

**Ukwowa Mumwela Nabangeli: Transcendence, Flight and Inculturation in
Zambian Devotional Artwork**

by Aaron Samuel Mulenga

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Practice Supervisor: Professor Maureen de Jager

Thesis Supervisor: Mbali Khoza

ABSTRACT

With a focus on my artistic practice, this paper seeks to interrogate the tensions and overlaps in various representations of transcendence that have shaped my spirituality by interrogating how these have featured in Eurocentric Christian iconography and Zambian cultural practices, particularly cultural artefacts used for spiritual flight, housed in Zambian museums. Transcendence is understood by some as a change in a person's physiological or psychological state that allows them to go beyond their experience of time, place or being. I understand transcendence to be the moment that one's spirit is elevated beyond the limitations of their physical body. The use of Biblical text relating to flight will also be discussed as a comparative study to explore how transcendence through flight operates within Christianity and a Zambian cultural context.

Furthermore, I shall interrogate how black artists (particularly Zambian), such as Laurence Yombwe, address the omission of black people from Christian iconography (which is predominantly depicted as white people). I aim to highlight the important role that representation plays in allowing for an individual to experience transcendence. I believe inculturation is a fitting solution to address some of the pitfalls in Christian iconography brought about due to the lack of representation of black people. Inculturation can be understood as an adaptation in the way the gospel of Jesus is preached to non-Christian cultures, and in turn, how these cultures influence the teachings of the gospel.

Finally, I will explore how transcendence as a concept applies in my artworks and how the materials I use highlight this concept. Through my art, I grapple to combine what seem like disparate spiritual paradigms, arising from my culture and my faith. My artwork seeks to contribute to the work that particular artists (a majority of them black) are grappling with to correct the lack of representation of black people in Christian iconography. I will use the notion of inculturation as an avenue through which to interrogate the tensions I experience while exploring the concept of transcendence.

Key Terms: Transcendence, inculturation, flight, Christian iconography, representation

DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

I declare that this thesis is my own work and that all the sources I have used have been acknowledged by complete references. This is being submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirement for Master of Fine Art at Rhodes University. I declare that it has not been submitted before for any degree or examination at another university.

Signature: Aaron Samuel Mulenga

Date: 2020

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INTRODUCTION

As far back as I can remember, the concept of transcendence has always fascinated me. I am perplexed by how a person can conduct supernatural feats such as walking on water, calling fire down from the sky or making it rain even during times of drought. These are stories I read about in the Bible or heard as a child growing up. Aside from reading Bible stories, I enjoyed copying images to draw from our family's huge illustrated Bible that my grandfather gifted my mother. This Bible is one of the first references I recall of Christian iconography. At the time, I only saw those images as pictures, which related to stories I had read or was taught in church. Only when I grew older did I realise that none of the images in this Bible looked like my family and me; they all looked white. Slowly, I began to question the representation of these biblical characters and whether or not there was room to depict black people in Christian artwork; and if there was, then how would such depictions appear?

As age began to creep up on me and the lustre of childhood innocence diminished, the responsibilities of adulthood became more apparent, leaving me to question how I could have a more fulfilled life both physically and spiritually. This idea of fulfilment, mixed with the notion of belonging, amplified the concept of transcendence for me, leading me to seek out ways I could experience transcendence in my faith and my life. When I looked more closely at the lack of representation of black people in the Bible, I realised that this lack of representation is something I have come across in the depiction of Christian iconographic artwork in a number of Catholic churches in Zambia (my country of origin and the location of my study).

