

# Ndembu cultural liminality, terrains of gender contestation: Reconceptualising Zambian Pentecostalism as liminal spaces

**Author:**Chammah J. Kaunda<sup>1</sup> **Affiliation:**<sup>1</sup>Department of Christian Spirituality, Church History and Missiology, University of South Africa, South Africa**Corresponding author:**Chammah Kaunda,  
pastorchammah@gmail.com**Dates:**

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In this article, I demonstrate how Capital Christian Ministries International has been conceptualised as ecclesiastical spaces for de-gendering. I have utilised symbolic imagination within the Ndembu cultural liminality as theoretical framework in theological studies. I have argued that the initiates in the liminal spaces subverted social normative through the process of un-gendering. The article concludes by arguing that reclaim and reconstitute ecclesia spaces as liminal spaces have potential to promote gender emancipation within African Christianity.

## Introduction

In contemporary society, the term 'gender' has become a contested terrain, with notions of female and femininity, male and masculinity increasingly seen as fluid and in process rather than monolithic or fixed identity or meaning (Butler 1986; 1990; 2004). African women theologians have questioned and interrogated the invocation of Eurocentric paradigmatic canons in interpreting gender in African Christianity (Dube 2001; Oduyoye 2004; Phiri & Nadar 2006). They have critiqued colonial imposition and Eurocentric notions of gender as cross-cultural and universal organising principle for all people of all time and in every age (Amadiume 1997; Oyewumi 1997). This critique came out of the desire to reclaim, recover and reconstitute humanising concepts of gender embedded in African cultural past and everyday lived realities in order to overcome 'dubious universals' and 'intransitive discourses' (Yai 1999). In order to appreciate African notions of gender, the methodological consideration for theorising requires engaging with ideal symbolic expressions of gender within culturally lived experiences in both structured and anti-structured (liminality) social spaces.

I employ an anthropological concept of liminality within theological studies in an attempt to deconstruct gender as ecclesia organising principle for the Capital Christian Ministries International (hereafter, CCMI). During my fieldwork among pentecostals<sup>1</sup> in Zambia I participated and interviewed some members in CCMI in Lusaka, described briefly in the section below, I was impressed on how the church seeks to promote gender justice and equality by consciously perceiving ecclesiastical space as liminal space – a temporal space where gender distinctions are not applied. I draw from these observations, interactions and interviews with over 15 members of CCMI from March to September 2016.<sup>2</sup>

I am arguing that by CCMI embracing the liminal as its ministerial approach has potential to accelerate its process of ecclesiastical inculturation. The argument is that the concept of 'Church' is a universal language for talking about religious groups that believe and follow the disciplines of Jesus Christ. This means that the expression of Jesus can easily find local equivalents in any culture. Admittedly, the concept of 'Church' among many Zambian pentecostals continues to be expressed with some colonial connotations. Hence, the process of inculturating some of its key theological aspects, such as issues of gender, is vital for reconceptualising its ecclesiastical ministries with local ideas of religion.

This article struggles with various questions as follows: Does CCMI approach help to envision radical anti-systemic politics beyond gender binaries? Does it have potential to overcome

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1.Throughout this article the lowercase 'pentecostal', 'pentecostals' and 'pentecostalism' are used in reference to all types of pentecostal traditions and charismatics. The upper case 'Pentecostal' or 'Pentecostalism' is used when referring to a specific Church as in the case of Capital Christian Ministries International and is also returned in direct quotations.

2.The research grant given by John Templeton Foundation, through the Nagel Institute for the Study of World Christianity under the theme 'Christianity and Social Change in Contemporary Africa'.

contemporary reductionism and dichotomisation between masculinities and femininities? In what ways can liminal gender be thought of as a framework by which CCMI believers symbolically subvert and contest prevailing classification of gender as socio-cultural organising principle? Or can we conceive of the CCMI liminal space as contributing to the creation of a new humanity?

