

The Public Religious Speech Acts That Does Justice: Reclaiming the Narrative of Resistance in the Context of Heterosexism

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ABSTRACT

The narrative that does justice is an oppositional discourse re-enacted in the liminal spaces as a dynamic cultural form termed as ‘narrative of resistance.’ Describing public religious speech acts as liminal discourse highlights the symbolic and ideological dimensions that can enable African Christians, Zambians in particular, to take an oppositional stance against heterosexist narrative rampant among religious leaders. The article demonstrates how public religious speech acts as liminal discourse within African Christianity might function as a tool of resistance to heterosexist narratives and help change the worldviews, behaviours and attitudes entrenched with prejudice against sexual minorities. The article concludes by giving an example of *ubuntu* Biblical hermeneutics as a framework for doing public religious speech to resist heterosexism.

Introduction

In contemporary Zambia, life-denying heterosexist¹ public religious speech acts are ubiquitous among Christian leaders. To understand the notion of religious speech acts, John L. Austin’s observation in *How to Do Things with Words*, is informative. He writes that language is essentially ‘performative’. He stresses, the ‘performative’ utterances are statements that *do* what they *say* in being uttered, such as promises, blessings, curses, announcements, evocations, praises, prayers, warnings, commands, and so on.² In short, whenever words are spoken, actions

- 1 In this article, heterosexism is entrenched prejudice, stereotyping, or discrimination against homosexuals on the basis of their orientation. This includes any belief system or practice with tendencies of homophobia that “‘denies, denigrates and stigmatises’ any non-heterosexual ‘form of behaviour, relationships of community’”. Ian Smith, Lindsay G. Oades and Grace McCarthy, “Homophobia to Heterosexism: Constructs in Need of Re-Visitation”, *Gay and Lesbian Issues and Psychology Review* 8, no. 1 (2012), 1-11 at 5.
- 2 For deeper discussion on speech acts refer to the foundational works by John L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1962); and John R. Searle, *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1969).

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are simultaneously done. This means that ‘all speech acts are performative, but some are more performative than others.’³ For instance, certain words that are uttered by persons in authority such as high profile religious leaders are more performative in certain contexts such as Zambia where the Bible and the church are judged as authoritative, determining acceptable moral positions. Thus, the public religious speech refers to any utterance either through media or public gatherings by religious leaders. I focus specifically on the public religious speeches from church leaders in Zambia. The utterances of church leaders are perceived as endowed with specific divine authority sanctioning the words of such leaders.

African theologians have raised serious concerns about certain ‘performative’ usage of religious language in post-colonial African Christianity. It has been observed that some churches in Africa are preoccupied with proclaiming the gospel that justifies ‘the oppression or marginalisation of ‘the other’.⁴ Generally, contemporary African Christianity is not addressing ‘the multiple contradictions afflicting’⁵ millions of people. Rather, it appears to fuel prejudice and discrimination against women⁶ and sexual minorities—lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) individuals.⁷

This article seeks to grapple with the complexity of rethinking the public religious speech acts as liminal discourse. As crucial stages in most African rituals, the liminal space functions with a liminal discourse, which brings subjects into non-judgmental, anti-structural and temporal spaces—allowing them the experience of *communitas*, which is the immediate relational group bonded in just-love. This status accorded liberty to the subjects to subvert heteronormative power structures with its ideological foundations. These power structures inhibited the ability of those who remained in structured societies from imagining what human sexuality was, and how its boundaries were defined.

I employ the notion of liminality (threshold) articulated by Victor Turner to demonstrate how the liminal discourse can aid the reconceptualisation of heteronormative religious speech. The liminal stage was a stage in betwixt

3 Richard S. Briggs, “Getting Involved: Speech Acts and Biblical Interpretation”, *Anvil-Bristol* 20, no.1 (2003), 25-34 at 28.

4 Mercy A. Oduyoye, “Calling the Church to Account: African Women and Liberation”, *The Ecumenical Review* 47, no. 4 (1995), 479-89 at 480.

5 Kenyatta R. Gilbert, “Making the Unseen Seen: Pedagogy and Aesthetics in African American Prophetic Preaching”, *Homiletic* 34, no. 2 (2009), 18-30 at 27.

6 Chammah J Kaunda, “‘A Voice Shouting in the Wilderness’: Desmond Mpilo Tutu’s Contribution to African Theology of Public Prophetic Preaching for Social Justice and Wholeness”, *International Journal of Public Theology* 9, no. 1 (2015), 29-46.

7 I use sexual minority group to refer to LGBTI as a discriminated minority group based on their distinctive sexual identity, orientation or practices in the majority heterosexual society such as Zambia.

and between separation and reintegration in the structured society through the cultural process of the rite of passage.⁸ I demonstrate from the cultural liminality perspective how conceptualising public religious speech as liminal discourse can become a useful resource in prophetic resistance to heterosexism within Zambian Christianity, while assisting Christians to develop inclusive and non-heterosexist attitudes toward sexual minorities.

The Colonial Missionary's Heterosexist Narratives

The colonial and missionary context in which Christianity was introduced in Africa underlines its entrenchment in belief systems that maintain heterosexual privilege.⁹ Despite being the most popular religion in sub-Saharan Africa, the religious leaders' outcry that sexual minorities are 'un-Christian' does not recognise the fact that Christianity, post-colonial political structures and even the English language are equally colonial imports. In other words, African religious and political leaders self-select which Western values to accommodate, demean and utterly reject.

The material legacies of the power dynamics of imperial and colonial missionary Christianity of the nineteenth and twentieth century are evident in the history of heterosexism in African Christianity and Zambia in particular. Scholars have noted that generally all missionaries regardless of church traditions described sexual minorities and African sexualities in general 'in reference to scriptural account of heathenism.'¹⁰

In Africa in particular, similar to colonial authorities, the missionary christianisation project sought the destruction of African worldviews, cultures, behaviours, genders, sexualities and interests.¹¹ Since the missionary worldview classified sexual minorities as 'neurotic', any individual who openly expressed

8 Victor W. Turner, *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1967); *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-structure* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1969).

9 Kapya J. Kaoma, *Colonizing African Values: How the U.S. Christian Right is Transforming Sexual Politics in Africa* (Somerville, MA: Political Research Associates, 2012); Chammah J Kaunda, 'Betrayed by Cultural Heritage: Liminality, Ambiguous Sexuality and Ndembu Cultural Change—An African Ecclesia-Ethic of Openness', *Alternation Special Edition*, no. 14 (2015), 22-44.

10 Brian Stanley ed., *Christian Missions and the Enlightenment* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), 115-116.

