore Museveni ascendancy to leadership on 26<sup>th</sup> January, 1986 created a paradigm shift from British Colonialism to American neo-liberal imperialism in the great lakes region. During Museveni's 36 years in power, success has been associated with connections with USA however, during the 1960s and 70s successful Ugandans were so much associated with London. Neo-liberal imperialists used the World Bank and IMF to lure Museveni to privatize and liberalize almost the entire economy. Museveni opines that a successful and genuine Ugandan is capitalistic in orientation. He has also argued that Madhvani, a Ugandan investor of Indian origin, is better than two million Ugandans because he makes enormous contributions to economic growth in the country (Museveni, 2002). It must be noted that neo-liberal Structural Adjustment Programmes in Uganda have caused desperation and economic quagmire since thousands have lost their jobs due to emphasis of privatization of public institutions.

The capture of power in Uganda by Kaguta Museveni led the capture of power in Rwanda by Paul Kagame which eventually led to the capture of power in DRC by Laurent Kabila. The war propagated by the Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF) emanated from Uganda under the support of the USA. Paul Kagame hid under the pretext of fighting genociders who had fled to DRC to help Kabila capture power (Chossudovsky, 2003).

It has been argued that Kagame's forces carried out a genocide against the Hutus in DRC but this crime has been hidden from public scrutiny because Kagame is a staunch ally of the USA (Snow, 2008, Carrero, 2010). The neo-liberal alliance in the Great Lakes Region has unleashed American and European corporations in DRC and impoverished millions of Congolese citizens. The American neo-liberal empire has managed to keep DRC impoverished and underdeveloped by infesting it with militias who cause havoc in the interest of the American neo-liberal empire (Snow, 2011; Olara, 2013).

Likewise, the charismatic prosperity gospel preachers in Uganda have been used to divert people away from Museveni's American backed neo-liberal regime. According to prosperity preachers, Ugandans are suffering because of the poverty curse that they inherited from their ancestors. This poverty curse came about due to witchcraft, sorcery and satanic covenants made by the dead ancestors (Mugerwa, 2018:77). These

preachers are silent about the curse of wealth on corrupt officials in Museveni's neo-liberal state. They argue that sin imposes a curse on sinners however, one wonders why the curse of poverty is more emphasized than the curse of wealth and materialism accumulated through unethical means. If sin brings a curse, then wealth accumulated through corruption is definitely a big curse.

### **Neo-liberal Social Darwinism and its disconnect with Christianity**

Neo-liberalism is premised on the argument that if a state is to experience economic development, it is pertinent to make people greedy or too selfish. Neo-liberalism has nothing to do with morality and ethics because how people accumulate wealth should not be our concern. This implies that it does not matter whether wealth is accumulated through inheritance, robbery or fraudulent capital accumulation. In his work, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*(1759), the God father of neo-liberalism Adam Smith argues that business persons such as the bakers and brewers should not be motivated by altruism (helping others) but by selfishness. He believes that ethical altruism will hamper economic development in a state and thus it ought to be curtailed.

Neo-liberalism is premised on racism(Hohle, 2015) and the theories of eugenics(Winston, 2018:612) and Social Darwinism(Bourdieu, 1998:35). The theory of eugenics is premised on the argument that some people are born superior while others are born inferior. According to Social Darwinism, society ought to put in place policy interventions that aim at ensuring that the fittest or superior persons survive(Hawkins, 1997). The fittest persons are the rich persons who are economically enterprising and innovative. The poor are looked at as a burden to society and hence should be discarded by natural selection. In the logic of Eugenicists and Social Darwinists, persons with low intelligent quotients and persons with physical and mental disabilities should not be allowed to survive because they are a burden to society. According to Social Darwinism, society should not try in any way to cushion the poor through human rights, social subsidies and welfare programmes. The unfit persons should simply be exterminated through infanticide, abortion and sterilisation as they are a burden to society.

Learning from the aggravating effects of Social Darwinism, therefore, neo-liberalism is not in tandem with Christianity and must be resisted by Christians in order to protect the poor citizens. This deduction is based on the call by Jesus Christ when he said, "beware of covetousness (greed

for wealth and materialism) for a man's life does not consist in the abundance of things which he possesses" (Luke 12:15). In this perspective, Christianity is totally opposed to the neo-liberalism built around Social Darwinism whose agenda is being advanced by the charismatic prosperity gospel preachers.

