From the Fringes to the Centre: Rethinking the Role of Religion in the Public Sphere in Kenya

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Introduction

Despite, the predicted and expected demise of religion by modernists and secularists when secularization and privatization sets in, religions are thriving all over the world but especially in the Global South. In fact contrary to the above views, religions of the Pentecostal, Jewish, Hindu, Buddhists and African traditional movements have emerged and are thriving often in competition with the modern nation states (Meyer & Moors (2006); Hackett, (2005). According to Rosalind Hackett, (2005), this religious resurgence that has been spurred by globalization, democratization and the rise of modern media has gained a new but unexpected political significance over the last few years. At the same time these religions and spiritualities continue to have a strong public presence and dimension. These religions and spiritualities have moved from the fringes only a few years ago to the centre of national politics in many countries not only in the global south but also increasingly in America where religion particularly that of the Evangelical variant now plays a major role both in domestic and international politics and relations. For these reasons, Rosalind Hackett(2005) succinctly points out that ‘these religiosities and spiritualities are squeezing their way into the international arena and are increasingly informing political will as well as public policies in both emergent and longstanding democracies in many nations of the world.’

These developments have not only baffled many but have also generated huge debates and controversies. In essence, and as scholars such as Hackett, (2005) have argued, the debates have centered on the question of the role of religion in the public sphere particularly in modern pluralistic and democratic societies and whether religion belongs to the private or public sphere. At the same time, the public prominence of religion in national and international politics and relations have not only challenged our thinking about the role of religion in the public sphere but have also in the words of Brigit Meyer and Annelies Moors (2006) led to ‘the emergence of new sites of engagement and contestations’ such as the use of mass media by religious organizations to pervade the public sphere. These developments have confounded secularization theories as religion refuses to be confined to the place designated to it by modernists and secularists (the private sphere) to invade the public sphere as well as the arena of moral and political contestations. Since then many questions are now being asked, one of which is whether religion was ever relegated to the private sphere in the first place as secularization theories claimed. What
are the social and political implications of religion assuming ever more prominent and contested public and political roles?

This paper seeks to interrogate the rise to public prominence of the Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements as key elements within Civil Society in the governance of the state in Kenya and in the light of Jurgen Habermas theory of the public sphere, in order to draw lessens for governing the African public sphere. In so doing the paper shall be guided by the following questions: what is the public sphere and how can this concept be applied to the African contexts? What is the role of religion in the public sphere in Kenya? What role does the crisis of the modern state in Africa and Kenya in particular play in allowing for the public role of religion? How does the constitutional separation of church and state influence the role which religious traditions, communities and organizations are allowed to play in the political public sphere? What are the social and political implications of these developments in the governance and democratization of nation states in Africa? These are some of the questions, debates, and discourses that have essentially bogged the minds of many scholars and are the main concern of these research undertaking. Yet these questions, discourses, debates and new developments can only be adequately addressed if we first understood the notion of ‘public sphere’ that has not only gained prominence and acquired new meanings and usage but has also aroused many philosophical and sociological debates in recent years.

The paper is divided into five parts. Part one will discuss, theorize and critic the concept ‘public sphere’ in the light of Jurgen Habermas’ understanding of the concept but also draws from other generation of thinkers in a bid to situate this concept in the African context. Part two discusses the heightened role of religion and the recognition of this role in the public sphere globally by reviewing some of the literature available. Part three addresses the new prominence of religion in public sphere in Kenya as a new site of contestation and also highlight the critical role that religious activism is playing in the democratization of Kenya. Part four examines the relationship between religion and media and how religion has successfully appropriated mass media technologies and new communications avenues to pervade the public sphere. Part five offers a brief conclusion by highlighting the issues raised in the light of the general theme of the 12th General Assembly, **Governing the African public sphere.**
Theorizing the Public Sphere: the Debates

The free Internet Encyclopedia, Wikipidia, describes the public sphere as an arena in social life where people can get together and freely discuss and identify societal problems, and through that discussion influence political action (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/public sphere). It is therefore a kind of “discursive space” in which individuals and groups congregate to discuss matters of mutual interests and where possible reach a common interest (Gerard, 1998). Similarly, the public sphere can be seen as a theater in modern society in which political participation is enacted through the medium of talk. It is also a realm of social life in which public opinion can be formed. According to Jurgen Habermas (1989), the public sphere is also said to mediate between the private sphere and the sphere of public authority. The private sphere is comprised of Civil Society whereas the sphere of public authority deals with the state or the realm of the police, and the ruling class (Habermas, 1989). According to Habermas, (1989), the public sphere crossed over these two realms and through the realm of public opinion, it put the state in touch with the needs of society. This area is conceptually distinct from the state and is a site for the production and circulation of discourses that can in principle be critical to the state. In Habermas’ understanding, the people themselves have come to see the public sphere as a regulatory institution against the authority of the state (Habermas, 1989). Today the study of the public sphere centers on the idea of participatory democracy, and how public opinion becomes political action. According to Hauser (1998), the basic belief in public sphere theory is that political action is steered by the public sphere, and that the only legitimate governments are those that listen to the public sphere. In Hauser’s (1998) opinion, what this essentially entails is that democratic governance rests on the capacity of and opportunity for citizens to engage in enlightened debates. Much of the debates over public sphere involves is what the basic theoretical structure of the public sphere is, how information is deliberated in the public sphere, and what influence the public sphere has over society (Hauser, 1998).

The concept Public Sphere first originated from Jurgen Habermas and has since then gained a lot of significance and usage. It has equally attracted and created lots of sentiments and generated numerous debates, and discourses. In recent years, the concept has become the buzzword for anthropologists, sociologists, historians, political scientists and analyst and other social scientists and those in the humanities (Meyer & Moors, 2006). But the most contemporary
conceptualizations of the public sphere are based on the ideas expressed in Jurgen Habermas’ book *The Structural Transformation of the Public sphere- An Inquiry into a Category of the Bourgeois Society* 1989 which is an English translation from the German version. The German term *Offentlichkeit* (Public Sphere) encompasses a variety of meanings and it implies a spatial concept, the social sites or arenas where meanings are articulated, distributed, and negotiated, as well as the collective body constituted by, and in this process ‘the public’(Negt & Kluge 1993).

Through this work, Habermas gave a historical and sociological account of what he saw as the rise and decay of the bourgeois public sphere. In this great work, Habermas explored the concept of the public sphere, particularly the bourgeois public sphere, which he believes contains all the elements necessary for a healthy democracy. The bourgeois public sphere may be conceived above all as the sphere of private people who come together as a public; they soon claimed the public sphere regulated from above against the public authorities themselves, to engage them in debates over the general rules governing relations in the basically privatized but publicly relevant sphere of commodity exchange and social labor (Habermas, 1989).

Habermas (1989) argued that the bourgeois society was representative and universalistic and was able to speak for everyone. In his views and understanding, the public sphere was well established in various locations including coffee shops and salons, or other areas of society where various people could gather and discuss matters that concerned them. In his views all these venues such as salons from London to France not only paved a forum for self expression, but in fact had become a platform for airing one’s opinions and agendas for public discussions. Habermas (1989) further showed how the public sphere was cultivated through media (Newspapers and letters) and how the public was able to influence politics and society. According to him, the emergence of the bourgeois public sphere was particularly supported by the 18th century liberal democracy making resources available to this new political class to establish a network of institutions like the publishing enterprises, newspapers and discussions forums, where a democratic press was a main tool to execute this (Habermas, 1989).