11 Various scholars have given evidence of this assertion. See for example, Musa W. Dube, "Consuming Colonial Time Bomb: Translating Badimo into 'Demons' in the Setswana Bible [Mt 8:23-34; 15:12; 10:8]", *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 21, no. 73 (1999), 33-59; Emmanuel M. Katongole, "'A Different World Right Here, A World Being Gestated in the Deeds of the Everyday': The Church with African Theological Imagination", *Missionalia* 30, no. 2 (2002), 206-234.

non-heterosexual sexuality was considered a 'pervert' whose aim was to 'satisfy neurotic pseudo-aggression.'¹²

The claim that homosexuality is 'un-Christian' easily finds its equivalence within the Euro-North American history of heterosexism. Colonial missionaries' heterosexist narratives have shaped sub-Saharan Africa's religious language. The colonial missionaries' narratives, for example, were designed to justify and promote heterosexual superiority.¹³ Aside from arguing that Western Christianity was universally the tool of 'colonization of the Anglo-European world view, culture, behaviors, and interests,' Emily Askew and Wesley Allen note that 'heterosexism in the church has meant 'offering' salvation to homosexuals by forcing them to look and act like heterosexuals. This heterosexist approach to universalising the church has included using tools of coercion and even violence in 'saving' individuals from the 'darkness' of sexual minorities (for example, reparative therapy).'¹⁴

It is important to underline that the Victorian era Christianity had significant influence upon the worldviews of British law-makers. To some extent, anti-sodomy laws in Britain 'were expression of perpetual Judeo-Christian concern to regulate homosexuality.'¹⁵ Despite fifty years of self-rule, Zambian anti-sexual minorities laws date back to the British colonial era. The British Empire imposed its anti-gay laws on its colonies. One example that speaks to colonial anti-sodomy laws in Africa is the 1868 execution of a teenager Hogoza in Natal, South Africa for the 'detestable and abominable crime of buggery (not to be named among Christians).'¹⁶ Whereas Africans rejected colonialism, these colonial laws are yet to be decolonised. Sacralised with Christianity, Islam and post-colonial African cultures, these laws contribute to heterosexist attitudes in former British colonies.¹⁷

Moreover, the question of what constituted an ideal Christian identity for

12 See for example, Edmund Berg, "Homosexuality: Disease or Way of Life?" *Pastoral Psychology* 8, no. 5 (1957), 49-52; Nathan Greenebaum and Matt Funston, "Homosexuality in the 1950s; The Fab Dealing with Fraught", EverGreen, June 4, 2008, <<http://archives.evergreen.edu/webpages/curricular/2007-2008/fifties/index-21274.php.html>> [accessed Nov. 13, 2015].

13 Emily Askew and O. Wesley Allen, *Moving Beyond Heterosexism in the Pulpit* (Eugene, OR: Cascade/Wipf & Stock, 2015); Sylvia Tamale, "Confronting the Politics of Nonconforming Sexualities in Africa", *African Studies Review* 56, no. 2 (2013), 31-45.

14 Askew and Allen, *Moving Beyond Heterosexism in the Pulpit*, 60.

15 Paul Johnson and Robert Vanderbeck, *Law, Religion and Homosexuality* (Oxon: Routledge, 2014), 29.

16 Marc Epprecht, *Unspoken Facts: A History of Homosexuality in Africa* (Harare: GALZ, 2008), 134; Kapya J. Kaoma, "The Paradox and Tension of Moral Claims: Evangelical Christianity, the Politicization and Globalization of Sexual Politics in sub-Saharan Africa", *Critical Research on Religion* 3, no. 2. (2014), 227-245.

17 Susan Haskins, "The Influence of Roman Laws Regarding Same-Sex Acts on Homophobia in Africa", *AHRLJ* 14, no. 2 (2014), 393-411.

missionaries was intertwined with heterosexuality. This interconnectedness was evident in the way missionaries perceived homosexual practices and gender reversals that were common in most African ritual practices.¹⁸ In addition to defining Africans as full of ‘libido and pre-civilised’, the missionary perception of same-sex activities was negative. To them sexual minorities were ‘inferior’, ‘primitive’, and ‘undeveloped’;¹⁹ thus in need of redemption through the liberating light of civilisation.²⁰ The residue of this worldview is traceable today in the North American Christian Right which remains hostile toward sexual minorities. These fundamentalist religious-political organisations continue to use and export religious speeches against sexual minorities to other continents such as Africa.²¹

In his book, *Racial Castration*, David Eng demonstrates how the heterosexist worldview informed the colonial mission theories in Africa. He writes with reference to Freud’s *Totem and Taboo*. ‘On Narcissism,’ Eng writes, ‘we witness a convergence of homosexuality with racial difference, a coming together of the homosexual and the primitive as pathologised, banished figures within the psychic landscape of the social proper.’²² Colonial missionary activities in Africa were heteronormative landscapes for the perpetuation of heterosexual superiority, sexing beliefs, and practices as well as the mediums through which racial boundaries were secured. According to Peter Gary Tatchell, a British human rights campaigner of Australian origin, ‘narratives of racism and homophobia are very closely intertwined. It’s one of the great tragedies of Africa that so many people have internalised the homophobia of that colonial oppression and now proclaim it as their own authentic African tradition.’²³ To understand some implications of this argument requires the investigation of the African cultural heritage.

18 See for example, Géza Róheim, “Dying Gods and Puberty Ceremonies”, *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* 59 (1929), 181-197; Edward E. Evans-Pritchard, “Some Collective Expressions of Obscenity in Africa”, *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* 59 (1929), 311-331.

19 Todd W. Reeser, *Masculinities in Theory: An Introduction* (West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons Ltd, 2010), 152; see also Anias Mutekwa, “From ‘Boys’ to ‘Men’? African and Black Masculinities, Triangular Desire, Race, and Subalternity in Charles Mungoshi’s Short Stories”, *Social Dynamics: A Journal of African Studies* 39, no. 2 (2013), 353-367.

20 Reeser, *Masculinities in Theory*, 152.

21 Kapya J. Kaoma, “The U.S. Christian Right and the Attack on Gays in Africa”, *The Huffington Post*, May 11, 2011, <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/rev-kapya-kaoma/the-us-christian-right-an_b_387642.html> [accessed April 22, 2016].

22 David L. Eng, *Racial Castration: Managing Masculinity in Asian America* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 13.

23 Quoted in David Smith, “Why Africa is the Most Homophobic Continent”, *The Guardian*, February 22, 2014, <<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/feb/23/africa-homophobia-uganda-anti-gay-law>> [accessed Nov. 12, 2015].