In order to establish neo-liberal slave states in Africa, the first strategy of the American neo-liberal empire is to keep people, including elites, ignorant about the fundamental philosophies of neo-liberalism. Many elites in Africa simplistically define neo-liberalism by its tenets of privatization, and currency devaluation. They are ignorant about the positivistic ramifications of this ideology. This has helped neo-liberalism to thrive almost unchallenged. The major strategy of USA Empire has been to use the new religious right movement fronted by the prosperity gospel preachers to cover the evils and skullduggery of neo-liberal regimes. This movement acts as an opium for the masses. It tells people that the problems they have are not caused by the bad governance of the ruling regimes but are rather self-inflicted due to laziness and lack of faith. At the same time it loots the poor people of their hard earned cash through giving seed money and donations to the already filthy rich preachers.

### **The Prosperity Movement in Uganda as a Replica of the Corrupt Neo-liberal State**

The implementation of neo-liberal reforms in Uganda led to an upsurge of corruption and fraudulent accumulation of wealth in Uganda among other East African countries (Whyte & Wiegratz, 2016:232; Wiegratz, 2019:357). According to the Transparency International Corruption Perception Index 2017 and 2019, Uganda is ranked 151 out of 181 countries and 137 out of 180 respectively (Transparency International, 2017). Uganda loses 200 million US dollars annually to corruption (Kagaba, 2013) because the neo-liberal state in Uganda has prioritized markets and economic growth accumulation at the expense of anti-corruption. On December 4<sup>th</sup> 2019, President Yoweri Museveni's led an Anti-corruption walk from Constitutional Square to Kololo Ceremonial Grounds. Among the participants were, Pastor Robert Kayanja of Rubaga Miracle Centre Cathedral and Bishop David Livingstone Kiganda of Christianity Focus Centre (Ugchristiannews, 2019).

The President of the Alliance for National Transformation Major General Mugisha Muntu questioned the usefulness of Museveni's Anti-



Corruption Walk. He opined that “the anti-corruption walk was a mockery and waste of time with intentions of confusing the masses to believe that Museveni has goodwill to fight corruption” (URN, 2019). According to him, “Museveni is incapable of fighting corruption because he uses it to maintain himself in power”. He reiterated that “the only way people will believe Museveni efforts in fighting against corruption is when he starts to arrest top government officials implicated in corruption including ministers and permanent secretaries among others”. Muntu further clarified that “Museveni cannot dare to tackle top government officers because they are the pillars of his survival” (URN, 2019).

Prosperity pastors in Uganda have been largely silent about corruption in neo-liberalized Uganda. This is because Museveni’s NRM government has given a deaf ear to public outcry about the corruption, extortion, financial manipulation and ponzi schemes in a number of Prosperity churches. Besides the few tens of thousands of shillings believers sow in envelopes in Prosperity churches around Kampala, a number of people give assets such as cars and houses in exchange for prayers for wealth, visas and physical healing (The Observer, 2007). The silence of Pentecostal ministers seems to be a fulfillment of the adage, scratch my back as I scratch yours.

Cissy Kagaba the Executive Director, Anti-Corruption Coalition Uganda (ACCU) divulges that:

as a nation, our sense of right and wrong has been surrendered to impunity. The men of the cassock accept posh cars from the president as an unwritten contract to simply watch when and as the state commits wrongs against their flock. They look on, mute, as their own who stand up against evils such as corruption are victimized and thrown into jail. They continue to preach the "good news" unto their people and go to bed with their oppressors. In the end, there is no one to say "this is wrong" and to hold others accountable (2013).

Betty Nambooze the Member of Parliament for Mukono Municipality one time tasked Pastor Joseph Serwadda and Bishop David Kiganda to explain why they were so passionate about criminalizing homosexuality in Uganda and silent about corruption in Museveni’s government (Nambooze, 2014). She reiterated that:

I wish we could use just 50 per cent of the energies we have used to fight homos in the fight against corruption; I wish we would undress those who steal public funds the way we have been targeting girls in

miniskirts; I wish we would look with scorn on the corrupt the same way we despise homos; I wish religious leaders would be as bold on corruption as they have been on issues of the gays (Namboozee, 2014).