I chose to focus my study on the Catholic Church in Zambia because my first encounter with Christian iconographic art came from the church. For the most part, the representation of Christian iconography (in Zambia) has predominantly maintained a Eurocentric depiction (i.e., most of its imagery appearing white). I cannot help but compare this form of exclusion of black people to the experiences of segregation in periods such as colonialism, before independence, when black people were cordoned from spaces deemed fit only for white people. Black people were also left out of critical decision-making processes in the nation during this time. It is as though the residue of a bygone era remains in very subtle ways. I believe that if an individual cannot see

themselves represented in a space, it becomes difficult for them to feel a sense of belonging to that environment. Space can be physical, emotional or spiritual, such as the church, for example. This feeling of not belonging made the concept of transcendence stand out for me because black people fought to obtain spaces of belonging and recognition. They were able to overcome subjugation and systems that sought to erase them and their importance. In a manner of speaking, they transcended oppression and found their spaces of belonging. For this reason, I believe it is essential to address subtle forms of regression, such as the lack of representation of black people in Christian iconography in the church. I am particularly interested in the work that must be done to represent more black people in Christian iconographic art in Zambia.

Others before have recognised the need for acknowledgement and representation in spaces such as the church. For instance, the Catholic Church has previously employed strategies like inculturation to address this issue. In this paper I investigate how inculturation integrates Zambian culture and its people with concepts revealed in Christian iconographic art. The Marian Shrine (a Catholic parish) is my case study to explore the use of inculturation while also questioning its effects on those who encounter artworks made through the process of inculturation within the Catholic Church. Furthermore, I explore the tension that comes from inculturation that is, can seemingly disparate cultures coexist, and is it possible to represent Christianity through a non-Eurocentric lens. If this is possible and it has been done, how effective has it been?

A metaphor that resonates with the concept of transcendence for me is that of elevation or more accurately, flight. I am interested in the idea of flying because it conveys weightlessness and rising above the limitations placed before an individual. Currently, I am researching how people have used the power of the Holy Spirit to fly, as revealed in the Bible, while also questioning how some people in Zambia are believed to achieve flight through the use of spiritual objects they have crafted. Lusaka Museum ethnographer, Esther Banda (personal communication, 2019), narrated to me during an interview that culturally in Zambia, flight is performed in secret (and mostly at night); usually, only those that engage in this form of flight would be able to explain the mechanics behind it. Alternatively, an individual who may have been a former practitioner may also elucidate on how to achieve flight; however, this practice is

shrouded in mystery and perceived as a practice of witchcraft (Esther Banda, personal communication, 2019). In this paper, I question whether flight (in these two forms) can be understood as a way of transcendence, allowing individuals to find their space of belonging and fulfilment. Finally, I will interrogate iconographic images found in the Catholic Church that depict flight, and question how such images can function as tools to represent transcendence for the benefit of the church congregants. I shall also engage with the need for black people to see themselves imaged in Christian iconographic depictions.

As an artist one of the ways I conduct my research is through my practice. I am conscious of the materials I use in order to best articulate the questions I intend to ask but also to guide the viewer through the journey I took as I conducted my research. For instance I use coffee as an avenue through which to speak about Christianity's origin on the African continent. The coffee also works as more than a metaphor as it serves as a media with which I construct paintings onto canvas. I also work with a variety of mediums such as video, sound and installation in order to create an emersive experience for the viewer, but also to better articulate my research as I believe a multi medium approach in my artistic creation gives a better understanding of the extent with which I conduct my research. In this paper I shall dive deeper into some of the choices I made when creating my art and how it served as an avenue through which to explore the concept of flight through transcendence.

CHAPTER 1: Flight as a Metaphor for Transcendence

1.1. Defining Transcendence

Transcendence is a concept that has been extensively discussed by scholars in various academic disciplines. To help me bring clarity to my argument, I shall use Rebecca Sager's definition of the concept as one of my main reference points in this paper. Sager (2012: 27) defines transcendence as "a change in a person's physiological or psychological state that engenders an awareness or sensation of going beyond one's usual experience of time, place or being." During my research, I found many theological and philosophical definitions of transcendence that were neither succinct nor straightforward. I interpret this as an indication of how multidimensional the concept of transcendence can be. The Oxford online dictionary (2018), defines transcendence as "an existence or experience beyond the normal or physical level." John E. Smith (2000) claims that the two most important concepts created by theologians and philosophers for the interpretation of the divine are transcendence and immanence, which are meant to express the relationship between the divine and finite realities. Smith defines transcendence as going beyond a limit or surpassing a boundary, whereas immanence is remaining or existing within the confines of a limit. This delineation becomes essential when one thinks about the person of Jesus Christ, who is considered by Christians to be fully God and fully man. Jesus was able to transcend physical limitations through the miracles he performed, but he also displayed immanence by living within the confines of his humanity daily. To receive a more nuanced understanding of transcendence, I shall explore the perspective of other scholars.