Cultural Liminal Discourse as Nonheterosexist

A number of historians and anthropologists have found evidence that African religio-cultural past was hospitable to individuals who did not meet the expectations of socio-cultural heteronormativity. Beyond romanticising African past,²⁴ the goal of this section is to examine how cultural liminal spaces functioned as hospitable and inclusive spaces for sexual minorities. Whereas one of the earliest anthropologists in Africa, Max Gluckman, termed African rituals as ‘rituals of rebellion’,²⁵ I understand them as rituals of resistance. Rituals of resistance can be defined as ‘any act of expressive behaviour which inverts, contradicts, abrogates, or in some fashion presents an alternative to common held cultural codes, values, and norms be they linguistic, literary or artistic, religious or social and political.’²⁶ Most anthropologists are agreed that African ritual performances are embedded in symbolic resistance against the normative.²⁷ The duty of the liminal facilitator in such rituals is to enable oppositional behaviour among participants who freely engaged in non-heteronormative conduct as well as gender and social status reversals, same-sex intercourse and various other forms of resistance to normative social influence.²⁸ These non-normative activities, however, took place in anti-structured spaces which contrast the normative cognitive and social structure of

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- 24 Adriaan Van Klinken, “African Christianity—Developments and Trends”, in *Handbook of Global Contemporary Christianity: Themes and Developments in Culture, Politics, and Society*, ed. Stephen Hunt (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 129-151; Adriaan Van Klinken, “Christianity and Same-sex Relations in Africa”, in *Routledge Companion to Christianity in Africa*, ed. Elias K. Bongmba (London and New York: Routledge 2015), 487-501.
- 25 Gluckman was one of the earliest anthropologists research among the Zulu people of KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa. Max Gluckman, *Rituals of Rebellion in South-East Africa: The Frazer Lecture, 1952* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1954).
- 26 Barbara Babcock, *Introduction to the Reversible World: Symbolic Inversion in Art and Society* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978), 14—italics added for emphasis.
- 27 Some anthropologists have criticised Gluckman for failing to give specific ethnographical accounts on the African attitudes toward symbolic inversion. See Hilda Kuper, *An African Aristocracy* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961) and Edward Norbeck, “African Rituals of Conflict”, *American Anthropologist* 65, no. 6 (1963), 1254-1279. Others have validated the thesis with empirical evidence such as Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Chicago: Aldine Pub. Co., 1969) and Susanne Shröter, “Ritual of Rebellion—Rebellion as Ritual: A Theory Reconsidered”, in *The Dynamics of Changing Rituals: The Transformation of Religious Rituals within their Social and Cultural Context*, ed. Jens Kreinath, Constance Hartung and Annette Deschner (New York: Peter Lang, 2004), 41-58.
- 28 The following are amongst the various books and articles Turner has written on this subject. See, “Symbols in Ndembu Ritual”, in *Closed Systems and Open Minds: The Limits of Naivety in Social Anthropology*, ed. Max Gluckman (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1964), 20-51; “Three Symbols of the Passage in Ndembu Circumcision Ritual: An Interpretation”, in *Essays on the Ritual of Social Relations*, ed. Max Gluckman (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1962), 122-180.

the society.²⁹

In some Zambian cultures, for example, homosexual practice as liminal sexuality functioned more malleably within the ritual context. Scholars on the *mukanda* rite (boys circumcision ceremony) among the *ecumene* ethnic groups in northwest Zambia — Ndembu, Balovale, Chokwe, Luchazi, Lucho, Lunda, and Luvale community cultures — observe that the liminal facilitator is responsible for helping liminal subjects' engagement in non-judgemental processes of deconstructing and reconstructing; de-creating and recreating; and transforming and retransforming cultural landscapes through symbolic actions within liminal spaces.³⁰ In reference to the Ndembu cosmology, Catherine Bell argues that these rituals do not merely restore social equilibrium; rather they are 'part of the ongoing process by which the community was continually redefining and renewing itself.'³¹ The ritual process necessitated the dissolution of immediate relational group in order for the initiates to achieve a *communitas* — a radical bondedness which challenged the status quo in the community's attempt to rearrange its socio-cultural values.³² In the *communitas*, initiates found the intricate balance between justice and love, love shaped by justice, and justice shaped by love.

But these symbolic actions were also 'the power of the weak';³³ they provided initiates with freedom to experiment with anything without the fear of prejudice or discrimination. In this way, the *communitas* became a symbolic socio-cultural critique of prevailing social arrangements. The *communitas*' key function was to enact a process that could lead to creation of a just and equitable social order. In short, the liminal discourse was more than just a presentation of information about social reality through symbolisms, but also a subtle means of engaging in the process of cultural transformation of the social order.

To some extent, the liminal discourse could be regarded as disorder, mysterious and ambiguous because it endeavoured to synthesise the sacred and the profane in order to generate a new thought and a new custom.³⁴ Same-sex relations, for instance, were the most common features of boys' initiations into manhood and into secret societies.³⁵ In other words, liminal spaces created room for nonconformist forms of thinking and acting. As Bell observes most social '...conventions are

29 Jacob Pandian, "Symbolic Inversions: An Interpretation of Contrary Behavior in Ritual", *Anthropos*, 96, no. 2 (2001), 557-562.

30 Max Gluckman, "The Role of the Sexes in Wiko Circumcision Ceremonies", in *Social Structure: Studies Presented to AR Radcliffe-Brown*, ed. Meyer Fortes (New York: Russell and Russell, 1963), 145-167 at 147.

31 Bell, *Ritual*, 40.

32 Turner, "Symbols in Ndembu Ritual", 30-31.

33 Turner, *The Ritual Process*, 108.

34 Turner, *The Ritual Process*; Turner, "Symbols in Ndembu Ritual."

35 Evans-Pritchard, "Some Collective Expressions of Obscenity in Africa", 318.

consistently violated by means of obscene gestures, homosexuality, and taboos against touching the ground.³⁶ Such ‘practical and theoretical instructions in sexual life’, Géza Róheim noted, are prominent features not just in boy-initiation but also in girl-initiation ceremonies.³⁷ Since these sexual encounters were assumed to be limited to the liminal spaces, most African societies tabooed the public practice of same-sex relations outside the liminal space.³⁸ The limitation of such encounters to liminal spaces forced sexual minorities to act as heterosexual in disguise.³⁹

The symbolic actions such as lewdness, gender reversal, and homosexual acts were performed to aid the understanding of how gender functioned in society. Hence the liminal space was critical to the psychological transformation of initiates. This is because the liminal space was the only taboo-less and transgressive space open to diverse experimentation as well as to knowledge construction. In other words, the liminal discourse was embedded in a socio-political journey which affirms human subjectivity as part of the meaning of human becoming as a historical and social construct. The liminal discourse was also the authoritative legitimator of what it means to be a human fibre interwoven in the web of just-love relationships. The humanity uncovered through the ritual had potential to challenge the normative construction of meaning of self and others.⁴⁰ From this perspective, one could expect that same-sex relations would not be problematic if they filtered into the structured society. Since same-sex activities challenge heteronormative sexual values, however, societies ensure that it remains in the liminal state — thus homosexuality is patrolled to ensure it remains as such.⁴¹ But since globalisation, the internet and social media makes it impossible to regulate

36 Touching the ground was prohibited because the initiate was regarded as a pure spirit and therefore must not be contaminated with pollutants from the groups. The ground itself is not regarded as a pollutant but the things that are done to the ground make it polluted/unclean. See also Catherine Bell, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 54-55.