One of the primary criticisms of Habermas theory was the idea that the bourgeois public sphere was inclusive in nature. In contemporary thought, informed by the rise of postmodernism, questions about the public sphere have turned to questions about the ways in which hegemonic
forces dictate what discourse is and is not allowed in the public sphere, and in turn dictates what can and cannot be formulated as a part of one’s identity (Hauser, 1998). The main concern of many theorist have been the fear that when people form together in a group, other people are pushed out of social settings because of their identity, and therefore are unable to participate in the discussions occurring within the public sphere. This is specifically the problem with the bourgeois public sphere, which excluded women and other minorities from discussions. The concept of the public sphere as advanced by Jurgen Habermas has been heavily criticized with some scholars suggesting that it is too normative and universalistic, and for allowing for the use of generalizations based on western historical contexts (Meyer, 2006: Calhoun, 1992; Warner 1992). There have also been concerns that Habermas public sphere may not be applicable to other contexts outside Europe such as Africa. It has also been largely criticized for excluding and marginalizing groups such as women and other minorities. Yet despite, the criticism, the concept of public sphere as advanced by Habermas remains the point of reference to many scholars interested with the theories of the public sphere and as one scholar aptly pointed out ‘to date Habermas work is still considered the foundation of contemporary public sphere theories, and most theorists cite it when discussing their own theories’ (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/public sphere). It is also the dominant point of reference in discussions on the public sphere both in western and non western scholarship.

Starting form Habermas’ public sphere as a point of both reference and critique, some scholars have come up with new models to help understand how marginalized groups interact with the dominant political sphere. Notable in these new models are scholars such as Nancy Frazer (1990), Osker Negt and Alexander Kluge (1993). Nancy Fraser (1990) for example identified the fact that marginalized groups are excluded from the universal public sphere, and thus was impossible for it to claim that one group would in fact be inclusive. However, she claimed that marginalized groups formed their own public sphere or what is now known as counter public or counter publics (Fraser, 1990). While Fraser saw Habermas public sphere as an indispensable resource, she observed that Habermas stops short of developing a new, post bourgeois public sphere (Fraser, 1990) and in an attempt to offer a modern conception of the public sphere, she came up with the concept of counter publics. In her reevaluation of the bourgeois public sphere, Fraser(1990) argues that rather than opening up the political realm for everyone, the bourgeois
public sphere shifted political power from ‘a repressive’ mode of domination to a hegemonic one (Fraser, 1990). Rather than rule by power, there was now rule by the majority ideology. To deal with this hegemonic domination, Fraser (1990) argues that repressed groups form into counter publics that are parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated groups invent and circulate counter discourses to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests and needs (Fraser, 1990). In any society and certainly globally, there are always multiple publics, many associated with particular groups or interests and some in opposition to others.

Benhabib (1992) notes that in Habermas’ idea of the public sphere, the distinction between public and private issues separates issues that normally affect women (e.g. issues of reproduction, nurture and care for the young, the sick, and the elderly), into the private realm and out of the discussion in the public sphere. She argues that if the public sphere has to be opened to any discussion that affects the population, there cannot be distinction between ‘what is’ and ‘what is not’ discussed. But Gerard Hauser (1998) proposes a different direction for the public sphere than the previous models. He proposes that public spheres were formed around the dialogue surrounding issues, rather than the identity of the population that is engaging in the discourse. Rather than arguing for an all inclusive public sphere, or the analysis of tensions between the public spheres, he suggested that publics were formed by active members of society around issues. Hauser(1998) believes a public sphere is a discursive space in which strangers discuss issues they perceive to be of consequence for them and their group. Its rhetorical exchanges are the bases for shared awareness of common issues, shared interests, tendencies of extent and strength of difference and agreement, and self-constitution as a public whose opinions bear on the organization of society. Other scholars have propagated somehow different views of the public sphere.

According to Calhoun (2005), the public sphere is a space of communication and as such transcends any particular place, and weaves together conversations from many places and people. It also transcends particular social groups, involving people who are strangers to each other in communication to each other. Similarly, the public sphere is also a medium of social integration, a form of social solidarity as well as an arena for debating possible social arrangements (Calhoun, 2005). The public sphere has also been proposed as a crucial dimension of Civil Society. In fact
in the last few years, the notion of the public sphere has not only gained a new prominence but has also been invoked as an alternative to the concept of Civil Society, which has been critiqued for ascribing western assumptions of proper state-society relations to post colonial context (Meyer, 2006; Comaroff and Comaroff 2000; Mamdani, 1995). Because of the criticism of the concepts of public sphere as understood by Jurgen Habermas, and partly as a result of the failure of many nation states, scholars have advanced concepts such as Civil Society as the answer to democratization of the African nation states. The concepts of civil society were fully developed in the 1980s with the growing hegemony of neo-liberal ideas and the early 1990s liberalization of the economy and the retreat of the state were advocated in order to speed up economic growth, and were also thought to result in further empowerment of citizens and democratization (Mamdani, 1995; Willeim, 2007). The state was seen as inherently bad for development so a reduced role of the state and an increased civil society were proposed as the solution. This led to a mushrooming of Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) on the African continent in the 1990s and increasingly these begun to deliver services previously delivered by the state. Civil society was seen as intrinsically good, and as a power free zone that hold the state to account. Yet, today the notion of public sphere is now often invoked as an alternative to the concept of Civil Society which is critiqued for ascribing western assumptions of proper state/society relations to postcolonial contexts (Meyer, 2006).

At the same time, while the concepts of Civil Society and the Public Sphere have been used in relation to the advent of democracy in Africa, it is however the later concept particularly in the case of Africa, that has been much talked about and greatly attributed to an important role of promoting the democratization process in Africa (Willeims, 2007). The African contribution to the public sphere analysis or as an analytical tool is yet to be fully rediscovered. Nevertheless, African scholars and Africanists have engaged in both thought and research in the analysis of concepts such as the public sphere and Civil Society and their usefulness for the African context. For example, Peter Ekeh, in his very influential 1975 article entitled *Colonialism and the Two Publics in Africa: A Theoretical Statement* emphasizes that western experience of a unified public sphere, which the state and civil society both occupy, is not reflective of an African social space (Willeim, 2007; Ekeh, 1975). Ekeh distinguishes two publics: the primordial and civic public. Ekeh argues that the post-colonial African states have not been successful in its hegemonic drive,
so that the political space it occupies is by no means the only public space that exists in Africa. For him and according to Willeim, the sphere of what he calls the primordial public occupies vast tracts of the political space that are relevant for the welfare of the individuals, sometimes limiting and breaching the state’s efforts to extend its claims beyond the civic public sphere (Willeim, 2007). There is therefore need to understand this publics as they relate to African historical developments and contexts. Though the public sphere has been challenged and criticized even compromised, it has not lost its importance. This is because the debates inspired by Habermas and others as Meyer & Moors (2006) points out ‘can help scholars to understand the emergence of new arenas of debate that are not fully controlled by the nation states and which generates shared ideas, sentiments and moods among people who do not necessarily have the same cultural or ethnic background. Such arenas include new publics such as religion, media, trade unions and women movements. There is need to find ways of integrating religion into discourses and debates about the public sphere rather than only confronting religious differences as an obstacle. In the preceding pages, I discuss the place of religion in the public sphere in contemporary societies.