The premise of this article is that CCMI notion of liminal gender has the potential to enable the church to articulate a vision of new humanity beyond the imposed gender dichotomies at least at ecclesiastical level. It is a first step in enabling the church to undo gender as a dominant model of conceptualising the relationships among the believers. Here, I begin by explicating how liminal gender functioned within Ndembu ritual.

## Symbolic imagination as subversive silence

The Ndembu people on whom this article is focused occupy the western portion of Mwinilunga District in North-western Province of Zambia. Their systems of governance follow matrilineal principles with the ancestry traced through the mother but are not matriarchal. In Ndembu thought, the cosmos is not merely a given system but a system that unravels itself in the complexity of symbolism. Like many other African people, the way Ndembu people organise and reorganise their societies and lives is discoverable within the symbolisms of creation. In short, their worlds are intrinsically symbolic (Turner 1975). It is through symbolical ritual performances that wisdom and knowledge is chiselled in this system of thought. In defining the symbol, I follow Paul Ricoeur's (1974) delineation:

as any structure of signification in which a direct, primary, literal meaning designates, in addition, another meaning which is indirect, secondary, and figurative and which can be apprehended only through the first. (p. 13)

According to this definition, although the symbol may include the sign as it expresses and communicates a meaning, it also carries a much deeper, latent meaning behind the obvious ones. In Ndembu thought, the rituals are symbolical performance of the interplay of social relations at different stages of life and human progress. Victor Turner (1975) who began his research among the Ndembu people 'as an agnostic and monistic materialist', acknowledged:

I learned from the Ndembu that ritual and its symbolism are not merely epiphenomena or disguises of deeper social and psychological processes, but have ontological value, in some way related to man's [*sic*] condition as an evolving species, whose evolution takes place principally through its cultural innovations. (p. 31; see also Turner 1974:57)

The Ndembu cultural landscapes are created, recreated, transformed and retransformed by human symbolic actions in cultural liminality. The people perform these rituals as social mechanism for recreating and reaffirming their humanity and develop new ways of being and becoming so that social healing can follow in the community. In reference to the Ndembu cosmology, Catherine Bell argues that the intentions

of rituals are not simply to restore communal balance; they are also 'part of the ongoing process by which the community was continually redefining and renewing itself' (Bell 1997:40).

Turner writes that any symbol in ritual involves a dynamic exchange between their two poles, that is, sensory and ideological poles. The sensory or normative pole concentrates on the very literal characteristics of the symbol as a way to arouse desire and feelings. The second is the ideological pole that challenges status quo and seeks to rearrange social norms and cultural values of people (Turner 1964). Ideological symbolic actions in the ritual have been utilised as 'the power of the weak' (Turner 1969:108) that enabled the weak to break free from cultural bounds of Ndembu society as long as they remained in the liminal spaces. The subversive nature of rituals in some African societies made Max Gluckman to classify them as 'rituals of rebellion' (Gluckman 1954). Nonetheless, the Ndembu rituals cannot be classified as rituals of rebellion, rather as rituals of socio-cultural critique and reordering. As Bell observes, the sensory pole is a transposition of the sensual experiences associated with a particular symbol which are expected to shape the resultant-associated ideological values into people's consciousness, 'endowing the ideological with sensory power and the sensory with moral power' (Bell 1997:41). Therefore, the ritual is more than just presenting the social reality by a symbol but a more subtle means for engaging in the process of cultural transformation of social order and relations.

But liminality does not give certainty concerning gender transformation. Bjørn Thomassen argues that 'liminality opens the door to a world of contingency where events and meanings – indeed "reality" itself – can be moulded and carried in different directions' (Thomassen 2014:7). However, it is up to the individuals emerging from the liminal space to giving new meaning to reality. This is because 'human beings react to liminal experiences in different ways' (Thomassen 2014:7). This will become clear in the conflictive responses that came from CCMI members. Before I turn to CCMI, it is important to demonstrate how gender functioned in the liminal spaces; one has to understand how liminal spaces functioned within Ndembu culture.