37 Róheim, “Dying Gods and Puberty Ceremonies”, 189. Among the Bemba, a girl’s initiation is called *ichisungu* and *kankanga* amongst the Ndembu; Evans-Pritchard, “Some Collective Expressions of Obscenity in Africa”, 311-331; Richard Audrey, *Chisungu: A Girls’ Initiation Ceremony Among the Bemba of Zambia*, 2nd ed. (London: Tavistock, 1982); Edith Turner, “Zambia’s Kankanga Dances: The Changing Life of Ritual”, *Performing Arts Journal* 10, no. 3 (1987), 57-71.

38 In 1920, Edwin W. Smith and Andrew M. Dale noted that homosexuality existed in Zambia. They wrote of a man who always dressed and behaved like a woman and slept where women slept but never had intercourse with women. He was never discriminated against but just kept quiet and for who he was. See, *The Ila-speaking Peoples of Northern Rhodesia* (London: Macmillan and Co. Limited, 1920). It must be highlighted that even heterosexual relations are equally tabooed in unstructured spaces and within the structured societies during certain initiation ceremonies such as *Mukanda*.

39 Kaunda, “Betrayed”, 22-44.

40 Kevin E. Quashie, *Black Women, Identity, and Cultural Theory: (Un)becoming the Subject* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2004), 78.

41 Kaunda, “Betrayed”, 22-44.

human sexuality, it was only a matter of time before homosexuality could filter into structured societies and become an alternative lifestyle. This begs a question: can the liminal discourse lead to the acceptance of other forms of sexuality as opposed to the 'select' sexuality?

Heterosexist Public Religious Speeches in Zambian Christianity

While Britain has abandoned its anti-homosexual laws, in former colonies, sexual minorities remain criminalised. In Zambia, for example, the crime carries a minimum sentence of fifteen years to life in prison if convicted of 'having carnal knowledge against the order of nature.' Although this clause has not been defined in the constitution, it is nevertheless presumed to prohibit same gender sexual expressions among consenting adults.

In recent years, anti-sexual minorities laws are also assumed to prohibit public dialogue on homosexuality. Anyone who dares to speak or defend sexual minorities rights is harassed and persecuted as was the case with Zambian human rights activist Paul Kasonkomona in April, 2013. Among religious leaders, however, such a person is equated to 'the devil' for 'inciting' the public to take part in 'satanic and immoral activities.'⁴² These religious heterosexist polemics are generally used by most Zambians because they feature in the main discourse that influences Zambian public life religious speeches. Hence, the following section analyses some public religious discourses from prominent clerics in Zambia and other parts of Africa.

Heterosexist narratives in Zambian Christianity

Zambia's heterosexism rides on the 1991 President F.T.J Chiluba's declaration of Zambia as a 'Christian nation'. The subsequent 1996 constitutional clause that constitutionally made the nation 'Christian' has become the backbone in religious leaders' arguments against sexual rights in Zambia. Pentecostal bishop Joe Imakando of the Bread of Life Church International argues that 'homosexuals and lesbians had no room in society because Zambia had been declared a Christian nation.'⁴³ In addition to arguing that homosexuality is 'against traditional norms', Bishop John Jere of the United Christian Action argues that 'homosexuality is a

42 Juliet Mphande, 'Zambia Shackled by Homophobic Laws', Independent Online, October 25, 2013, <<http://www.iol.co.za/capetimes/zambia-shackled-by-homophobic-laws-1.1597384#.VP1wk3yF5TM>> [accessed Nov. 13 2015].

43 Times of Zambia, "Zambia: Channel Funds to Projects, Not Gay Rights, Donors Urged", South African Litigation Centre, May 7, 2010, . <<http://www.southernafricalitigationcentre.org/2010/05/07/zambia-channel-funds-to-projects-not-gay-rights-donors-urged/>> [accessed Nov. 13 2015].

sin and as a country we are a Christian nation.⁴⁴

Pentecostal Bishop Bernard Nwaka, Ph.D., founder of Living Waters Global Churches in Africa shares the above argument. In his sermon during the annual Action Conference for Celebration Ministries International in 2013 entitled ‘Overcoming Demonic Alters [sic]’, Nwaka maintained that the ‘Christian nation’ clause in the national Constitution can be employed to challenge any attempts to legalise homosexuality, which he terms ‘ungodly practices’.⁴⁵ Nwaka also thanked God for Zimbabwe’s president Robert Mugabe’s hatred of sexual minorities. Like Mugabe, he views sexual rights as Western plot hence ‘Africa is not for sale’, he argues. In another sermon, he prayed against ‘demonic and abominable powers of homosexuality’, which he argues, ‘are becoming human rights’. To him, sexual minorities can only be ‘accommodated for the sake of repentance and restoration (reparative or conversion therapy).’⁴⁶

The Rev. Pukuta Mwanza, Director of the Evangelical Fellowship of Zambia, is another religious leader to condemn homosexuality — calling it an ‘inhuman and unnatural practice’.⁴⁷ In addition to arguing that Zambia ‘is a Christian nation’, Mwanza noted that homosexuality is ‘alien to Zambia’s traditional values.’⁴⁸ Similarly, Bishop Paul Mususu, the chairperson of the Evangelical Fellowship of Zambia; Bishop Joshua Banda, Ph.D., of Northmead Assemblies of God, are among many Evangelical leaning leaders to denounce same-sex relations. Banda also believes that homosexuality is alien to Zambia.⁴⁹

Rev. Conrad Mbewe, Ph.D., of the Reformed Baptist Church and one of the

44 Mwansa Pintu, “Zambian Churches Unhappy with US Stance to Tie Aid to Homosexual Rights”, The Catholic Free Press, December 22, 2011, <<http://www.catholicfreepress.org/international/2011/12/22/zambian-churches-unhappy-with-us-stance-to-tie-aid-to-homosexual-rights/>> [accessed 04 March 2016].

45 Tris Reid-Smith, “‘Demonic Alters’ Bishop Thanks God for Mugabe’s Gay Hate”, Gay Star News, May 28, 2013, <<http://www.gaystarnews.com/article/%E2%80%98demonic-alters%E2%80%99-bishop-thanks-god-mugabe%E2%80%99s-gay-hate280513/#gs.Wloj4S0>> [accessed Feb. 29, 2016].

46 Bishop Bernard Nwaka, “Revival 2013 Session 4 Morning—Accessing the Prophetic”, YouTube video, 1:29:10. Posted by “Christian Missionary Fellowship International, Maryland”, September 2, 2013, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2VX9M01B9XE>> [accessed Feb. 29, 2016].

47 Pukuta N. Mwanza, “Church Body Preaches to European Union on Gay Support”, *Zambian Watchdog*, April 8, 2013, <<http://www.zambianwatchdog.com/church-body-preaches-to-european-union-on-gay-support/>> [accessed Nov. 13 2015].