**Religion in the Public Sphere**

The concept of secularization advanced by scholars such as Max Weber (1930), David Martin, (1999) and Harvey Cox, (1996), is a simple notion premised on the prediction that all-encompassing process of modernization will soon replace religion. The theory according to Donald Miller and Tetsunao Yamamori (2007) was based on the Enlightenment doctrine that science would replace religion since it was clearly superior to the mythologically based irrationalism of religion, which solved problems through magical and illusory projections of human attributes onto hypothesized gods. This observation and prediction has long been proven wrong by the resurgence of religion in the public sphere in many parts of the world. Another aspect of the secularization argument that has equally been disapproved by recent developments was the idea that religion would become increasingly individualized, relegated to the private sphere of life, thus having little influence on the public domain (Miller & Yamamori, 2007). Jurgen Habermas (1990; 1962) for example saw the emergence of the public sphere and the public decline of religion as depended on each other (Meyer & Moors, 2006). He believed that religion belonged to the private sphere arguing that religious convictions only emerge in public debates only as opinions and thus have to engage with non religious opinions in line with agreed
upon, rational discursive rules (Meyer & Moors, 2006). What this essentially meant was that people might hold on to religion for personal rites of passage related to birth, death and marriage, but certainly have no influence on public policy or moral principles governing business, medical research, and other areas in the public realm. This was not to be the case for in the later part of the twentieth century, sociologists begun to notice that religion had not disappeared even though it had marginal importance in some western European countries. Instead there was a tremendous resurgence of religion in public life in many countries particularly in the countries of the global south. But even more surprising was the connection and continued interface between religion and politics, public policy and moral values.

In fact, Brigit Meyer, (2006) aptly points out that contrary to the expected demise of religion as predicted by modernists and secularists when secularization and privatization sets in, religions particularly those belonging to the newer Pentecostal and charismatic types are thriving all over the world but especially in Africa and other countries of the Global South. Many empirical indicators now suggest that new religious movements are emerging far more quickly than secularization theorists would predict. In fact, world events make it increasingly clear that religion will continue to be a major player in politics (Haynes, 1993) These indicators and evidence from new developments in Africa and elsewhere have challenged secularization and modernization theories and rendered them questionable as they did not fit the facts on the ground. Rosalind Hackett(2005) points out that the recent increase in claims for the recognition and implementation of religious ideas, identities, values, practices and institutions in the governance of nation states and the lives of citizens, however indicates that these predictions were wrong’(Hackett 2005). They also do not reflect the reality in Africa’s religious and socio-political changes sweeping across the continent.

Thus, despite these predictions, religion continues to have a public dimension and prominence. In fact, religions have refused to be relegated to the private sphere and have long invaded the public domain to become dominant players in national and international relations and diplomacy (Hackett, 2005). In fact ‘religious traditions and communities of faith have gained a new, but unexpected political importance and significance since the epoch making change of 1989-90. Spurred by globalization, democratization, and the rise of the modern media, this remarkable
religious resurgence is evident in a variety of places: from scholarly works and popular interests to increased awareness of the importance of religion in diplomacy and peace building (Hackett, 2005). Today, as Hackett (2005) further reflects, debates and publications regarding the appropriate role of religion in both emergent and long standing democracies increasingly inform political will and public policy. According to her, literature had been lacking in the area of religion in the public sphere, notably on the international level prior to the early 1990s. This lack of recognition of religion caused scholars and observers to downplay the significance of religion in domestic and global affairs (Hackett, 2005). However, over the last few years, scholars have attempted to pay some attention to the increasing presence of religion in the public sphere. The role of religion in the transformation of the public sphere now also receives increased attention.

The early 1990s, and the aftermath of September 11/2001 to be precise, marked an upsurge in literature recognizing the role of religion in the public sphere. Since then, the place and role of religion in the public sphere has generated a lot of controversies (Guinn, forthcoming). One of the most influential and controversial of these writings was Samuel Huntington’s (1996) work, *The Clash of Civilizations?* In this work, Huntington argued that the world would be shaped, in large measure, by the interactions among seven or eight major civilizations, mainly, Western, Confucian, Japanese, Islamic, Hindu, Slavic-Orthodox, Latin American, and possibly African. The volume elicited unprecedented reactions and he was heavily criticized for down playing religion (many suggested that the most differentiating feature was religion and that post-Cold War optimism would be shattered by deep rooted cultural conflicts (Hackett, 2005). But controversial as this important volume was, it nevertheless opened a flood gate of studies on the role of religion in international affairs. There followed several volumes that paid attention to the influence of religion in the last one decade. For example, a landmark study by Johnston & Sampson (1994), *Religion, the Missing Dimension of Statecraft* demonstrates that religion has been absent from the analysis of many international conflicts and their resolution.

Other published works have also helped focus attention on the growing importance of religion on the international field. One of these publications was Jose Casanova’s (1994) influential study, *Public Religions in the Modern World*. This book reconsiders the relationship between religion and modernity and argues that many religious traditions have marked their way, sometimes
forcefully, out of the private sphere and into the public sphere at an increasingly international level. This movement of religion into the public sphere, notes Hent de Vries, (2001) is also facilitated by the radical transformation of the functions ascribed to religion. However, religious resurgence as some scholars have pointed out brings new problem for both emergent and established nation states which according to Rosalind Hackett(2005) can only be tackled through a careful balancing of different cultural and religious differences in increasingly multi-religious, multi-cultural, and multi-ethnic national contexts. At the same, the September 11th 2001 terrorist attacks on America spectacularly demonstrated the effects of religious ideology on the public sphere. In the words of Philip Jenkins, a prominent academic commentator on contemporary religious affairs and as quoted from (The Economist, 2007):

*The Twenty-First Century will almost certainly be regarded by future historians as a century in which religion replaced ideology as the prime animating and destructive force in human affairs, guiding attitudes to political liberty and obligation, concepts of nationhood, and, of course conflicts and wars.*

One effect of the aftermath of September 11th 2001 is the upsurge of literature on Islam, on religion and violence generally and on peace and conflicts (Hackett, 2005). At the same time and as Hackett (2005) aptly points out, it brought home to many the need to know more about other religious interpretations of the world, but also a stronger sense of the ambivalence of the sacred and of our global connectedness. Since then journalists and academic analysts have rushed up to catch up with global religious resurgence. Similarly, scholars have since then attempted to explain the rise of the so-called fundamentalist Muslim, Hindu or Christian transnational movements, which are perceived as disturbing because they assume a political role and question the ability of the modern state to contain religion (Meyer & Moors, 2006:5). Manuel Castells (1996, 19) for example argues that the rise of Muslim Fundamentalism is a reaction against unreachable modernization, the evil consequences of globalization, and the collapse of the post-nationalist project (Meyer & Moors, 2006). Similarly he argued that Christian American fundamentalists seek to reassert control over life, and over the country, in direct response to uncontrollable processes of globalization that are increasingly sensed in the economy and in the media(Meyer & Moors, 2006). In the words of Manuel Castells as quoted in Brigit Meyer & Annelies Moors, (2006) “the public articulation of Islam and Christianity is a defensive reaction
against the insecurities arising “when the world becomes too large to be controlled” and concerns an attempt of people to try and shrink it back to a manageable size so as to ground themselves in a delimited place and have a history. Eickleman and Anderson (1999) have propagated a somewhat different theory from Castells. In their study of the emergence of a new Muslim public sphere, they have argued that “the easy accessibility and proliferation of electronic media facilitates the constitution of a new Muslim Public able to challenge the state and conventional religious authority, building civil society, and engaging in transnational relations” (Meyer & Moors, 2006). These two scholars have advocated for a theory of globalization from below which has come about as a result of new forms of media communication such as cassettes, pamphlets and the internet. Their study is complemented by studies on global Pentecostalism such as those by David Martin (2001) who argues that Pentecostal groups creatively appropriate new mass media technologies to reach out the world.