## Gender performance in the Ndembu liminal spaces

The liminal spaces within Ndembu culture were a process that involved withdrawal from the cultural centre (structured society) so as to engage differently certain aspects of cultural norms (see Kaunda 2015; 2016a; 2016b; 2016c).<sup>3</sup> The withdrawal from normal society was meant to enable the community to get a better and clear view of cultural elements that were inadequate so as to upgrade them in order to make the society more responsive to the changed circumstances. The liminality (kukunka–cocoon) was a decentring approach to the prevailing social arrangement. It was the British Anthropologist, Victor Turner who introduced the anthropological noun

<sup>3</sup>I have developed this argument in my various works.

'liminality' into the Ndembu thought through his study of Ndembu ritual. It is important to note that although the notion of liminality (in the meantime) has been widely used in Western Anthropology, much of the recent understanding of the concept emerges from Victor Turner's observations among the Ndembu people. In other words, although liminality is a western invented concept, its connotation in its post-Turnerian usage is entrenched with Ndembu thought. The argument is that Turner introduced a new concept in Ndembu culture to conceptualise local ideas that already existed for universal consumption. Turner introduced a new language for scholars to rationalise Ndembu complex thought system. This means that even if we replace the concept with a new one, the idea of Ndembu ritual will remain intact. Turner was concerned with understanding cultures on the basis of dynamism and disorder, seeing culture not as a fixed, monolithic and homogenous thing but rather as a dynamic and dialectic process. He saw in Ndembu culture a movement from one social world to another as a constant struggle between structure (normative) and anti-structure (liminality).

Turner rediscovered a three-phase formulation of Arnold Van Gennep (1960/1908) in Ndembu ritual, which is also generally found in many human cultures around the world. The ritual process starts with kwingija (seclusion), followed by kukunka (liminal phase or cocoon) and kwidisha (reintegration). The most crucial phase in the ritual is the kukunka which was the means to strike the intricate balance within society. Turner describes this as a 'stage of being between phases' (Turner 1969:151) or a stage of being covered in a cocoon, like a caterpillar metamorphoses before emerging as a butterfly. He noted that entities in the reigns of liminality are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between. It is the interstitial zones which allow transformation from one social status to another.

During this stage, the liminal subjects were detached from their previous socialised context. They were brought into a 'disorder phase where sacred and profane were synthesised generating new thought, new custom and new action' (Kaunda 2015:28). In the liminal phase, an alternative form of human interrelatedness is formed. Turner describes this modality with the Latin word *communitas* that is distinguishable from normative community which is 'an area of common living' (Turner 1969:96). The *communitas* is a comparatively unstructured society underpinned on relations of equality, solidarity and de-gendered subjectivity and identity opposed to the normative social structure.

The *communitas* of liminal subjects was embedded in radical equality and genderlessness. The liminal subjects, therefore, were regarded as neither males nor females and not transgendered but ungendered pure spirits. They could function with any gender but remain ungendered and undefined. They were:

at loss for stable points of reference as the established normative dissolved before the new images and attitudes begun to appear which are neither solid nor reliable as everything at this stage remained fluid and in flux. (Kaunda 2015:26)

They were 'neither living nor dead but both undead living and living dead. This was the ambiguity of the anti-structural period' (Kaunda 2015:26). They were 'liberated from social normative with its hierarchic, gender binary and power relations' (Kaunda 2015:27). Their main struggle at this stage 'was to realise their humanity – a humanity which was perceived as always becoming' (Kaunda 2015:27). The adoption of ambiguous gender was significant for becoming whole through realisation and attainment of ungendered self.

Therefore, the liminal subject was subjected to conditions characterised by ambiguity, indeterminacy, contradiction, incoherence, blurring of boundaries and role transition. A liminal view of gender gives some form of glimpse that gender identities and performance in the structured society are fluid, transitional and dynamic rather than absolute and natural. While the liminal that opens up during these rites is a temporary phase, and one is aware that certain things happen there because it is a liminal and temporary situation which is different from structured society, if the church has to adopt this approach, it has to function beyond letting the situation go back to 'normal' – I return to this point below. This perspective stresses that the essential traditional oppositions such as female and male, human and nonhuman, spirit and material and mind and body are artificial constructions that imprison human beings from existing as freed creatures.