48 Lusaka Times, “More Condemn Sata on Gay Rights”, *Lusaka Times*, March 15, 2011, <<https://www.lusakatimes.com/2011/03/15/condemn-sata-gay-rights/>> [accessed Feb. 29, 2016].

49 The heterosexist theology of Bishop Joshua Banda has been analysed by Adriaan S. van Klinken. See his “The Homosexual as the Antithesis of ‘Biblical Manhood’? Heteronormativity and Masculinity Politics in Zambian Pentecostal Sermons”, *Journal of Gender and Religion in Africa* 17, no. 2 (2011), 129-142. Van Klinken has also analysed some recent debates on sexual minority among Zambian Christians. See, “Gay Rights, the Devil and the End Times: Public Religion and the Enchantment of the Homosexuality Debate in Zambia”, *Religion* 43, no. 4 (2013), 519-540.

most renowned religious leaders in Zambia, equally shares this heterosexist theological perspective.⁵⁰ In one of his sermons, Mbewe attributes sexual minorities to sinfulness. In his words, ‘homosexuality is what happens when society loses the doctrine of sin.’⁵¹ Like Mwanza above, Mbewe classifies sexual minorities as ‘abnormal’ and ‘irrational’, and classifies their lifestyle as contrary to African ‘cultural and Christian values’. He appealed to the belief that sex is only for procreation:

*Sex is not only for pleasure. It is also for procreation, taking us on the road of partnership in parenting, as we fulfil God’s cultural mandate to fill the earth and subdue it. The homosexual agenda flies in the face of all that and wants us to behave like kids. Come on, guys, grow up!*⁵²

Despite his anti-sexual minorities’ views, Mbewe associates same-sex relations with children — pointing to the acceptance of such acts in liminal spaces. Yet like Nwaka above, Mbewe views homosexuality as a Western import — thus not a human rights issue. According to Mbewe, the same-gender loving lifestyle is ‘another bane of the West.’ Human beings are insisting on being given the ‘inalienable right’ to have sex with individuals of the same gender. ‘But can’t everyone see that the emperor walking in front has no clothes on?’⁵³ Mbewe further laments the Western Church’s failure to remain beholden to Victorian sexual values. He asserts,

It was the West, through its Christian missionaries who taught us decency and propriety but now Western society is walking around half naked. It was the missionaries who taught us that marriage comprised one man and one woman for life, but now their own kith and kin are totally defacing this concept.⁵⁴

Then he questions: ‘We thought the Bible is clear on this matter, or are we reading different Bibles?’

50 Kapya J. Kaoma has made this observation in his various articles. See his “Who’s Colonialist? African Antigay Politics in the Global Discourse” *The Public Eye Magazine* 25, no. 3 (2010), 3-8; and *Globalising the Culture Wars: US Conservatives, African Churches, and Homophobia* (Somerville, MA: Political Research Associates, 2009).

51 Conrad Mbewe, “The Tragic Loss of the Doctrine of Sin”, A Letter from Kabwata (blog), June 29, 2015 (4:30 p.m.), <<http://www.conradmbewe.com/2015/06/the-tragic-loss-of-doctrine-of-sin.html>> [accessed Nov. 13, 2015].

52 Conrad Mbewe, “The Homosexual Agenda: (My 19th Radio Christian Voice Commentary for 2015)”, A Letter from Kabwata (blog), May 23, 2015 (9:38 p.m.) <<http://www.conradmbewe.com/2015/05/the-homosexual-agenda.html>> [accessed Nov. 13, 2015]—italics added for emphasis.

53 Conrad Mbewe, “The Western Emperor Has No Clothes On” A Letter from Kabwata (blog), June 12, 2013 (1:54 p.m.), <<http://www.conradmbewe.com/2013/06/the-western-emperor-has-no-clothes-on.html>> [accessed Nov. 13, 2015].

54 Mbewe, “The Western Emperor.”

Heterosexist narratives are equally shared by Anglicans, the Council of Churches in Zambia (CCZ) — an affiliate of the World Council of Churches, and Roman Catholic religious leaders. The Anglican Bishop of the diocese of Luapula, Robert Mumbi, for example, claims that ‘homosexuality is against African traditional way of life and Christian values.’⁵⁵ Aside from opposing ‘the distribution of condoms to inmates in prisons,’ CCZ General Secretary Rev. Suzanne Matale argued that ‘sex is between male and female in a marriage context hence homosexuality should not be tolerated.’⁵⁶

In his statement, ‘Homosexuality—What the Bible Teaches’, the Roman Catholic Zambia Episcopal Conference (ZEC) spokesperson, Father Paul Samasumo writes, ‘The Catholic Church’s constant and firm teaching on homosexual acts is unequivocal. Homosexual acts are seriously wrong and sinful.’⁵⁷ In line with the U.S. Christian Right argument, Samasumo writes, ‘Many homosexual persons argue that they were born that way. Studies on the issue that certain persons have a genetic disposition to homosexuality are inconclusive. Even if this was conclusively proven by science, it would not make homosexual behaviour acceptable.’ In another statement he asserts, ‘Donor aid should not be tied to promoting immorality;’⁵⁸ an argument that presents homosexuality as a neo-colonial imposition.

To bring this section to the conclusion, it seems that Zambian Christianity in whatever traditional manifestation has united as one voice to rebuff the rights of sexual minorities. Religious leaders seem to direct their energies at a powerless and marginalised social group. Such voices, however, are deaf on issues of corruption, poor governance and misuse of religion for political endeavours.

Heterosexist narratives in other African nations

The Zambian religious leaders are not alone in denouncing sexual minorities. Most African clerics have adopted unsympathetic heterosexist rhetorical strategies against sexual minorities. For instance, Bishop Emmanuel Martey, PhD., the Moderator of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of God and the Chairman of

55 Blog Admin, “Homosexuality Against African Norms - Anglicans”, Southern Africa Litigation Centre (blog), May 6, 2010, <<http://www.southernafricalitigationcentre.org/2010/05/06/homosexuality-against-african-norms-anglicans/>> [accessed Nov. 13, 2015].

56 Lusaka Voice, “Churches Purportedly Promoting Homosexuality Condemned”, Lusaka Times, December 19, 2013, <<http://lusakavoice.com/2013/12/19/churches-purportedly-promoting-homosexuality-condemned/>> [accessed Feb. 3, 2016].

57 The Times of Zambia, “Zambia: Catholics Deplore Homosexuality”, South Africa Litigation Centre, March 11, 2011, <<http://www.southernafricalitigationcentre.org/2011/03/22/zambia-catholics-deplore-homosexuality/>> [accessed Feb. 3, 2016].