At the same time, books on religion or spirituality reports Rosalind Hackett (2005) now feature regularly on the New York Times bestseller list. In November 2007, The Economist devoted 18 pages to a special report on Faith and Politics. In this paper, the Economist highlighted the growing influence of religion in public life not only in the Third world countries but also in the Western world too. Similarly, as an extension of the greater recognition of the role of religion on the international stage, a number of new initiatives to extend the scope of Faith-Based Organizations (FBOs) to the diplomatic realm is notable particularly in Africa. Amongst these volumes are Stephen Ellis and Gerrie Ter Haar (2004) Worlds of Power: Religious Thoughts and Political Practice in Africa.

Nevertheless, despite this upsurge of literature and the fact that religion is a force to reckon with in Kenya’s public sphere, research is lacking in this critical field and this paper hopes to fill in this gap. At the same time, even in the ranging debates about the relationship between religion and politics, no one has explored the religious benefits and challenges of public engagement of the Christian believers. In fact what is missing in the literature in Africa, Kenya in particular are empirical and in depth case studies that examines the role of religion in the public sphere especially within the broader sweep of African and global Pentecostalism. Also missing in the literature is its implication for policy, international relations and conflict resolutions. These are
Pentecostalism in the Public Sphere in Kenya

There has been tremendous resurgence of new religious movements and religious revival particularly of the Pentecostal and Charismatic type in the African continent, Kenya in particular over the last three and a half decades now. These religiosities have altered the religious and socio-political landscape of many African nations. David Maxwell (2006) for example observes that Africa’s contemporary landscape looks very different from a century ago when mission historic churches such as the Catholics, Anglicans, Methodists, Baptists and Lutherans dominated the scene. In African cities and more recently rural areas, he points out that evidence of religious revival and renewal are visibly and conspicuously notable in different shades and forms across the landscapes of these countries. In the continents major cities, notes, Ilesanmi (2007) ‘Pentecostalism has eclipsed the mainstream Christianity of Catholicism, Methodism and Presbyterianism interrogating earlier conceptions of the nature of religious authority, of the relationship between the religious and the secular sphere or the private and public domain, even the possibility of co-existence with other faiths.’ These latest developments have increasingly blurred the relationship between the religious and the secular as well as the private and the public spheres as religion forces its way into the public sphere. The movement attracts the youth who heavily consume and appropriate a Christianized popular culture (Ilesanmi, 2007: Parsitau, 2008) and women who are critical to the founding and expansion of these movements (Mwaura, 2005). Indeed in Ghana, Kenya, South Africa, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe, “Born again” Christians are so numerous and their leaders so influential that they are just as ‘mainstream,’ ‘mainline’ or ‘established’ as the Anglicans (Maxwell, 2006).

Across the African continent, David Maxwell (2006), reports that Pentecostal Christianity grows ever more strident and publicly visible. In urban centres, urbanites are continually provoked to reflect upon the state of their souls, by scriptural banners heralding the latest convention led by the most recent born again celebrity (Maxwell, 2006). At weekends and weekdays, cinemas, schools and abandoned warehouses become theatres of the Holy Spirit for new churches and assemblies or are permanently bought up and transformed into air conditioned venues for new
mega-churches (Maxwell, 2006: Ukah, 2003). Public places and spaces such as parks, bus stations, markets, stadium, play grounds or any other places where people congregate are targeted for evangelistic crusades, lunch hour meetings, revival meetings, prayer meetings or Bible study meetings (Maxwell, 2006). This type of African Christianity has seized hold of popular culture and worship stores have sprung up in many urban cities selling a host of Christian literature (Maxwell, 2006). Christian tracts and magazines are sold on the streets as gospel music tunes are played loudly in towns and gospel music shops and kiosks (Parsitau, 2006). The Christian consumer can now buy audio tapes, CDs DVDs and recorded sermons from bookstores, on the streets and church tape booths. Born again graffiti, stickers and handbills pervade public places such as institutions of learning, public notice boards, walls, and streetlight poles. Vehicles have Christian slogan painted across the front or the rear (Maxwell, 2006) in catchy and creative phrases: ‘In case of rapture, this car will be unmanned’; ‘I am covered by the blood of the Lamb’ ‘Jesus loves you’ ‘Keep cool, Jesus is in control’. Shops and business enterprises are christened ‘Victory boutique,’ ‘Ebenezer hair Salon’,’ Kings Motors and Car boutique,’ ‘Faith furnishers and interior décor’, ‘Psalms 123 Hardware’ and Faith and Care Savings Society’. In short this type of African Christianity is powerfully visible and pervades all sectors of public life. It is this overtly visible public prominence of this type of Kenyan Christianity that is the focus of this research undertaking.

This born again movement has not only invaded the public sphere but has equally created new fault-lines in African Christianity, transcending previous denominational boundaries (Maxwell, 2006:6). Although accurate figures are hard to obtain, especially because ‘born again are obsessed with size and prone to exaggerations’ (Maxwell, 2006), what is not in doubt is the numerical and institutional growth and strength of Pentecostal Christianity in Kenya. The Pentecostal constituency has not only grown numerically and institutionally, its influence in the public sphere has equally grown tremendously to become a major force in national politics. Its large Christian constituency has also grown to become a critical election mass that can easily be mobilized by its influential leaders. But this trend is not only peculiar to the Kenyan context but is also noticeable in many parts of the world but especially in the countries of the Global South and in the United States of America too. In fact throughout the world, there is a resurgence of religion in the public sphere and religion is forcing its way into politics (Aluanga, 2007).
In tandem with other global developments, there has been an overwhelming explosion of Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity in Kenya in the last three and a half decades or so where thousands of churches of Pentecostal and Charismatic persuasions and inclinations have sprouted all over the country but especially in urban centres. According to the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life (2006) survey, the Pentecostal and Charismatic movement account for more than half of Kenya’s population. The survey also found that approximately seven in ten protestant in Kenya are either Pentecostal or Charismatic, and about a third of Kenyan Catholics surveyed can be classified as Charismatic. Similarly, according to newspaper reports, the Registrar General’s office is overwhelmed by increasing demands for registration of these churches (Ndegwa, 2007). The Attorney General Amos Wako while speaking in a workshop for church leaders revealed that the department is overwhelmed by increasing demand for registration of churches and the facility is facing difficulties in processing 6,740 pending applications by various religious organizations. Wako also revealed that there are about 8,520 registered churches and that about 60 applications are filed every month (Ndegwa, 2007). Although not all of these churches seeking registration are Pentecostal, the majority of them are of Pentecostal and charismatic inclinations.