The liminal space espoused the fact that human beings are not meant to be objects of gender but subjects who should define what it means to be human and have power and authority to choose to be either gendered or ungendered. In so doing, they demonstrate the inadequacy of existing social order and the need for gender transformation. It is important to highlight that the way these rituals are performed in contemporary Ndembu has shifted due to the influence of Christianity. Edith Turner noted that 'Christianity and nationalist modernization had been devouring the ancient culture like a plague – a plague full of the best intentions but in fact the agent of tragic destruction' (Turner 1987). She writes that the Ndembu cultural discourse and practice of liminal gender have been completely altered due to the impact of colonial Christianity. The colonial missionaries set out to redefine and impose European forms of femininity and masculinity, gender and sexuality on some African people.

The pan-African revolutionist, Frantz Fanon argued that the colonists introduced a different model of gender which deeply modified African social constellation and the cultural wholeness (Fanon 1964). Yet the pre-colonial liminal gender in Ndembu cultural rituals remains crucial for reconceptualisation of gender in African Christianity, Zambian Christianity in particular. Various questions may be raised here: could CCMI begin to think of itself as processes, transitional, in-between, liminal places where cultural complexities of the textures, tensions and unresolved trajectories of gender can be reconstructed? Liminal places where forms of human subjectivity that have shrugged off the shadows of colonial Christianity binary logic and fixed categories of gender can be subverted? Places where believers begin to perceive their

gender as no longer stable and unitary but fluid and malleable over which they have sovereignty? Where they are liberated to explore themselves as non-unitary, multiple, complex subjects who cannot be reduced to gender? Where there can be found inner courage to dare to cross the liminal line and express their gender subjectivity in the structured society? In what follows, I analyse how CCMI function as a space of gender contestation.

## Capital Christian Ministries International a gendered space

CCMI was established in 2001 in Lusaka by Bishop George and Rev. Beatrice Mbulo, former ministers in Pentecostal Assemblies of God in Zambia (PAOG – Zambia) and Assemblies of God in North Hollywood in Los Angeles, United States of America. Both of these denominations are Classical Pentecostal Movement and place emphasis on personal experience of God through salvation and baptism in the Holy Spirit. CCMI is described as ‘Pentecostal/Charismatic congregation, holding contemporary church services to meet every person’s expectations’ (CCMI 2009a). CCMI has to be a ‘local-church based multifaceted Christian ministry in every capital city of Africa’ (CCMI 2009b). CCMI has already begun to expand into other African capital cities such as Pretoria, Lilongwe and Gaborone. CCMI seeks to express gender equality in the functioning of the church with hope that it can affect the community of faith’s daily life in society. They believe that God calls the wife and husband as equal partners in ministry. Bishop Mbulo argues that:

We in the Capital Christian family have and we will continue to be guided by the Lord himself, and good balanced sound biblical teachings, with deep conviction, recognizing that women are equal blessed partners in the kingdom ministry, carrying out the vastness and the richness of the task for the Lord’s glory.<sup>4</sup>

This understanding has shaped how CCMI appoints leaders and treats women. Married couples are appointed together for the same leadership position. Single individuals are appointed to leadership based on merit rather than gender. As a result, the church leadership constitutes 70% of females. Chisha Mutale stressed that:

At Capital there is nothing like gender, that’s my experience. In fact the majority of people that are serving as leaders in Capital are women. They are the ones who are at the forefront of the leadership. Yeah and so this element of side-lining women here at Capital, it’s not there, in fact, they encourage more women to come on board, both men and women and it’s balance.<sup>5</sup>

It was interesting to see the wife and the husband ministering together on Sunday in the church service. For instance, when it is the wife preaching, the husband has a kind of obligation to carry the Bible to the pulpit for her and prayer for God’s strength on her and vice versa. The church sends both wife and husband to study theology in the Bible College. Bishop Mbulo said ‘we consider our female counterpart as equal

partners in our development agenda’.<sup>6</sup> He argues that the church has been influenced by:

indigenous teachings on gender equality which is not based on political pressure, but our attitude towards women. We value women, and because of that we act in respect for their humanity.<sup>7</sup>