Paul Levesque in *Symbols of Transcendence* unpacks the writings of his predecessor Louis Dupré's work on transcendence. Levesque (1997:1) explores the importance of symbols and their use in the expression of religious understanding. He uses art to explain how aesthetic images are used constantly to express religious experiences; one can think of images found in churches that play this role. Levesque believes that transcendence is essential for religion; it takes on various meanings depending on its context. He also believes that transcendence is made manifest through faith; a belief that aligns with the theories of Professor Svein Christoffersen. He states that

transcendence is a means of connecting humans to the divine (i.e. God) by associating transcendent experiences with experiences of divinity. Christoffersen (2015: 21) defines transcendence as “man’s ability to go beyond the form of existence he has, at a given time in his life, and thus, go beyond his own limits, physically or psychologically.”

He quotes another scholar, Merald Westphal’s definition of transcendence to expand its meaning and show how transcendence allows humans to connect with the divine by asserting, “Self-transcendence is only possible when one encounters the divine revelation of Jesus Christ.” In so doing, he contextualises how one can view the experience of transcendence through Christianity – as something made manifest through an encounter with Jesus. However, Christoffersen recognises the need to locate where transcendence sits in relation to modernity in a postmodern world. In his view, we are in an era where religion and modernity live side by side (which causes us to wonder how people receive such concepts as transcendence and whether they are relegated to airy-fairy mystic religious beliefs or understood as legitimate and useful practices). Christoffersen further questions whether a sensory experience such as one brought about through art in its various forms (literature, drama, music, visual art, and architecture) can cause an individual to experience transcendence. I believe that transcendence can indeed be brought about through the arts, and as my focus is on visual arts, I explore how this could be achieved by using a number of visual objects as examples. The ability to transcend is not limited to Christianity, and through my paper, I expand upon how it is utilised in other sectors of life, such as Zambian culture.

1.2. Transcendence as Revealed Through the Bible

Art is one avenue through which transcendence can take place. In my paper, I study how visual art can be used as a vehicle to carry poignant messages in Christianity while providing an avenue for transcendent experiences to occur. I also believe that cultural practices can bring about transcendence. In Zambia, some people are believed to have the ability to create flying objects that are used to fly through spiritual means. Through this process they attain a state of transcendence by going beyond their physical limitations. If I were to use Christoffersen’s understanding of transcendence, I believe a sensory experience that goes beyond a modern understanding of flight takes place for

the users of such objects. Similarly, when one reads Bible stories where flight is depicted, a form of transcendence takes place as individuals are able to go beyond physical limitations through the power of the Holy Spirit. The main difference between the biblical stories and those within a Zambian context is that the Bible explicitly highlights the power of God through the Holy Spirit as the mechanism to attain flight. Whereas, it is unclear to lay people what powers are used in a Zambian cultural context to achieve flight. In this paper, to explore the concept of transcendence further, I examine several stories that depict moments when people have supernaturally taken flight.

I argue that transcendence through flight provides an opportunity for those that encounter it to experience a sense of belonging and fulfilment. If Levesque states that transcendence is made manifest through faith, I find it fitting to acknowledge the writing of theologian John Piper (1998) who outlines how God gives all Christians varying measures of faith by which Christians live and minister based on Romans 12:3-8 (Holy Bible, 2011). It is this measure of faith that gives a Christian the ability to access the power of God, which in turn, I believe, allows them to experience transcendence. Therefore, if a Christian can access God's power through faith, then the possibility of flight becomes a potential reality for such a Christian. In John 14:12 (Holy Bible, 2011) Jesus speaks of the feats possible for anyone who has faith in him stating, "I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these because I am going to the Father."