Thus, thousands of these newer churches have sprung up and sprouted in all major urban centres some within less than three to five kilometers of each other. Some are huge mega churches while others are too small to be called churches but anyhow add to the numbers. These churches are anything but monolithic and cut across various social classes in the country: urban and rural, richer and poorer, literate and illiterate (Ukah, 2007). All types are represented in the Kenyan religious landscape: Classical, Neo-Pentecostal and Charismatic types. These churches shot into prominence from the 1970s and 80s and gained momentum in the 90s to date. They rose into prominence due to a combination of socio-religious factors including opening up to younger university evangelical Christian leadership, rapid urbanization and the collapse of African economies (Gifford, 1999; Kwabena, 2005). Pentecostal fast growth has equally been necessitated by aggressive evangelism, church planting, lay mobilization, lively music and celebratory nature of worship (Kwabena, 2005; Gifford, 1999). Their influence has also invaded all aspects of Kenyan Public life and their presence is now being felt in the realm of politics, economics, cultural and socio-religious fields. To a large extent, the mass media has been
instrumental not only in propelling this type of Christianity into the public sphere, but also in maintaining their prominence in society.

**Pentecostals, Mass Media and the Public Sphere in Kenya**

Scholars have observed the dominance of Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity in the public sphere, particularly in the public media where they actively broadcast their religious messages on radio, television, and the print media (De Witte, 2003; Meyer, 2004; Adogame, 2005; Kwabena, 2005; Hackett, 1998; Parsitau, 2008). Others have observed the presence of these churches on the World Wide Web (Kwabena, 2007; Adogame, 2005). This is because, in many parts of Africa for example, Pentecostal and Charismatic Churches are increasingly and effectively appropriating mass media and communication technologies to propagate their message (De Witte, 2003; Parsitau, 2008: Hackett, 1995). This is also because as Marlene De Witte (2003) correctly observes, that media are first of all an effective channel for spreading the gospel of Christ to the masses. Pentecostal and Charismatic churches have therefore embraced the media as an effective evangelistic tool. At the same time, the use of mass media offer very convenient means through which these churches can put their activities into the public sphere (Kwabena, 2007). However, mass media communication technologies as De Witte (2003) further observes can also be used to enhance an image of success, prosperity, and modernity and to build and boost the personality of the preacher.

The relationship between Pentecostals, mass media and the public sphere has recently attracted a lot of scholarly interests as well as public debates and scholars have contemplated the evolving relations between these two entities. This is because, in recent years, religion and media are increasingly interacting and intermingling in interesting ways. In fact (Hoover, 2006) observes that “as we move further into the twenty first, the relationship between religion and the media keeps widening.” This has led to what some scholars call the Pentecostalization of public sphere, where the boundaries between politics, religion, commerce, entertainment and the public sphere gets increasingly blurred (Cf, De Witte, 2003, Kwabena, 2001, Meyer, 2004, Parsitau, 2006; 2008). I will now turn to the relationship between religion particularly that of the newer Pentecostal and charismatic churches, mass media and the public sphere in Kenya. In this section, I attempt to understand how religion has come to use mass media to invade the public sphere. But
more importantly, I examine how this relationship between religion and media is increasingly shaping and transforming the religious, social, political and cultural life of the country (Hoover, 2006). In so doing, I point to the extent to which the interaction between religion and media has become an increasingly profound and far reaching one and attempt to answer the question: how does the accessibility of new mass media, offered by new global infrastructures and media technologies as well as the state policies of media liberalization and commercialization, facilitate the public articulation of religion (Hoover, 2006)? What role does the crisis of the modern state play in allowing for the public role of religion? I shall further attempt to explore the entanglement of religion and media in the Kenyan Pentecostal scene and examine how this entanglement has propelled the Pentecostals into the public sphere. At the same time I explore how religion has invaded the realm of commerce and entertainment. This is because, the links between religion, commercial and entertainment are not only widening but have also transformed Christianity and drawn it into the sphere of entertainment (Meyer, 2006: Parsitau, 2008). How can one therefore conceptualize this blurring of religion, media, commerce, and entertainment? What are the implications of this blurring for the relationship between the “secular” and the “religious,” an opposition that has not only dominated modern social sciences but also informs the ways in which the public sphere is understood in concrete empirical settings? How are religion and media involved in transforming the public sphere and what are the effects of this engagement on the public sphere?

Since the 1990s, Meyer and Moors(2006) observe that “the increasingly public character of religion, the proliferation of the electronic media, and the crisis of the nation states have shaped people’s worldviews throughout the globe in ever more visible ways.” For these reasons scholars have attempted to understand these developments in a variety of fields in the humanities and the social sciences (Castells, 1996; Anderson, 1991; Appandurai, 1991). There is therefore a large body of literature on the proliferation of New Religious Movements such as the Pentecostal and Charismatic movements and their relationship with the mass media. Recent scholarship for example (Hoover, 2006; and Meyer & Moors, 2006) explores the role of religion in the transformation of the public sphere. These two volumes seek to further our understanding of the multiple relationships between religion, media, and the public sphere in the context of post colonial societies. For example, Brigit Meyer and Annelies Moors (2006) points out that in the
1980s, religion and electronic media were by and large seen as belonging to different spheres. And as they so aptly note, “today we are not only witnessing the explosion of televangelism particularly by the Pentecostal and charismatic movements in Latin America, Asia and Africa but also a deliberate and skillful adoption of various electronic media and digital media-cassettes, radio, video, television and the internet and the formats and styles associated with these media by Muslims, Hindu, Buddhist, Jewish, or indigenous movements.” For these reasons, a New York Times article of May 16, 2002, aptly captured it when it observed that in the third millennium “religion finds technology” At the same time, especially after Mel Gibson’s movie Passion of the Christ, religion now features prominently in cinematography and other forms of entertainment (Meyer & Moors, 2006).

The proliferation of Nigerian and Ghanaian movies now popularly known as Nollywood, all over Africa, Kenya in particular are classic examples. Brigit Meyer and Moors (2006) reports that video-films producers in Ghana and Nigeria have framed their movies in line with Pentecostal concerns, while at the same time, the encounter with films and television has transformed Christianity and drawn it into the sphere of entertainment. Religion also now features highly as entertainment. Gospel music, film and video now feature highly in Kenya’s public sphere (Parsitau, 2008). The emergence in the sphere of entertainment of religion has signalled a discontinuity between religion as representing a distinct tradition and religion as a typical modern notion (Meyer & Moors, 2006). And by deliberately choosing to associate itself with popular culture, religion has transformed entertainment and vice versa and further blurred the relationship between religion, commerce and entertainment. The increasing appropriation and use of media technologies has generated a kind of Pentecostal and Charismatically oriented public sphere which is characterised by the intertwining of religion with both national and global politics and the field of commerce and entertainment (Kwabena 2001; Meyer, 2004; Witte, 2003). In this public sphere religion, particularly of the Pentecostal variant also merges into the world of commerce. Religion becomes like a consumption good, a product in the religious market place where churches compete for customers (Ibid). At the same time the growth and proliferation of the gospel music industry in Africa, and Kenya in particular now almost rivals the secular music industry as gospel music is rated on musical charts just like secular music (Parsitau, 2006; 2008). In this case then, and in the words of Steve Hoover (2006), ‘films, television, the music industry,
and the internet are central to the whole process.’ These trends are not only a preserve of Christianity especially its Pentecostal variant but as Meyer & Moors (2006) report, they are also visible within Hindu, Muslim, Jewish and Buddhist traditions.