The Prosperity church in Uganda therefore lacks moral authority to criticize the corruption schemes in Museveni's NRM government. A number of Prosperity ministers have been accused of exploiting the poor through prayers for sale, compulsory tithing, extortion, mind control and manipulation. More so, a number of Prosperity ministers have been accused for failing to account for funds received from their flock. Therefore the lack of transparency and accountability in a number of Prosperity churches is analogous to the paucity of the same in the ruling NRM neo-liberal government.

For instance, "while visiting Hoima town in 2007, Reverend Godfrey Lule, a senior pastor of Blessed Temple Church in Kawanda told people who want to escape from poverty to pay Shillings 30,000 for holy oil and another Shillings 20,000 for individual prayers". According to the residents of Hoima town, Rev. Lule "made quite a lot of money there. No amount was too much for him to accept and none was too little" (The Observer, 2007).

If for instance, "you had only Shs 30,000, he would give you a small bottle of what he called holy oil but would not pray for you. He would then instruct you to apply the oil on only your forehead without sharing it with anyone" (The Observer, 2007). For Shs "20,000, Lule would only anoint you with oil and a few words of prayer. He would go on to call those who had Shs 10,000 and eventually Shs 5,000". He assured those he anointed that they would "get their wishes in 72 days. If their problems were not solved by then, he promised refund their money" but never did so (The Observer, 2007).

Furthermore, besides selling the prophets' portrait at 300 US dollars, the prophet's badge at 100 \$ and calendar at 150\$, Prophet Kakande Ministries was selling miracle pens at 35\$. The ministry pompously advertised the miracle pens as follows, "Praise God brethren, please order yourself a miracle pen and see how the Lord God Almighty is to bless your life. To the jobless, use it to write an application, students use it for lectures, Prophet Samuel Kakande assures you that God will always be ahead of you, stay blessed"(The Kakande Ministries, 2013).

The corruption antics of Prophet Samuel Kakande of the Synagogue Church of Nations located along Mulago, Kubiri round about, were manifested in the introduction of holy rice worth 50,000 shillings in

2017. According to the Prophet Kakande, “believers must sprinkle some of the rice to theirs, then cook it, in order to receive miracles”. The retail price of rice then was “merely Shs. 3,600 per kilogram which is about 14 times less expensive than the holy rice Prophet Kakande was offering” (Namara, 2017).

Therefore the corruption tendencies among a number of Prosperity churches in Uganda made Newer Pentecostalism a perfect ally of Uganda’s neo-liberal state. This implies that neo-liberal dictums of greed is good, greed is right and greed works were equally espoused by the Prosperity movement and the neo-liberal state presided over by President Museveni. Consequently the neo-liberal state hid the corruption skullduggery in the Prosperity movement and the Prosperity movement in turn kept silent about the corruption and fraudulent capital accumulation ruses of the neo-liberal state.

### **Pentecostal Churches as Rehabilitation Centers for Victims of Neo-liberal Dictatorship**

The implementation of neo-liberal Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) created mass camps of poverty, deprivation and disempowerment. Due to recruitment bans in the public service, a number of educated youths could not find employment, so, several of them opted for underemployment as airtime vendors, taxi drivers, boda-boda riders and hawkers. As neo-liberal greed led to fraudulent accumulation of wealth through land grabbing and development induced displacements, a number of people opted for Pentecostal churches for mental rehabilitation.

Several churches organised lunch hour services, night prayers and counseling sessions to cushion the poor and victims of neo-liberal austerity measures and injustices. A proportion of sick people opted for prayers from pastors because they could not afford the expensive treatments offered in both government and private hospitals and clinics. Numerous pastors manipulated people into believing that their problems were inflicted by ancestral curses, clan spirits and personal weaknesses and not the neo-liberal state. Pastors imparted blessings on people to go and work as security guards in Iraq, Somalia and Afghanistan oblivious of the fact that they were supporting the American neo-liberal oil war from the trio.