58 See, Pintu, “Zambian churches ...”

the Christian Council of Ghana, denounced sexual minorities as ‘demonic’ and “Satan’s deadly agenda”, plotting to destroy Ghana.⁵⁹

The same trajectory is followed by most Nigerian religious leaders. Temitope B. Joshua aka T. B. Joshua, of the Synagogue Church of All Nations,⁶⁰ Pastor David Oyedepo, the General Overseer of Winners’ Chapel, Pastor Enoch Adeboye, the General Overseer of the Redeemed Christian Church of God, have all demonised sexual minorities as immoral since homosexuality is against the will of God. For instance, Adeboye follows the US conservative argument that homosexuality is against ‘the natural order of procreation instituted by God,’ which ‘may be expunged if the practice [homosexuality] continues.’⁶¹ Malawian renowned Prophet Shepherd Bushiri shares similar sentiments by arguing that ‘there is no such a thing as gay rights... homosexuality is a sin.’⁶²

The opposition to sexual minorities is not limited to Evangelical and Pentecostal pastors. Aside from associating sexual diversity to Western encroachment, Most Rev. Ignatius Ayau Kaigama, the Archbishop of Jos and the President of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Nigeria argued that homosexuality ‘contradicts our cultural and religious norms of marriage’ and is ‘alien to our understanding of the family and should not be imposed on Nigerians...’⁶³ This speech was meant to clarify the Nigerian Roman Catholic Church’s letter to former Nigerian President Goodluck Jonathan, thanking him for signing Nigeria’s anti-gay bill into law in January 2014. This argument is shared by Roman Catholic religious leaders across Africa — homosexuality is sinful. Anglican bishops in Nigeria, Uganda, and Kenya among many others have equally condemned homosexuality in public speeches. To them, sexual minorities are not only foreign to the African way of life but also sinful and demonic.⁶⁴

In sum, there seems to be a generic anti-gay speech from African clerics from

59 Dan Littauer, “Leading Ghana Cleric: Gay People Are ‘Satan’s Deadly Agenda’”, *Gay Star News*, July 1, 2013, <<http://www.gaystarnews.com/article/leading-ghana-cleric-gay-people-are/>> [accessed Sep. 27, 2015].

60 Ihechukwu Njoku, “Pastor TB Joshua Reacts to Gay Law Passed in the USA”, *The Maravi Post*, June 27, 2015, <<http://www.maravipost.com/life-and-style/people/9147-nigerian-pastor-tb-joshua-reacts-to-gay-law-passed-in-the-usa.html>> [accessed Feb. 3, 2016].

61 Esther Ogenyi, “Pastor Adeboye Condemns Homosexual Practice, Says It’s Against Natural Order”, *Daily Post*, May 5, 2015, <<http://dailypost.ng/2015/05/05/pastor-adeboye-condemns-homosexual-practice-says-its-against-natural-order/>> [accessed Feb. 3, 2016].

62 Ulemu Teputepu, “Prophet Bushiri Urges Malawians to Reject Gays”, *Nyasa Times*, December 29, 2015, <<http://www.nyasatimes.com/2015/12/29/prophet-bushiri-urges-malawians-to-reject-gays/>> [accessed Feb. 3, 2016].

63 Vatican Radio, “Nigerian Bishops’ Conference Takes a Swipe at Media Misrepresentations”, *Vatican Radio*, September 28, 2015, <http://en.radiovaticana.va/news/2015/09/28/nigerianbishopsconference_against_media_misrepresentations/1175390> [accessed Feb. 3, 2016].

64 Kaoma, “Globalizing the Culture Wars...”, 13-14.

Evangelical to Pentecostal to Roman Catholic and mainline Protestant churches. The Bible, colonial missionary teachings, neo-colonial global relations and the appeal to African “cultures” are generally employed as means for the exclusion of sexual minorities in both church and society.

Besides, there is a danger in presenting procreation as ‘the only goal’ of human sexuality. Whereas procreation is used as a strategy to promote and defend heterosexism, childless heterosexual marriages within African societies mostly due to infertility abound. Just as these marriages do not obliterate the human family, sexual minorities do not. From a pastoral perspective, childless marriages are not immoral or better than other heterosexual marriages. Just as the church does not excommunicate or punish childless heterosexual couples, sexual minorities can find the spiritual home in African Christianity.

As goes the church, so goes politicians

It is important to note that the heterosexist language emerging from religious leaders has filtered into the general public and political spheres. Heterosexism is retooled as a political weapon for African political campaigns. Just as religious leaders employ sexual politics to attract followers, African politicians have used it to win the overtly religious electorate. Zimbabwean president Robert Mugabe, for example, has used his hatred of sexual minorities to win votes. To him sexual minorities are ‘satanic’ and ‘worse than pigs and dogs.’⁶⁵ Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni and former Nigerian president Goodluck Jonathan employed anti-gay strategies in their political aspirations.

Similarly, President Edgar Lungu of Zambia called on ‘those advocating gay rights should go to hell. That is not an issue we will tolerate. There will be no such discussion on gay rights. That issue is foreign to this country.’⁶⁶ In 2014, Mr. Gabriel Namulambe, then Foreign Affairs Minister of Zambia employed the argument of the ‘Christian nation’ to oppose homosexuality. Namulambe reportedly said, ‘as Government, we have the Constitution to protect and in the preamble of our Constitution, Zambia is a Christian nation and as such, we live by the Christian values and we will not be able to recognise gay rights.’⁶⁷ These

65 The World Today, “Zimbabwe President Says Homosexuals are “Worse than Pigs and Dogs””, Africa Undisguised, <<http://www.africaundisguised.com/newsportal/story/zimbabwe-president-says-homosexuals-are-worse-pigs-and-dogs>> [accessed Feb. 3, 2016].

66 Mamba Writer, “Zambians Elect ‘Go to Hell’ Anti-Gay President”, Mamba, January 26, 2015, <<http://www.mambaonline.com/2015/01/26/zambians-elect-go-hell-anti-gay-president/>> [accessed Mar. 9, 2015].

67 Michelle Garcia, “Zambian Minister Confirms Government Won’t Recognize Gay Citizens’ Rights”, Advocate, June 9, 2014, <<http://www.advocate.com/world/2014/06/09/zambian-minister-confirms-government-wont-recognize-gay-citizens-rights/>> [accessed Nov. 13, 2015].

Christian values appear to be only important in the debates on sexual minorities and not on issues of poor leadership and corruption which are at the base of dismal economic development in Zambia.