The Kenyan mass media scene has come to be characterized by a heavy Pentecostal and Charismatic presence and dominance. Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity has not only become a prominent feature of the countries religious and political landscape but is also becoming increasingly prominent in Kenya’s mass media scene as they are the keenest buyers of air time. The liberalization of airwaves in the early 1990s and early in the new millennium has had a significant effect in promoting Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity and in ushering it into public sphere. These Churches were quick to understand the implications of the liberalization of the media that entailed a shift from the state ownership of control over the media to a privatised ownership (Hackett, 1998). What this essentially meant was that anyone who can afford it could buy airtime from the numerous media houses that have since emerged. Pentecostal Christianity grabbed this opportunity first hand and religious programmes now occupy significant space in the country’s airwaves. This is because the liberalization of airwaves opened up airtime to the public as long as they can afford to pay for it for as Meyer observes elsewhere, access to the media was above all a question of money (Meyer, 2004). Hence there is an abundance of religion on the airwaves or God on airwaves in Kenya (Parsitau, 2008). For example, Pentecostal religious programming takes up a large percentage of airtime on most Television Stations and FM radio stations especially during the weekends. During weekends a series of church services, sermons and gospel music fills more than seven to eight hours of television time on only four channels alone that are: Kenya Broadcasting Corporation (KBC), Kenya Television Network (KTN), Nation Television (NTV) and Citizen TV. Besides, there are about two Christian TV stations namely Family TV which is jointly sponsored by America’s Trinity Broadcasting Network (TBN) and Christian Broadcasting Network (CBN) and God TV a new Christian TV channel. These TV stations together with Radio 316, Hope FM, Jesus is Lord Radio ensures that Christian programmes and gospel music are aired throughout the day.

Televized church services, radio sermons and phone in-talk shows, audio taped sermons and gospel music now occupy a central place in the country’s mass media-scene. Mega Pentecostal
churches such as the Deliverance Churches of Kenya, the Nairobi Pentecostal Churches, Jesus Celebration Centre Ministries, Jesus Is Alive Ministries (JIAM), Redeemed Gospel Churches, Maximum Miracles Centre Ministries, Neno Evangelism Ministries and many others all buy air time in almost all of these media houses. The Pentecostal and Charismatic Churches could easily afford airtime because of the large funding they collect from tithes and offerings, which sometimes could run into millions of shillings. These churches are now exploiting this opportunity to their fullest to propagate their message and to invade the public sphere. While reliable figures are hard to come by, as no research has been done on these latest phenomena in Kenya, it is safe to say that religious programmes occupy a significant amount of airtime on Kenyan airwaves, thus radically altering the country’s media scene and soundscape (Witte, 2003; Parsitau, 2008). Christian programmes are prominent on KBC, KTN, Nation TV, Citizen TV, God TV and Family TV. In Kenyan, it is the Pentecostal and Charismatic Churches who are the main players. One reason for the heavy consumption and appropriation of mass media and communication technologies is because these churches attach a lot of importance to evangelization, and church growth. In fact ever since the liberalization of the airwaves in the late 1990s and in the advent of the new millennium, Pentecostals have learned to use the mass media to propel themselves into the public sphere. The liberalization and commercialization of the airwaves increasingly opened up the democratic space for the public. This space has opened up the way to the public manifestation of religion in Kenya.

The new millennium however appears to have ushered in new concerns about the relationship between religion and media both at the international and local levels. Events after September 11 2001 further complicated matters as religions forced their way into public life and public discourse became dominated by concerns about the role of religion in public life. In the US for example, after 9/11, Hoover, (2006) reports that public discourse shifted from the role of religion in public life to the role of religion in public policy and international affairs (Hoover, 2006). The media has been a big part of this shift. But again in 2004, during the US general elections, religion again became the dominant factor as religious concern featured very highly in the elections. But all these developments led to new debates about whether religion belonged to the private or the public domains. Recent event in many countries histories have showed that religion has refused to be relegated to the private sphere and is now a public matter. This has helped to
redirect religion into the larger national and international public sphere (Hoover, 2006). Meanwhile religions are increasingly gaining a higher profile in contemporary political and social life. This recent and emergent trend within Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity has not only led to their social prominence in the public sphere but has also become prominent in the Kenyan mass media scene.

In the last few years of the new millennium, the relationship between the Kenyan state and Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity has changed tremendously. At the beginning of the new millennium, the Pentecostals who were initially preoccupied with evangelization, soul winning and getting institutionally established, suddenly plugged themselves into the public sphere (Parsitau, 2008). In fact they shifted from political spectators to full political participants who have managed to cut out a niche for themselves in the Kenyan society in a relatively short time. It is precisely in 2002/3 that the separation of the spheres of politics and Pentecostal and Charismatic churches ceased in Kenya. This is when these churches made a resolve to get more involved in the socio-political issues of the country. Since then, Pentecostal churches have developed a distinct political theology of involvement based on the understanding that Kenya can only develop, prosper and progress if it is led by God fearing people (Meyer, 2004, Parsitau, 2008). For these reasons an unprecedented high number of clergy from Pentecostal traditions contested for elective politics in the 2007 general elections (Parsitau, 2008). At the same time and during the last general elections, religion occupied significant space in the mass media scene in both the electronic and print media. I shall discuss this further on the section of Pentecostals, politics and the public sphere. But one thing is clear and that is the fact that the relationship between Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity and the mass media in Kenya has ushered in these churches into public sphere. In fact in the last less than five years or so, the Pentecostals have now effectively used the mass media to propel themselves to the public sphere.

**The Pentecostalization of the Public Sphere in Kenya**

Thus the impact of this type of African Christianity is not only in its numbers but also in its much diffused influence on general popular culture, tastes and styles that may not be religious per se, but are clearly shaped by Pentecostalist discourse (Meyer, 2004). Over the last one decade or so, there appears to be a kind of Pentecostalization of public sphere (Meyer, 2004) that has emerged
in Kenya. In this pentecostalization of the public sphere, the Pentecostals are not only using the mass media to propagate their religious messages but also to consolidate their own influence and pervade the public sphere with a force like never witnessed before. This pentecostalization of public space has invaded the airwave ‘as its media -savvy pastors cum superstars regularly fill the airwaves with their preaching and gospel music that has radically changed the many countries airwaves’ and mediascapes (Ilesanmi, 2007). But the pentecostalization of the public sphere goes beyond the appropriation of mass media technologies or increased presence of the Pentecostals in the public spaces. This is because the Pentecostalization of the public sphere as Harri Englund (2007) has argued ‘does not simply refer to the increased presence of Pentecostals in public life, but also to their influence on the style and manners of others, many of whom can be resolutely anti-Pentecostal.’ In Kenya for example, this is evident in the way mainline churches, even some Muslim organizations are heavily appropriating the style of Pentecostals in their preaching and sermons and the mode in which they relay their religious messages. To counteract the Pentecostal onslaught on their religion particularly the rhetoric of spiritual warfare, Muslims now organize public rallies and crusades at crowded bus-stops, market places, parks and children playgrounds or any other places where there are large crowds. Through the use of loud speakers (like Pentecostals), they preach and recite the Koran. But this influence is not only visible within Islamic and mainline church circles but is also visible with the general public. At the same time, Pentecostal manners such as their usual style of greetings by hugging and kissing punctuated by words such as ‘bwana asifiwe’ loosely translated as ‘praise the lord’ has become a common way of Christians exchanging pleasantries or greeting each, a trend that has also infiltrated many mainline churches. This way of exchanging pleasantries has become the norm in the country’s social life.