It is clear that at within ecclesiastical spaces, CCMI empowers men and women to reject socio-cultural status quo of marginalisation in patriarchal societies and legitimises ambitious women to achieve economic, social and political independence (Spinks 2015). Yet, some feminist scholars such as Jane Soothill (2010) have argued that:

It should not be assumed, however, that the spiritual and material equality of believers undermines inherent biological and psychological differences between women and men, or that it fundamentally disrupts the rules governing social relations between them. In marriage, a woman is still to ‘submit’ to her husband. (p. 84) (Eph 5: 22–4)

While not refuting Soothill’s argument, Elizabeth (Betty) Sera feels that:

Submission is also a topic that is highly misunderstood, I don’t have to submit to you because you bring something on the table, submission is where I value your opinion. But submission should also mean you value my opinion ... you are not the head to kill the will of the people, to kill those that are under you, so at the end of the day we are looking at a different kind of headship, a headship that submit as well.<sup>8</sup>

The members of CCMI are in struggle with this conflictive gender justice imagination as Chikombe Jonathan Chela confessed:

When it comes to gender equality, I think there is misinterpretation, at the same time we are saying we are partners and at the same time we are saying no, the husband is the head of the home, the priest of the home. However, gender equality will influence, yes in a positive way with a proper guidance.<sup>9</sup>

It is clear that CCMI ecclesia gender equality is yet to be translated in the marital contexts as some like Pastor Alex Chisanga still maintain that ‘the structure of God should be maintained at all level where the man should still remain the head of the family’.<sup>10</sup> However, this does not negate CCMI quest, as Bishop Mbulo highlights, ‘our aim is to promote gender justice and equality in the attitudes and behaviours of our members in church, society and home’. CCMI notion of gender demonstrates that while there seems to be struggle to

4. Interview with Bishop George Mbulo, Capital Christian Ministries International, Mulungushi International Conference Center, 30 March 2016.

5. Interview with Chisha Mutale, Capital Christian Ministries International, Mulungushi International Conference Center, 09 June 2016.

6. Interview with Bishop George Mbulo, Capital Christian Ministries International, Mulungushi International Conference Center, 30 March 2016.

7. Interview with Bishop George Mbulo, Capital Christian Ministries International, Mulungushi International Conference Center, 30 March 2016.

8. Interview with Elizabeth (Betty) Sera, Capital Christian Ministries International, Mulungushi International Conference Center, 09 June 2016.

9. Interview with Chikombe Jonathan Chela, Capital Christian Ministries International, Mulungushi International Conference Center, 09 June 2016.

10. Interview with Pastor Alex Chisanga, Capital Christian Ministries International, Mulungushi International Conference Center, 09 June 2016; interview with Mukuka Mulenga, Capital Christian Ministries International, Mulungushi International Conference Center, 10 June 2016.



redefine gender equality in the home, within ecclesiastical spaces ungended lifestyle is promoted. In the following section, I barely chart the terrains for reconceptualising CCMI as liminal space for creating a new (ungended) African Christian humanity.

## Reconceptualising CCMI as liminal space

For almost three decades now, African women theologians across disciplinary orientations have called the African Church to become gender sensitive and develop policies that promote gender justice and equality (Dube 2001; Oduyoye 2004; Phiri & Nadar 2006). As a result, modern African Christianity appears to be reaching a certain level where gender roles would not matter as in the past and are easily swapped in some most progressed African Christian homes. Nonetheless, the ghost of gender continues to haunt most African churches like an unappeased spirit of an ancestor seeking for revenge. A continuity of 'colonial theology of gender' in most post-colonial African churches is epitomised by a failure to adopt a cultural liminal framework as a model for functioning. This has retarded the process of achieving a great measure of gender justice as the notion of gender remains a principle organisation notion for the large segment of African Church with its all-male leadership. Even in the contexts where women have been allowed to be ordained, gender continues to dictate how women do pastoral ministry as if it were men who called them into ministry. Being ordained has not given most women full equal status to some of their male counterpart. This raises a critical question: how can African Christianity transcend colonial Christianity gender trappings? Tom F. Driver and Victor Turner in their *Liberating Rites: Understanding the Transformative Power of Ritual* call for a liminal turn to 'help [the churches] find viable alternatives to patriarchy' (Driver & Turner 1997:37). The Church will understand its place in the world once it becomes willing to transcend the convention.