Pastors also prayed for a number of their congregates to go and work in Saudi Arabia, Bahrain Dubai, Oman and Qatar as maids, drivers and

shopkeepers among other jobs not knowing that they were selling them over to slavery. Of course, a number of Ugandan maids working in Arab countries were sexually abused and exploited with impunity. It must be noted that the austere structural adjustment measures imposed by international neo-liberal financial institutions (IMF and World Bank) on Uganda created poverty and joblessness. The desperation created by the same lured a number of Ugandans into falling prey to corrupt pastors who robbed them with impunity.

### **Postmodernism and the New Religious Right Movement in Uganda**

Post modernism refers to a philosophy that denigrates the universalisation of standards, procedures, theories, knowledge and ways doing things. Unlike modernists who defended universal theories and practices, the postmodernists advocate for particularism, relativism and *specificism* (Lyotard, 1984:11-13). According to postmodernists, there is no universal way of looking or doing things. This means that conceptions, perceptions and practices are contextual, unique and specific (Holtz, 2020:2). In other words, we don't do our thing rather everyone does his or her thing. This implies that since your thing many not be my thing, let everyone do his or her thing. Post modernists reject the binary thinking that is evident in modernism. According to this perspective, things exist in opposites for instance, the opposite of black is white, the opposite of good is bad and the opposite of gay is straight. Postmodernists believe that things do not exist in opposites but rather in contexts, sub-contexts and particularities (Deutsch, 2011:314). For example there is nothing like ugly and beautiful because beauty is in the eyes of the beholder.

The postmodernity in Neo-Pentecostalism is evident in the disregard of essential Christian preoccupations such as; the focus on eternity (heaven) instead of worldliness, the focus on simplicity instead of the obsession with hoarding material wealth and the focus on holiness instead of carnality. Postmodern Neo-Pentecostalism emphasizes a social kind of gospel that attracts big crowds and big money (capital). According to this gospel, the pastors should not preach what the Holy Spirit leads them to teach but rather what people want to hear. This post modernistic compromise makes both Christians and church leaders such as pastors, bishops, apostles and prophets non-confrontational and compromisers with state vices such as; human rights abuses, corruption, racism and tribalism.

In Uganda for example, confrontation of the president, police and military about injustice and human rights violations has been shunned by prominent Prosperity pastors because it stands in the path to accumulating capital and profits. For instance, although Uganda has had a dictatorship presided over by Yoweri Kaguta Museveni for 36 years; Prosperity pastors have persistently dined with this dictatorship. The dictatorship has entrenched itself in power through vote rigging, torture and brutality and has been greatly criticized by the catholic church as well as civil society organizations amidst the abysmal silence of the Prosperity Christian Church in Uganda.

During the swearing in of President Museveni after winning the controversial 2016 general elections, Pastor Robert Kayanja, the Senior Pastor of Miracle Centre Cathedral and CEO of Channel 44 Television praised Museveni as follows:

Your Excellency this swearing in and inauguration is different from any other because of the following, number one: the NRM government has been in power for 30 years and it's like when king David took over the territory of Israel ...he was 30 years. Even our Lord Jesus Christ when he was anointed to save humanity, he was 30 years. There is a fresh anointing Mr. President ...that is coming upon this country. There is a fresh anointing not the anointing just to do stuff but things are gonna speed up, like the servant of Abraham, Eliza he asked God to give him good speed. I prophecy, I speak success in Uganda in every area of our life there will be good success, Mr. President thank you for being a God Lover, a lover of God's People and you love Uganda. You have defended Africa and also United Uganda, but these five years of your life and your leadership in this country are going to be super years of success God is gonna bless our gardens, God is gonna bring life, there will be no pestilence in this land, there will be unity in this nation. Everything you do will go as God has planned it to be. Because God will do that as it's done in heaven let it be done in Uganda, go ahead Mr. President, unite East Africa, go ahead, let Uganda rise out of this, for God has chosen you Mr. President Yoweri Kaguta Museveni to take the shame off Africa...(Watchdog News, 2016).

Of note, after winning the a controversial February 14 2021 Presidential Election that was characterized by the death of over 50 Ugandans; Kidnap (enforced disappearances) and torture of National Unity Plat Form (NUP) supporters by state security agencies; and the disputation of the presidential elections results by the United States of America and European Union, a group of prominent Pentecostal pastors went to the

state house to congratulate Museveni upon his victory. This time still, Pastor Robert Kayanja praised Tibuhaburwa Museveni as follows:

Today we come first to congratulate you upon your victory. Our relationship with you and the NRM government is not a seasonal affair but a lasting and deep partnership for our country. Your victory is ours, Uganda's and for Africa as well (Osiba, 2021).