The demonisation of sexual minorities dehumanises fellow human beings as well as robs them of what Herbert C. Kelman calls ‘fundamental modalities of human existence: agency and communion.’⁶⁸ Kelman explains;

To accord a person identity is to perceive him as an individual, independent and distinguishable from others, capable of making choices, and entitled to live his own life on the basis of his own goals and values. To accord a person community is to perceive him—along with one’s self—as part of an interconnected network of individuals who care for each other, who recognize each other’s individuality, and who respect each other’s rights. These two features together constitute the basis for individual worth.⁶⁹

Indeed, there is something seriously misleading in the use of Christian *misvalues* rhetoric to discriminate against sexual minorities. In socio-economic and political terms, heterosexism worsens the existing domination, inequality and exploitation of masses in religious and political spheres. The politicisation, religionisation and deculturalisation of sexual minorities in Zambia and many African countries are not scientifically based, but myths based on pseudoscience. They present no legitimate or well-researched information on sexual minorities within African cultural history. The un-African claim, for example, cannot be historically substantiated; but it is anchored on an old practice of selective invocation of African cultural heritage, the Bible and colonial histories by those in power to suppress the powerless.

Liminality of Public Religious Speech: The Narrative of Resistance

The church is a liminal space where the ambiguousness of human existence is affirmed without prejudice or discrimination. This is not suggesting that the religious leaders must affirm same-gender relationships, but an invitation to experience the liminal discourse that promotes life based upon the all-inclusive affirmation of human life in all its complexities. And that, it is heterosexist attitudes, gestures, laws, behaviours, sermons and some forms of Christianity planted in colonial theological thought that can be classified as un-African, but not sexual minorities.

68 Peter Holtz and Wolfgang Wagner, “Dehumanization, Infrhumanization, and Naturalization”, in *The Encyclopedia of Peace Psychology*, ed. Daniel L. Christie (Oxford: Blackwell, 2011), 317.

69 Herbert C. Kelman, “Violence Without Moral Restraint: Reflections on the Dehumanization of Victims and Victimizers”, *Journal of Social Issues* 29, no. 4 (1973), 25-61 at 49.

Due to the permanency of the church's liminality, Christians can advance the liminal resistance and influence the wider society into accepting the all-inclusive mission of God. As Kapya Kaoma argues, Christian mission as the *Missio Creatoris Dei* is the Creator's invitation to the church to actively participate in justice-seeking actions in the world.⁷⁰ As an assembly of the family of God, the *church* as a liminal gathering of the called out ought to engage in a constant process of separation from their structured societies into liminality (church spaces) and vice versa.

The liminal space in the liminal discourse

Public religious speech in the context of liminal discourse is a celebration of ambiguity and mysteries of the union of human beings and God through Jesus Christ. Liminality of public religious speech means that such speech is a prophetic and empowering framework of thinking about what it truly means to be human (*ubuntu*). It serves as a form of heterosexist criticism and calls attention to the struggles of sexual minorities as people occupying the anti-structured spaces. It seeks to achieve a *communitas among* its members in the struggle to release the inclusive character of just-love and radical equals. Reclaiming public religious speech as a liminal discourse is about restoring 'just theology' and biblical hermeneutics for the whole people of God. It acknowledges the power of Jesus' occupation of the liminal space as the liminal facilitator who calls religious ministers to the office of liminal enablers.⁷¹ If public religious speeches are embedded in just-love, the redefinition of ministers as liminality enablers is crucial. The liminal enablers are not afraid of ambiguity, fluidity and malleability of human existence. Christian ministers are called to bring dimensions of ambiguity and mystery to both sacred and secular public spaces 'where obligations that go with one's social status and immediate role are held temporarily in abeyance.'⁷² Public religious speech ought to be planted in the *missio Creatoris Dei* (mission of the Creator God) of unconditional love-justice for humanity and the whole Creation.

The Christian ministry of the liminal enabler echoes Peter McLaren's concept of 'the teacher as the liminal servant', who 'is a convener of customs and a cultural provocateur—yet she (or he) transcends both roles.'⁷³ 'The liminal servant', McLaren observes, 'does not shy away from the ambiguity and the opacity of

70 Kapya J. Kaoma, *Christian Mission in Creation Care, Edinburgh 2010 Series* (Oxford: Regnum, 2015).

71 Marilyn Bennett Alexander and James Preston, *We Were Baptized Too: Claiming God's Grace for Lesbians and Gays* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 98.

72 Peter McLaren, *Schooling as a Ritual Performance* (London: Routledge, 1986), 114.

73 McLaren, *Schooling*, 115.

existence.⁷⁴ While McLaren's is writing about education, his observation applies to Christian ministry. A liminal pastor does not only fight for non-heterosexism, but also engages in the struggle for inalienable rights of every individual without fear of the cost aside from religion.

Further, the church as a liminal community is invited to participate in God's mission of love-justice after the liminal servanthood of Jesus Christ. In *Jesus Acted Up*, Robert Goss highlights this very point:

He [Jesus] lived in liminal spaces, those between boundaries and categories of the first century Jewish Palestine. Jesus invited the outcasts, the undesirables, and the nobodies of society to share his vision quest for God's reign. He was a boundary breaker, threatening the social boundaries constructed to privilege some and exclude others. He understood that God's reign could only be perceived from the margins of his society and that it would be created from the liminal spaces.⁷⁵

If Jesus were to be born in contemporary Zambian society, one group that would be included in those he chose to share his visionary quest for God's reign would be sexual minorities. Jesus preached to those who were forced to live in the perpetual liminal spaces by the religious and political institutions of the day. The liminal status that Jesus adopted gave him a sense of new identity and enabled him to empathise with diverse human realities. He dined and touched outcast and lepers. As the liminal enabler, he critiqued sexism, prejudice, discrimination, internalised oppression and other forms of oppression. He performed rituals of resistance through public religious speeches and actions — eating on the same table with the marginalised, and oppressed as a critique of social stratification.

Moreover, Jesus refused to become bedfellows with the oppressive institutions of his time. As both the liminal servant and enabler, Jesus' teaching and actions provided safe space for those who existed at the margins of society. Like in the cultural liminality, Jesus' standards of judgement were based on just-love. He exorcised demons as symbolic resistance to Roman political injustice and repression. He fed the hungry as symbolic inversion against economic injustice. He healed the sick as symbolic resistance against forces of death that deny the 'other,' the right to life. Public religious speech should aim at bringing the believers into the liminal space of just-love. As an essential aspect of the mission of God, religious speech can invite believers into the divine *communitas* of Christ where 'there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ' (Gal 3:28).

The public religious speech of resistance against heterosexism has the potential to move people into the liminal conceptualisation of human life. It is this religious

⁷⁴ McLaren, *Schooling*, 115.

⁷⁵ Robert R. Goss, *Jesus Acted Up: A Gay and Lesbian Manifesto* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1993), 131.

speech that can lead people to pledge to accept and embrace difference with just-love. Liminal public religious speech is also a means of grace; thus it is centred exclusively on the Triune God, and utterly depends on God's initiative in Christ. The public religious speeches can equally benefit from the values of *ubuntu* planted in the unconditional love of Christ.