The Pentecostals have been able to infiltrate public space and bring about the pentecostalization of the public sphere for a number of reasons. For one Ilesanmi (2007) argues that the ability of the newer Pentecostal movements ‘to transform gender relations and bring about generational change and its willingness to provide infrastructure that the collapsed institutions of the state have neglected or abandoned have made Pentecostalism an attractive force to millions who have converted to this type of African Christianity.’ Similarly Peter Berger (1999) suggests that ‘conversion to this brand of religiosity brings about a cultural transformation, new attitudes
towards work and consumption, a new educational ethos, and a violent rejection of traditional machismo. But these movements are not only bringing about a cultural reformation, they are increasingly having significant effects on politics, economics, and providing social services and other amenities.

**Pentecostals, Politics and the Public Sphere**

In the last few years, the place and role of Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity in Kenya’s public sphere has changed drastically and become much more conspicuous. In fact, in Kenya, Pentecostal Christianity refuses to be confined to the realm of private life and has now crossed over to the realm of politics. The Pentecostals are now involved in electioneering process, constitution making, engage in discourses about human rights, peace and conflict resolution and management and general development such as the provision of social services. Yet, the potential contribution of mediated religion to the development of a modern African public sphere has not been thoroughly studied by contemporary scholars. I now proceed to show ways in which Kenyan Pentecostalism has invaded the public sphere, particularly the realm of politics.

**Electioneering Process, Democratization and Governance**

Religious leaders from Pentecostal and Charismatic churches have plugged themselves into the socio-political space and are contributing in the democratization and governance of the country. In fact in the Kenyan socio-political scene, it would be correct to say that religion and politics are mutually interrelated for they have always influenced each other. But in the 2007 general elections, the relationship between the two institutions assumed new dimensions and proportions. This is because while religion and politics in Kenya as Maupeu (1997) observes, have always interacted in many different ways and at different levels, the interaction between the two institutions assumed new dimensions and new meanings in the just concluded but hotly contested 2007 general elections. In this highly discredited 2007 general election, the Pentecostals played significant roles in national politics and throughout the electioneering period. This was evidenced by the fact that an unprecedented high number of men and women of the cloth from these Churches sought for elective politics in the 2007 general elections. Bishops, pastors, apostles, evangelists and preachers declared their interests in civic, parliamentary even presidential elections and although most of them lost, they put up a spirited fight till the end of the exercise.
Pentecostal Church leaders such as Bishop Margaret Wanjiru of Jesus Is Alive Ministries (JIAM), Pastor Pius Muiru of Kuna Nuru Gizani Ministries, Pastor Mike Brawan of Metro Church International, and formally US based preacher Moses Ole Sakuda all contested for parliamentary even presidential seats in 2007. This latest developments have not only ushered these churches into the public sphere but have also entered into debates about the morality or immorality of power (Meyer, 2004).

In a move that baffled scholars, fellow clergy, politicians and the general public, there looked like there was a scramble for votes and what appeared like an exodus from the pulpit to parliament from this type of African Christianity of the born again type. But this trend had been emerging since the dawn of the millennium when Pentecostals who all along had been neutral politically seemed to have adopted a shift from non engagement in social political issues to full engagement. But this came out quite strongly since 2005/6 during the clamor for a new constitution that plugged the Pentecostal churches into public space like never before. Since then, a large number of Pentecostal clergy and followers have come to view electioneering as something that Christians can rightly participate in (Parsitau, 2008). This is evident from the numerous statements they issued throughout the campaign period and by adding their voices on a number of national debates and issues such as federalism, devolution or Majimbo, the so-called Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) allegedly signed by the Hon Raila Odinga, ethnic violence, corruption, free and fair elections, human rights issues and constitutionalism. Bishop Pius Muiru of Maximum Miracle Centers for example on 16/8/07 led a demonstration against the media bill passed by a section of members of parliament with the intensions of compelling journalists to reveal sources of their stories (Parsitau, 2007).

It is not so difficult to understand why Pentecostals are contesting politics now. According to David Maxwell (2006), Pentecostal leaders wield their enormous followings to influence governments to re-moralize politics. Maxwell (2006) further argues that some Pentecostals have formally entered the political arena standing in presidential as well as parliamentary elections. David Maxwell (2006) believes that African Pentecostalism has ambitions that transcend the nation state. He maintains that Pentecostal church leaders have been cold-shouldered and have engaged with secular leaders for respectability and public recognition as well as access to the
state media and that politicians desperate for new sources of legitimacy have sought to secure a born-again mandate and to make use of the growing born-again constituency. While Maxwell’s observations help to give a critical analysis as to why the clergy from these churches are fielding presidential and parliamentary candidates, it seems to me that they also appear to want to reform civic culture and sanitize Kenyan politics (Parsitau, 2008). Pentecostals believe that the future of the country is with them. Peter Wambuku (2007), a born again Christian and an advocate of the High Court argues that Christians who are men and women of integrity should be in charge of the government and should contest for both civic and parliamentary positions in order to sanitize Kenyan politics and bring some morals back to political life (Parsiatu, 2008). Even as they fight of criticisms that the clergy must stick to the pulpit and leave politics to the politicians, a new breed of clergy cum politicians and mainly Pentecostal is out to sanitize Kenyan politics. These breed is driven by an inherent belief that something is wrong with national leadership and are arguing that politics is no longer a preserve of the worldly but something that they can rightly participate in. Pentecostal clergy such as Bishops Wanjiru, Pius Muiru and others are out to sanitize Kenyan politics through Christian morality and ethics. But while electoral politics has become a popular topic in these church’s pulpits this, as Machado, (2002) enables the socialization of opinions of the religious leaders, increasing their influence over their followers who in addition to possessing rudimentary levels of education, present little or no involvement in socio-movements, associative organizations or political parties.

This according to Machado, (2002) has the ability to transform the community into an electoral base, and its members into activists who when called upon by church leaders, take to the streets with the purpose of electing a Christian political candidate. What is clearly emerging in the Kenyan Pentecostal scene is that the network of religious relations has developed into a powerful network of political relations and that these Christian faithful are learning the importance of political-religious activism. Religion played a central role in the 2007 general election. At the same time, religious concerns such as the debates generated by the allegedly signed MoU between Honorable Raila Odinga and a section of Kenyan Muslims, claims of politicians consulting witches, the role of prophecies, talks of miracles and spiritual warfare, all featured highly throughout the campaign periods and may have influenced the electorate to vote in a reactionary manner. This was even more dramatized by the scramble for both the Muslim and
Christian votes by the Orange Democratic Movement (ODM) and the Party of National Unity (PNU). This is because in so far as religion has the potential to mobilize individuals into groups and to act in concert and has a close analogue to political parties which are united by shared objectives, and hoped for outcomes (Silk, 2000), then religion is bound to play a crucial role. It is also the case that political parties often seek to induce in the faithful a religion-resembling loyalty and commitment.

Religion, along with ethnicity and economic issues, were among the factors that may have influencing voting patterns in Kenya’s general elections. In fact religion appeared to be a swing or determinant factor and Pentecostal clerics contesting politics brought it to the fore. The ODM leader’s Memorandum of Understanding with Muslims generated a lot of public interests and sparked off national debates. The document opened a heated national debate and the MOU generated a lot of anger among some Christian leaders as well as fears of increased demands for sharia, and Islamic code of religious law. Some Christians most likely voted in a reactionary manner to the MoU while there was a general concern among many Pentecostal Christians about losing their freedom of worship as well as fears about the growing Islamic influence in Kenya. The signing of the memorandum of understanding by the ODM leader was seen as having endeared himself to Muslims and made him look like he is there to promote the interests of Muslims who have felt frustrated by the government. But above all, what emerged clearly during the 2007 general election was the fact that the Pentecostal constituency as Ogwu Kalu (2003) critically observed has evolved into a critical election mass that cannot be ignored any more. This large Pentecostal constituency can easily be mobilized and can have a significant impact and influence on the course of Kenyan politics. It can equally change or shape the electoral landscape in the country. What has emerged here in Kenya is a public sphere in which religious leaders and political discourse flow into each other. One area in which this is increasingly visible is through what is now called the National Prayer Breakfast and the National Day of Prayer which I briefly discuss in the next section.