The above noted illustrations shows how the infestation of Neo-Pentecostalism with neo-liberal capitalistic greed led to dire compromises by the Prosperity movement. This means that the fraudulent accumulation of profits and capital by church leaders has taken precedence over the advocacy for justice, good governance and social justice for the poor.

### **Prosperity Preachers, Land grabbing and Development Induced Displacements**

One of the greatest evils of neo-liberalism in Uganda is the promotion of accumulation of capital through dispossession of the poor peasants. This has been executed to pave way for large scale commercial farming. The government is optimistic that this will promote development which is defined as economic growth. In 2001 for instance, the government of Uganda used the army to evict over 2,000 peasants from their land in Madudu, Mubende district. The land was given to a Germany investor who used it to establish large scale coffee plantation (FIAN, 2010).

In addition, three multinational companies, Agilis Partners, Kiryandongo Sugar Works Ltd and Great Seasons SMC Ltd have evicted over 35,000 people from 14 villages since 2012. Kiryandongo Sugar is owned by members of the powerful Rai family, a Kenyan-based business group that own numerous plantations, food, metals and timber companies in East and Southern Africa (AFSA, GRAIN and Witness Radio, 2020). Agilis Partners on the other hand is a US company that has invested in growing simsim (sesame), maize, sunflower, and soybean while Great Seasons SMC Ltd, is a Coffee firm owned by Sudanese nationals. Kiryandongo Sugar Limited on the other hand is a company which supplies sugarcane to Hoima Sugar Works (AFSA, GRAIN and Witness Radio, 2020).

Like neo-liberal capitalist corporations, Prosperity pastors in Uganda are also evicting hundreds of poor people in order to establish large scale agricultural projects. For instance over 300 residents in Kamaliba village,

Mpigi district accused Pastor Samuel Kakande of Synagogue Church of all Nations of evicting them from their 24 acres of land without adequate compensation. They petitioned the parliament of Uganda to come to their rescue through their area member of parliament, John Bosco Sseguya Lubyayi. The poor residents accused the Uganda People Defense Force (UPDF) soldiers guarding Pastor Kakande of destroying their food gardens (The Observer, 2018). The peasants opine that they lived peacefully on the land until 2014, when, Aqua World Uganda Limited, a company owned by Kakande was issued a permit by National Environment Management Authority (NEMA) to carry out sand mining and fish farming in the area (The Observer, 2018).

During his Presidential campaign in Buwama, a township along Kampala-Masaka Road in 2016, President Museveni promised to buy three square miles of land to resettle more than 5,000 people in Mpigi District (The Monitor, 2016). One of the disputed lands in Nabyewanga, Muge parish where more than 1,000 people were facing eviction, belongs to Samuel Kakande of The Synagogue Church of all Nations (The Monitor, 2016). The president however has never fulfilled his campaign pledge to the peasants up to now. In April, 2020, a few weeks into the Covid 19 lock down, Aqua World Uganda Limited a company owned by Pastor Samuel Kakande donated 10 million Uganda shillings and three-tons of maize flour, to Mpigi district COVID-19 taskforce to clean Kakande's bad record in the locality where he has evicted a number poor peasants from their land without adequate compensation. The purpose of the donation according to the company was to help the task force feed the needy in the area (The Independent, 2020).

Some Prosperity pastors have used brutality and terror to amass land from poor peasants. For example, Pastor Michael Mukhono *aka* Musayi, the senior pastor and CEO of Mount Elgon Believers Baptist Independent Mission in Bugishu Sub region has been accused by poor residents of using barbarous tactics to grab their land. The residents accuse the pastor of torturing, assaulting, beating and cutting them with machetes in order to force them relinquish their land to him (Odeke, 2020). According to residents, they have filed a number of cases before the police in order to have pastor Musayi reprimanded but all to no avail.