Ubuntu as unconditional love resisting heterosexism

The African ideal of *ubuntu*, 'I am because you are' invites us to reflect on what it means to be fully human in our communities. *Ubuntu* is based on an affirmation of one's humanity as deeply entrenched in an 'other' with his or her uniqueness and difference. The notion has an affinity with the biblical concept of agape love. It is the essence of being human. It describes a pervasive spirit of unconditional love, caring, community, harmony, hospitality, respectful attitude, and responsiveness that does not attach any conditions to what it means to be human. The recognition that 'I am' is based on the radical unconditional love and acceptance of the other the way they are.⁷⁶ Moreover, *ubuntu* has a significant contribution to make to biblical interpretation in decolonising the Bible and expressing the Christian faith among African Christians.⁷⁷ The concept of *ubuntu* is articulated clearly in the fundamental ideal of the Bemba of Zambia in the proverb, *munda ni mucabu* [lit. the womb is a ferry]. In Bemba traditional thought, the womb is likened to *Lesá* (God).⁷⁸ This is because *Lesá* is a ferry within which every individual is brought into *Lesá*'s safe haven of earthly life. In this sense, there is no individual who has the right to reject or denounce what *Lesá* chooses to create.

In Bemba cultures, the people whom the community saw as different were regarded as *abana/ifilengwa na Lesá* (lit. designed by God) or children of God who were created as such. In fact, it is a taboo to point at them in disrespect, to laugh at them or mistreat them. This included the blind, albinos, intersex and transgender persons among many other categories. They were to be protected, accepted and unconditionally loved based on the conviction that they too are children of *Lesá*. As the Bemba say, *icicoleko cacolekwa na Lesá pamweo wamuntu, Lesá eka ewingasobolola* (the riddle of God on human life, only God can unravel it). The following section does not unravel the riddle of God in creation, but invites us to rethink how we treat one another as people of God through *ubuntu* biblical

76 Kwesi A Dickson, *Theology in Africa* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1984).

77 Musa Kuene has developed *Ubuntu* biblical hermeneutics. See his article, "Aspects of Ubuntu for Biblical Studies", *Didache: Faithful Teaching* 12, no. 1 (2012), <<http://didache.nazarene.org/index.php/volume-12-1>> [accessed April 22, 2016].

78 Hugo F. Hinfelaar, *Bemba Speaking Women of Zambia in a Century of Religious Change (1892-1992)* (Leiden: Brill, 1994).

hermeneutics. This is not intended to do a detailed biblical exegesis but to give an example of how to interpret the Bible in *ubuntu* framework.

*An Example: Theo-Ethical Lessons about Ubuntu-Unconditional Love
(1 John 4:7-20)*

Ubuntu as a frame for public religious speech of resistance against heterosexism carry the following lessons:

First, unconditional love comes from God, hence it is a divine gift to the church. The church as the medium of this love ought to love unconditionally. In missiological terms, the church is an agent of God's love to the world (1 John 4: 7). This is similar to the way the notion of *ubuntu* is understood in Africa. Gabriel Setiloane writes, *ubuntu* originates from God and expresses the divine plan for human beings. Bemba people believe that *ubuntunse ninkongole shamuntu onse* [lit. everyone human owes humanness to everyone else]. To be *umuntu* is to pay the debt we all owe to each other. *Ubuntu* does not belong to any individual —it is a divine gift to all people. This means that no human being has the right to withhold or deny another the values of *ubuntu* on any condition. To do that is regarded as sinful.⁷⁹ This suggests that the act of *ubuntu* is the evidence of what it means to be human. It can therefore be argued from 1 John 4:7 that acts of unconditional love are the evidence of the church's participation in the mission of God. It is also a form of witness to the world. Our unconditional love for sexual minorities ascertains that 'God lives in us and God's love is perfected in us' (1 John 4: 12). For this reason, public religious speech must reflect God's unconditional love for the world.

Second, it follows that unconditional love is an attribute of the Trinitarian God who exists in a *communitas* of unconditional love. As God's liminal missionaries, the Creator expects us to share this love in all cosmic relationships. The liminal nature of unconditional love is deeply entrenched in the concept of the incarnation. The church is Jesus' medium within which he emptied (*kenosis*) himself unconditionally for the love of the other. Jesus as an example of God's unconditional love continues to incarnate in the world through the church as an alternative model of God's engagements in the world. In this context, unconditional love is not the end in itself but means for radical inclusivity of all people.

Jesus' messianic identity was embedded in his inclusiveness — loving tax collectors, lepers, women, children and prostitutes among many others. As Musa Dube reminds us, 'Often, fear gets on the way of love, especially when we meet those who are different, those who are not like us—denominationally, nationally, religiously, racially, culturally, ethnically, sexually, genderly and economically.'⁸⁰

79 Gabriel M. Setiloane, *African Theology: An Introduction* (Braamfontein: Skotaville Publishers, 1986).

80 Musa W. Dube, ed., *Africa Praying* (Geneva: WCC, 2003), 212.

Fear of the other usually hinders our love for our neighbours. Again Dube writes, 'If we know God as the creator of all, then we will not fear difference, but love, for God is love.'⁸¹ From this perspective, unconditional love ought to permeate all religious speech; it ought to aid Christian awareness to the plight of social outcasts. In the context of this article, love ought to force us into seeing the injustice committed on sexual minorities and women. In this regard, unconditional love is the instrument of church's resistance to heterosexism manifested in social discrimination, torture and violence against sexual minorities and women.

Third, unconditional love is just-love. Saint John writes, 'if anyone says 'I love God,' yet hates his brother [and sister], he is a liar.' For 'Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen' (1 John 4:20). In these words, John underlines the justice basis of love. He brings love and justice together as two sides of the same coin; meaning love and justice are ontologically integrated. Whenever there is authentic love, there is justice. This suggests that justice without love is void. To some extent, love is justice expressed in concrete terms. Sexual minorities are not just struggling for justice or for human rights void of love, but for just-love within the community of life. For Christian love for God manifests in just-love, just-relationships, just-acceptance and just-respect for all human beings as the *imago Dei* — thereby affirming the Bemba maxim that the womb is like a ferry. Our human responsibility is to unconditionally accept and love any human being who emerges from this divine ferry. Here we see *ubuntu* as unconditional collective hospitality, love and acceptance.

Conclusion

This article proposes the notion of public religious speech of resistance as an oppositional stance against heterosexism re-enacted in liminal spaces. I have argued that reclaiming public religious speech as liminal discourse highlights the symbolic resistance to the prevailing religious and political heterosexual narratives and ideologies in Zambia and Africa as a whole. The liminal speech of resistance is grounded in God's unconditional just-love — it is graceful and liberating speech to all people. Such life-giving words can empower Christians to consciously and decisively bring about true repentance from all the evils of heteropatriarchy, while engaging in acts of 'creating justice with love for ourselves and for others.'⁸²

81 Dube, ed., *Africa Praying*, 212.

82 Robert E. Goss, *Queering Christ: Beyond Jesus Acted Up* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2002), 97.