The verse above reveals to the reader that Jesus promises great exploits that exceed those he performed, if only the person would put their faith in him. I believe that through such faith, Jesus promises Christians the possibility to reach supernatural levels higher than what he was able to achieve in his brief time on earth. One may ask what the purpose of flight would be. Would there be a greater good involved, or could it happen for one's pleasure without there being a more significant purpose behind it? We are able seek answers from scriptures that explicitly speak about flight showing, how or why some individuals were able to fly in the Bible.

Acts 8:26 – 40 (Holy Bible, 2011) narrates the story of Philip and his encounter with an Ethiopian eunuch to whom he preached the gospel of Jesus Christ and baptised. After

baptising the eunuch Philip disappears/takes flight to another region; the Bible reveals, “³⁹ When they came up out of the water, the spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away. The eunuch never saw him again... ⁴⁰ Philip, however, appeared at Azotus and travelled about, preaching the gospel in all the towns until he reached Caesarea.”

Weissenrieder (2014) describes Philip as “an object led by the Spirit” pointing out that it was through the intervention of the Spirit that Philip met with the Ethiopian eunuch. This goes to show that for transcendence through flight to take place (in Christianity) there must be a willing vessel (object) that the Spirit of God can work through. In most instances where flight has taken place in the Bible, there appears to be a purpose attached to it. For instance, in this particular story, Philip spoke to the eunuch about Jesus, thereafter he baptised and converted him into Christianity. It appears as though Philip was ministering the gospel to various people when the Holy Spirit gave him the power to fly in order to expedite this mission across a broader region. In 1 Kings 18:12 (Holy Bible, 2011), we meet Elijah (the prophet of the Lord) who is engaged in conversation with Obadiah (an Israelite palace administrator). Elijah asks Obadiah to announce his presence to King Ahab, who had been on a manhunt for Elijah. However, Obadiah in fear protests to Elijah by narrating how he (Elijah) was prone to be ‘carried away’ by the Spirit of the Lord [based on the scripture in Acts, I understand this to mean that Elijah could fly]. For that reason, Obadiah was afraid to report Elijah’s whereabouts to the king. He fears that he might lose his life if Elijah takes flight and is not found.

In this curious story, we get a glimpse of how the Spirit of God does not limit flight to moments when individuals are preaching the gospel. Rather, this form of transcendence seems to be made manifest depending on an individual’s connection with the Spirit of God. I believe transcendence through flight is accessible to those who believe in Jesus because Ephesians 2:18 (Holy Bible, 2011) states “For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit...” This verse shows that Christians have access to the Spirit of God, who gives them access to God’s power. This power in turn can give them access to flight as revealed through the story of Philip and Elijah above. Reading the Bible, one does not see a template instructing believers on how to access flight. However, it is comforting to know that Christians should not consider this practice off-limits. The Bible records flight as a possible form of transcendence through the

power of the Holy Spirit. This is significant for me because in Zambia, when people speak about flight through spiritual means, they refer to it as witchcraft. In turn, this has made it difficult to imagine or speak about flight through an alternative framework.

Flight has also been depicted through Christian artwork. The first place I recall actively engaging with Christian art was in our family Bible, where most of the illustrations I saw of flight were focused on Jesus' ascension into heaven. In Luke 24:51 (Holy Bible, 2011), we are told of Jesus' dramatic exit from earth into heaven after his resurrection. Andreas H. Hunnaeus depicts this moment in a painting entitled *The Ascension* (Fig. 1).



Fig. 1. Andreas H. Hunnaeus, *Ascension* (no date), oil on canvas, Agerup Church, Denmark. (Published in C.D. Stampley Bible, 1976)

In this painting, Christ appears to be floating on the clouds with an angel on either side of him, while his disciples and other bystanders below look up at him in awe. The image of Christ and the angels appear as white individuals. I take note of their race because, in our family Bible (where this image is from), most, if not all, the individuals depicted are fair-skinned or have seemingly white features: which is very similar to the

depictions I encountered in most of the Catholic churches I visited in Zambia. Later in this paper, I interrogate the importance of having alternative depictions of Christ and biblical characters because I believe the sort of images used to depict Christ or the saints matter.