The poor residents accuse the police and army of giving military protection to pastor Musayi and doing everything possible to sabotage all cases lodged by the peasants against the pastor (Odeke, 2020). On 23 January 2020, Justice Lillian C.N Mwandha of Mbale High Court ordered the eviction Pastor Michael Mukhono *aka*. Musayi from plot 9, Pallisa

Road in Mbale Municipality. Pastor Musayi had grabbed the piece of land from an 86 year old woman, Alice Kimono Kimaswa. The eviction order from the judge also stopped Pastor Musayi from collecting rent from tenants living in the house that was constructed in plot premises (Serugo, 2020).

## **Ponzi Schemes and Merchants in the House of God**

A number of Ugandans have been robbed through numerous Ponzi schemes since the introduction of neo-liberal reforms (Solli, 2015). For example, a charity organization called Caring for Orphans, Widows, and the Elderly (COWE) robbed millions of shillings from Ugandans under the silent watch of the state. It is “estimated that five billion Ugandan shillings (\$2.7 million) was lost across the country, with more than 700 million shillings (approximately \$390,000) taken from widows and orphans in a single district” (Duggan, 2016: 199, 200). Up to now, no one has been prosecuted for this fraud (Kavuma, 2016). These Ponzi schemes have moved from the secular realm to the precincts of the church. For instance, Bishop Fred Ntabazi of One Light Ministries, Kampala has faced a lot of criticisms in the media for executing a ponzi scheme that impoverished a number of Ugandans. His scheme required people “to invest a minimum of Shs 5m and, after a fortnight, get 10% (Shs 500, 000) every week for the next 48 weeks. This meant that an investor of Shs 5m would make Shs 24m after 48 weeks”(Mukasa, 2020).

Lured by the prospect of prosperity and a chance to escape the ditch of poverty, a number of people fell prey to his Ponzi scheme. Many people took loans from banks and others sold assets such as land, cars and houses to invest in Bishop Ntabazi’s Scheme (Mukasa, 2020). A few people received the promised weekly 10% deposits on their bank accounts, mobile money or even through physically picking the money on either Friday or Saturday until December 7, 2019 when the weekly deposits came to an abrupt end. The victims reported Bishop Mutabazi to **State House Anti-Corruption Unit (SHACU)** but were not helped. Some believe that he is untouchable because he has a strong connection to President Museveni’s state house (Mukasa, 2020).

In addition, Pastor Ssemanda in conjunction with a group of senior pastors and government officials formed the organization called Hands across the World Initiative Uganda to solicit money that was then deposited amongst their own bank accounts. Ssemanda was the patron of this organization. Many pastors however did not know that the



organization they promoted to their congregations was a scam (Semakula, 2020). In November 2020, Pastor Siraje Ssemenda the senior pastor at Revival Ministries Church, Bombo was arrested by **SHACU** along the Mutukula boarder as he tried to escape to Tanzania after defrauding hundreds of pastors, 400 private school owners and thousands of parents of vulnerable children (Semakula, 2020). Four billion( \$1million) shillings was robbed from the victims behind the promises of scholarships, trips abroad, taking them to meet President Yoweri Museveni and connecting them to income generating schemes under Operation Wealth Creation(Etukuri, 2020). Pastor Semanda was imprisoned pending trial in the Anti-Corruption Court.

## **Conclusion**

The alliance between neo-liberalism and charismatic New Religious Right Movements as fronted by the Prosperity Gospel preachers is one of the despicable fallacies of Christendom. The prioritization of markets at the expense of people's wellbeing by neo-liberalism is at total variance with Christianity and the teachings of Jesus Christ. Postmodern Charismatic Prosperity preachers have succeeded in making a solid alliance with neo-liberal capitalism due to their deviation from fundamentals and essentials of the Christian doctrine. These New Religious Right preachers have managed to define and equate success and godliness with excessive materialism and self-indulgence instead of purity and simplicity. Like the CEOs of mega neo-liberal corporations, a number of prominent Prosperity preachers in Uganda have managed to attain multimillion business empires under the protection of the neo-liberal state. Several Prosperity Gospel preachers have indulged in neo-liberal vices such as land grabbing, ponzi schemes, extortions and fraudulent accumulation of capital. The Prosperity Gospel movement in Uganda has successfully been employed to hide the ramifications of US imperialism in Uganda. Indeed the Cross has been used an opium to deflect the masses from coming to grips with the austere dimensions of the neo-liberal empire.

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