**National Prayer Breakfast**

A classic example that illustrates ways in which Pentecostals have infiltrated into the bedrock of Kenyan politics to invade the public sphere is through what has now come to be known as the
National Prayer breakfast meetings that have become common place. This prayer meeting which dates back to the early 1990s but gained prominence from the dawn of the new millennium to date involve the so called ‘born again’ Christian legislators, administrators, cabinet ministers, the clergy, civil society and other senior civil servants. Once a year, the politicians and the clergy, cabinet ministers and other powerful civil servants, and the business community come together for a prayer service over breakfast normally held in posh hotels such as the Grand Regency and sometimes with the president in attendance and some powerful Pentecostal preacher usually from America giving the sermon. Over the years the event has steadily grown from a small event to a large and high powered meeting normally aired live by most media houses to one that discusses issues of national importance such as corruption in government, ethnicity, human rights, and other social and political issues. The National Prayer Breakfast meetings provide the born again leaders especially legislators with forum to discuss issues of governance and serves as a mobilizing platform where they can strategise about the future of national politics. The National Prayer Breakfast offers a vivid illustration of the growing presence and increasing political influence of religion in the public sphere and is significant in a tripartite sense: firstly it puts the Pentecostal church leaders at the centre of national politics as the born again legislators can now form a significant political voice on parliamentary bills and national debates. Secondly, Pentecostal Christianity pervades the public sphere as they increasingly hold such meetings that receive wide media coverage all the time they are held. Thirdly it brings out strongly the perception of prayer as a political praxis and that the social, political and economic fortunes of nations as Kalu(2003:10) observes can be changed and reshaped through prayer. Prayer is therefore a powerful political tool as far as Pentecostal church leaders are concerned. According to these leaders prayers are an effective means of influencing national politics and they make use of the weapon just as much as they use the ballot box to vote out those they perceive as not delivering services to their constituencies. The Pentecostal Christians have also demonstrated that they are good citizens who pray for the nation and seek peace all the time.

**The National Prayer Day**

Another event similar to the National Prayer Breakfast is the National Prayer Day. This event that is held annually equally brings together the clergy particularly the Evangelical, Pentecostal, and
Charismatic leaders who are normally the main organizers and the politicians, civil servants, civil society, the business communities and the generally citizenry together to pray for the nation. On this national prayer day, Kenyans of all walks of life throng churches, mosques and temples throughout the country to pray for the nation. This is particularly so during hard times or when the country is faced by national tragedies such as air crashes, road accidents, earthquakes and others. For example, in April 21/2006 a plane crashed in North-Eastern Kenya, near Marsabit town killing 14 Kenyans, 6 of who were legislators on a peace-finding mission. A national day of prayer was held. The tragedy that deeply shook and shocked the nation was one in a series of calamities and misfortunes that seemed to rock the country since 2003. Among these calamities are drought, famine, collapsed buildings, accidents, untimely deaths of a sizeable number of Legislators and massive corruption in government. The clergy who have always given spiritual explanations to natural or man made calamities convinced the president to declare a national prayer and repentance day. The supposed need for prayer and repentance culminated in the national prayer day, an event attended by the President and his wife Lucy, Cabinet Ministers, Members of Parliament, The Official Leader of the Opposition, leaders from different political parties, the Clergy(Christian and non-Christian alike) and Kenyans of all works of life. The event was broadcast live from Uhuru Park and received extensive media coverage. For many Kenyans, it seemed like God was angry with the leaders because of corruption, tribalism and many other evils. An often quoted verse ‘if my people shall pray, and seek my face and turn away from their wicked ways: then will I forgive their sins and will heal their land (2 Chronicles7: 14), was the focus of repentance. The passage is a call to repentance so that God can heal the land of Kenya from the many problems that seemed to rock the nation. This passage has also become one of the most potent symbols sustaining the commitment to renewal and to solving the problems in the country.

The National Prayer Days though basically religious affair are significant in a number of ways and could be analyzed in the words of Ogbu Kalu’s emergent Political Theology of engagement. Firstly, it strengthened the fact that in Africa, religion and politics do influence each other and that the political realm is sacrilized or enchanted and politics is a religious matter precisely because it is a moral performance (Kalu, 2003:10). Secondly, it also brought out strongly the perception of prayer as a political praxis and that the social, political and economic fortunes of
nations can be changed and reshaped through the power of prayer (Kalu, 2003). Thirdly that, national and individual misfortunes of nations and human beings occur through internal sources such as sins, pollution and acts of disobedience that offend God and attract punishment or withholding of benefits. At the same time spiritual forces also externally attack the fortunes of a nation. Here Pauline images of wrestling with spiritual powers and African cosmology of causality looms large. These forces largely bring misfortunes to nations and misfortune and prayer and intercession is the only solution. Prayer and Intercession at this level serves as a form of political critique at the national level (Ibid). Fourthly that repentance becomes the key weapon against such misfortunes and Kenyans demonstrated this through the National Prayer Day.

**Projection of Prophesies into the Public Sphere**

Another way in which Pentecostal/Charismatic clergy have sought to intervene in the political sphere here in Kenya has been through the projection of certain prophesies into the public arena. During elections some political aspirants invoked local myths and prophesies to influence the voters. For example people in western Kenya were paying heed to an old prophesy by the late Elijah Masinde, a leader of Dini Ya Musambwa, a religious sect, who said that leadership would come to western Kenya after first being held by somebody from lake Victoria(referring to Prime Minister, the Hon Raila Odinga). There were talks about miracles, divine calls and prophesies by a number of clergy and politicians. The Honorable Kalonzo Musyoka(now vice president and a presidential contender in the 2007 general election) and an evangelical Christian for example kept talking about miracles and how he will put to shame pollsters that put him a far distance between Raila Odinga and Mwai Kibaki. While these prophetic messages, talks of miracles may have influenced how people voted in the 2007 general election, they have also created new theological and ideological discourse by bringing the concept of evil and spiritual warfare onto the agenda of political discourse and thus consolidating new forms of religious expression and political understanding (Ojo, 2004). This warfare in Pentecostal understanding can only be won through prayer and fasting and by establishing God-fearing men and women in political leadership. They further propelled religion into the public sphere.
Conclusion

The resurgence of religion in the public sphere not only in Kenya but globally indicates some emerging issues: firstly, religious organizations are not only major team players in national politics but are also critical for the successful governance of nation states particularly in Africa. Secondly, that the prominence of religion in the public sphere necessitates debates and discourses about the place and role of religion in modern and emerging pluralistic and democratic societies. And lastly that mass media has emerged not only as new sites of contestations but as a significant and popular location for propelling religion into the public sphere. This paper has tried to explore the entanglement between, religion, media and the public sphere in Kenya by pin pointing areas in which religion has bounced back into the public sphere, and in the light Jurgen Habermas understanding and theories of the public sphere. It has argues that religion is no longer in the private sphere but has assumed an increased presence and dimension in the country’s public sphere.

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