According to Christoffersen (2015: 195), John of Damascus (in the Byzantine era) believed that “through the icon [a devotional painting of a holy figure], believers moved into dimensions of the holy space and holy time, in living contact with the person or mystery depicted.” In his statement, John highlights his belief in the importance of the icons to connect believers with the supernatural. Through icons (such as the one of Christ above), individuals have the opportunity to connect with the supernatural and envision themselves in a similar state. This makes the possibility of transcendence through flight more tangible for them through visual imagery. I believe this may be the reason why artists saw the need to create icons because they provide opportunities for believers to connect with the supernatural. When one looks at these images that depict flight and see themselves reflected in them, the potential to seek out similar feats such as flight becomes a possibility that they may eventually attain through faith. In the next chapter, I will outline the importance of icons and how artists in Zambia have shifted the depiction of such images by representing them as black people in order to make their readings more relevant and relatable for a Zambian context.

1.3. Transcendence as Revealed Through Zambian Culture

As I explore transcendence through flight using a Zambian cultural lens, I have come across several stories where people are believed to have flown on spiritual objects they designed and operated through mystical powers or “witchcraft” as it is often called. I hope to shed light on flight as a cultural practice in Zambia to demystify what it entails. However, this may prove challenging, as most people are not forthcoming with information on this topic. The secretive nature of this type of flight and its attribution to witchcraft are limiting factors that cause people not to speak freely about it. As a Christian nation, witchcraft in Zambia is labelled as evil, and its practitioners may be ostracised from their communities or imprisoned if they are caught engaging in it. I argue that transcendence is taking place in both instances of flight (through the Spirit of God and through the Zambian spiritual object. This is because as Sager states, a

physiological change occurs in the individual's experience of time and place. Alternatively, to take Smith's definition, the individuals who engage in flight, surpass physical boundaries or limitations by moving from one location to another through supernatural forces. Later in the paper, I argue that transcendence can encompass a psychological change in an individual through visual arts. This argument provides a broader understanding of transcendence through flight.

Anthropologist Katerina Mildnerová (2010: 20) describes the spiritual objects used for flight in Zambia as advanced magical technology used by "progressive" witches to reach remote areas during night attacks. The association of "attacks" that Mildnerová places on these flying objects connotes something malevolent and maintains the sinister association most people make of these objects. For my research, I visited the Lusaka, Ndola, and Livingstone Museums in Zambia. During my visit to the Livingstone and Lusaka Museums, I learnt that most of the flying objects serve multiple purposes. For instance, aside from flight an "aeroplane" can also be used for spiritual protection against one's enemies.

These objects have the power to cause harm to those that may oppose their user, narrated Esther Banda (personal conversation, 2018) the Lusaka Museum's ethnographer. She informed me that for the objects to be safe for display in the museum, a witchfinder had to deactivate them of their powers. In Fig. 2a, the label of one of the "aeroplanes" in the Livingstone museum states that the object was used to cause death through pneumonia by biting into the chest of its victim and depositing poison (this is aside from its ability to fly). Though it may be difficult to authenticate these claims, it is important to consider people's lived experiences. These include people's claims of first-hand encounters with forces they attribute to witchcraft.

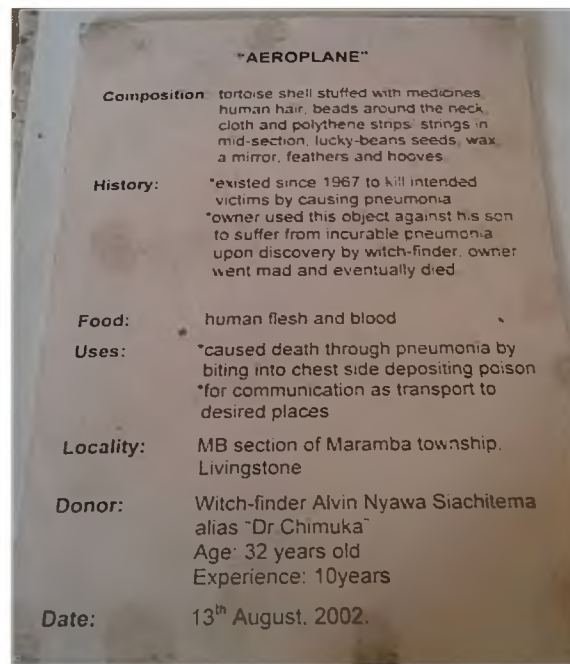


Fig. 2a. Livingstone Museum label of an 'Aeroplane' with its description below. Photo courtesy Aaron S. Mulenga (2018)