From the above discussion, CCMI appears to function in a similar way the cultural liminal spaces function in traditional African ritual spaces as dynamic sacred spaces of empowerment that enable initiates to create counter-gender temporal life which gives emphasis on the values of justice, equality and affirmation that to be human is not defined by gender. On the one hand, gender binary within a social order appears to be an arbitrary and avoidable limitation on human potential; on the other hand, the erosion of gender in CCMI ecclesia spaces appears to be emancipating for both women and men, and the whole church at large as for that temporal period everyone is free to be just a human created in the image of God.

The argument that is emerging from this discussion on liminal gender appears to transcend the mere call for gender justice and equality and tolerance of gender diversity in CCMI. What is clear from the liminal critique of gender is that gender exists only as a concept. Less than half of African human population has appealed to this concept as a

justification for the oppression and exploitation of more than half of human population in Africa. Anthony Appiah's (1985) argument on race is applicable here that:

the evil that is done is done by the concept and easy – yet impossible – assumptions as to its application. What we miss through our obsession with the structure of relations of concepts is, simply, reality. (pp. 35–36)

Appiah contends, gender 'like all other concepts, constructed by metaphor and metonymy; it stands in, metonymically, for the other; it bears the weight, metaphorically, of the other kinds of difference' (Appiah 1985:36). Could it be possible that if the concept was rendered inconsequential in African ecclesia structures, the male population that covetously or innocently benefit from this notion will have no concrete grounds where to stand and justify oppression, exclusion and exploitation of their human counterparts? How possible is it to initiate praxis of crushing gender hierarchies and shattering boundaries in ecclesia liminal spaces? How can a new humanity be envisioned in CCMI? A humanity that is not bound and limited by gender? What resources can CCMI borrow from Ndembu liminality in order to de-gender itself? These are profound questions that cannot be answered in a small section such as this one. As already argued in this article, I merely scratch on the surface as a way of beginning the discussion in this direction. The intention is not necessarily about proposing how gender must be reconceptualised in African Christianity. This I leave for a follow-up research on this article. Specifically for this section, the intention is to reconceptualise the institution itself in which liminal gender is performed for envisioning a new (de-gendered) humanity.

## The liminal nature of the Church: CCMI as a *communitas* of believers

The CCMI as a perpetual liminal has not come automatically but something that has been intentionally initiated. The Church is an assembly of the family of God. The Greek phrase for 'called out' forms a singular word 'ekklesia' which denotes a people who have been called from the world to form an assembly or the church of the Lord. Applying a liminal perspective to the Church suggests that the believers as called out ones are ritual subjects who constantly move between structured and unstructured spaces. They remain embedded within the normal life process of their social contexts but from time to time seclude themselves and gather together to ritualistically articulate the meaning of their faith so that they can live adequately when they return in the ordinary society. This rite of transition follows the mnemonic approach of the Ndembu initiation rites which contains three phases as explained above. The believers engage in a constant process of separation from their structured societies into liminality (church spaces) and back into their structured societies (reintegration) to live out their new discovered knowledge for the benefit of their societies. The religious process that CCMI takes has potential to overcome fixity because it has to be based on movement of the believers to and fro the structured society.

In this way, CCMI appears to have potential for constructing safe space for gender transformation by shattering gender boundaries and hierarchies that exist between male and female. It constitutes a religious moment in which believers are consistently exhorted to undergo transformation from one condition to another so that they become distinguishable from those who do not belong to CCMI. Understanding CCMI as liminal space suggests that the Church could become that peculiar safe space for moral contestation, resistance to normative social conformity, formulating new spiritual, social and political models which believers can strive to put into practice once reintegrated into structured societies. It has potential for headship and submission contestation as already some members have already started challenging the legitimacy of these notions.