Whilst conducting research at the Livingstone Museum, Sitali Mungoni (personal conversation, 2018) who was the ethnographer in charge of collecting a number of witchcraft objects, informed me that he was unaware of how the "aeroplanes" achieve flight. He claims that this is because he had never seen them in use, nor had he sought information from someone who had previously used such objects. In fact, none of the museums I visited were able to tell me how the "aeroplanes" could fly. The museums did not seem interested in discovering the inner workings of these objects but rather they appeared content to have these objects on display with brief descriptions attributed to their make-up and use.

One of the challenges I faced while conducting my research in the museums was a lack of up-to-date information. Some artefacts on display (or in storage at the Livingstone Museum) were not labelled or had insufficient information about the object to piece together what they were used for. This challenge made it difficult to gather sufficient information on the "aeroplanes" I was researching. In turn, it has revealed the need for more data to be collected on the processes involved in creating these objects to the point when they are flown. A challenge may arise in finding an individual willing to share these supposed secrets, but it would be a useful expansion to further understanding flight through transcendence in Zambia.

The objects used for flight (“aeroplanes”) vary in material composition. Having had a closer look at a few of them, I shall describe what I saw. Fig. 2b, (which corresponds with the label in Fig 2a) is located in the Livingstone Museum. It is made of a tortoise shell partly covered in human hair and wax. The object is wrapped with *chitenge*¹ on its side, and a rod mimicking the tortoise’s neck is covered in what appears to be wax and beads. Two seeds sit where eyes would have been, while what looks like a human tooth is fixed on top of where the tortoise’s mouth would be. An oval mirror is placed on its back, and some form of medicine would have been placed inside the object (supposedly to enable it to work). The mirror is believed to “represent the ‘other world’ inhabited by the spirits of the dead, who can peer through and see potential enemies”, according to scholar Shawnya Harris (2015). Harris’s explanation of the mirror was in reference to a spiritual object called an *nkisi nkondi* that has similar properties (and to some degree a similar function) to this “aeroplane”. The *nkisi nkondi* also uses the mirror in a similar way. Further research to uncover the meaning behind the other components on the aeroplane must be conducted.

Fig. 2c is located in the Ndola Museum and it is made from a winnowing tray with snakeskin wrapped around it. It has a small vial on its side (believed to store human blood or fat) and a string of beads attached to it. The blood or fat is thought to be used as fuel, which propels the “aeroplane”. From what I could tell, most of the objects in the witchcraft section of the museums I visited were made from an amalgamation of natural matter, which may be thought to give it its potency.

¹ African print or traditional fabric used in Zambia



Front



Back



Side

Fig. 2b. *Aeroplane* (2002). Mixed material (tortoise shell, human hair, wax, beads, *chitenge*, tooth, and mirror), Livingstone Museum. Photo courtesy of Aaron S. Mulenga (2018)



Fig. 2c. *Aeroplane* (no date). Mixed material (Winnowing basket, beads, vial, snakeskin, leather pouch, pins and wax) Ndola Museum. Photo courtesy of Aaron S. Mulenga (2018)

It is commonly believed in Zambia that for these objects to fly human blood must be used as fuel. The blood is obtained from an individual sacrificed (killed) for this purpose. George Mudenda (personal communication, 2018), director of the Livingstone Museum, confirmed this belief by adding that aside from blood, human fat or bone marrow can also be used to fuel these “aeroplanes”. In Bemba (one of the local languages of Zambia), a name given to one of these objects is *pula mulilo* (which translates to “jump from the fire”). This name is given to a flying object made from a human shin bone retrieved from the fire of a cremated body. Apparently, during combustion, there are times when bone fragments escape the fire; it is such pieces that are used as components for particular flying objects. The vernacular names given to these objects are connected to the elements used to create them (Mudenda, personal communication, 2018).