The Church is never called to replace secular government but to radically change or humanise its systems through practical actions of the believers. One key feature of liminality is a deliberate experience of critical egalitarianism. Similarly, the Church is called teach that every believer be regarded as equally valuable, equally recognised in the existential sense and equally free to choose to express their identity comfortably without the fear of being reprimanded and ostracised but as they relate to God in communion with other believers. CCMI appears to be resisting conformity to meaningless religious ritual with no clear vision for the de-gendering its ecclesiastical and social structures (Kaoma 2015).

Jesus never envisioned his group of disciples to become a structured institution. I am aware that he designated some as apostles but these must be understood as liminal enablers. CCMI has the potential to redefine the ministers as liminal enablers who should not be afraid of ambiguity, fluidity and malleability of human existence. The apostles were chosen because they had the ability to bring dimensions of liminality to the ecclesiastical spaces 'where obligations that go with one's social status and immediate role are held in abeyance' (McLaren 1986:114). The liminal enabler can be defined similar to Peter McLaren's concept of liminal servant as 'a convener of customs and a cultural provocateur, yet ... transcends both roles' (McLaren 1986:115). The liminal enabler will not seek to subordinate the political rights of the believers in society but as minister activist and spiritual director would strive as midwives to enable them explore their gender subjectivity. The liminal enabler does not only fight for de-gendering the ecclesiastical structures and mentalities of fellow ministers, but she also engages in the struggle for political and social de-gendering. It is not clear in the New Testament but a liminal enabler like in the cultural liminality should have the audacity to draw upon both feminine and masculine modes of consciousness.

Jesus called his disciples to follow him as unstructured or elementary structured and relatively undifferentiated *communitas*. The *communitas* draws its life and gains its meaning through deconstructing the normative social order. CCMI should position itself to be more than a mere ritual stage as its main preoccupation should be to fully realise and

actualise its spiritual, social, economic and political calling in Zambia (Schröter 2004:46). The disciples were brought at an equal level as undifferentiated *communitas* who followed instructions from the one who called them brothers or sisters and friends (Jn 15:15) – the liminal enabler of all time. He called them to create a model of society which was necessarily opposed to the prevailing social arrangement be it gender, race and every other aspect that informed human social order and negated human experience of the fullness of life (Jn 10:10).

The Church reconceptualised as liminal space has the potential to challenge the understanding that 'upright' or 'natural' is the only epistemic site for describing reality. This oppositional paradigm provides 'new languages through which it becomes possible to deconstruct and challenge dominant relations of power and knowledge legitimated in traditional forms of discourse' (Giroux 2005:13). The Church as a gathering of the 'called out' by God was envisioned is a liminal space for building subversive knowledge that resists the knowledge that falls into the trappings of gender binary and the trap of old colonial legacies, imperial and neo-colonial definition of African Christian humanity. Therefore, the current struggle of the CCMI is to regain and reconstitute liminality as a model for resisting traditional colonial Christianity imposed hierarchy that stifles the household of God and seeks to de-gender its structures and mentalities of the members.

## Conclusion

The aim of this article was to analyze how CCMI is conceptualised as liminal space in order to facilitate the process for de-gendering the household of God and creating new (ungendered) Zambian Christian humanity. It demonstrated how Ndembu cultural liminality defied natural order of things and functioned in opposition to the laws of probability as the liminal subjects engaged in redefining their identities and subjectivities through defying gender norms of their society. Employing this frame of thinking CCMI is called to reclaim and reconstitute liminality as a viable model for emancipation of Zambian Christians from the prison of gender. The argument is that the quest for ungendered Christianity will emerge out of resistance against the established social order in which gender is a key undergirding and organising principle.

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## Competing interests

The author declares that he has no financial or personal relationships which may have inappropriately influenced him in writing this article.

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