In Zambia, witchcraft objects are categorised under four main headings, namely; offensive, defensive, communication (the category flying objects fall under) and divination objects (see Fig. 3, with brief explanations of each category). It was much easier to obtain information on the broader topic of witchcraft than it was for a specific area such as flight as it is not something that many have written about within a Zambian context.

Offensive	Defensive
Offensive witchcraft projects provocation of the often innocent victims for selfish motives by the practitioner. The victim is targeted to suffer injustice, even death because of jealousy, envy and pure intolerance by the witch.	In protecting oneself from harmful intrusions, people would then engage in defensive witchcraft. Defensive witchcraft would be considered appropriate for purposes of protecting oneself from perceived danger and calamity.
Divination	Communication
Because witchcraft is viewed as a negative force people often try to find out the causes of bad events. Divination is then employed in the quest to interpret the bad or negative happenings. Divination would help the offended to settle the scores with the offender.	It is also believed that practitioners of witchcraft have their communication systems, employing 'sophisticated' gadgets and mediums that could not be detected even by modern sensors. The communication is said to happen over time and space, even some equivalent of cosmological space where the practitioners are believed to communicate with the dead.

Fig. 3. Lusaka Museum description chart of witchcraft categories. Photo courtesy of Aaron S. Mulenga (2018)

In Zambia there are so many stories of witchcraft that it becomes challenging to sift the truth from a lie. Journalist Charles Chisala (2018) in the *Zambia Daily Mail* newspaper narrates the story of a 75-year-old woman who was on a mission to murder a witchfinder, when something went wrong mid-flight and she fell to the ground off the Puku horn (“aeroplane”) that she and her accomplices were flying. She was taken to the Ndola Central hospital and admitted for a fractured hip after her fall. Once released from the hospital, she was taken into police custody and charged for admitting to the practice of witchcraft. Such stories are common in the country and may add to the stigma attached to people who are accused of being witches. Most of these stories are unfortunately connected with murder or the intention to murder, such as this one. In 2018 thanks to a UNESCO grant of \$340, 000 given to the University of Zambia to study intangible cultural heritage, a course was introduced for students to study and learn about witchcraft (*Lusaka Times*: 2018).

A social media frenzy erupted as people tried to make sense of why a course should be created to study witchcraft. The course, however, is directed at studying all intangible culture, of which witchcraft is simply one component. I believe studies of this nature could help to demystify what witchcraft is. Hopefully, through avenues like academia, new ways of interacting with such subject matter can be created. This may, in turn, shed light on why people choose to engage in certain practices such as flight, and allow for studies to be conducted, not from a place of fear but rather with the aim of learning. I would argue that due to a number of cultural practices being labelled as evil or taboo, there has been a lack of engagement with these practices, making it difficult to learn how they are engaged with. Through my work I desire to investigate possible parallels or overlaps that may exist between flight within a Zambian cultural context and that of a Christian context to discover how flight can function as a metaphor to represent transcendence.

During my research, I was left questioning the labels used for flying objects and other artefacts found in the witchcraft section of the Zambian museums. I wondered whether the individuals who use(d) these objects would have labelled their practice as witchcraft and if not what it means to use such labels on these objects. On a trip to Kasama (a town in the Northern Province of Zambia), my uncle and I were engaged in conversation with one of the chiefs in the region. My uncle began to ask him about the

“witchcraft objects” used in flight, to which the chief retorted “do you mean the objects used in natural science?” This response showed that not everyone is comfortable with the “witchcraft” label. The chief’s deliberate use of the word “natural science” instead of “witchcraft” shows the desire for an alternative wording that does not have a negative connotation to it when referring to cultural practices shrouded in secrecy. The chief narrated how certain practices could not be discussed with the general public (i.e. an individual such as myself) but only with those initiated into special sects, such as the chieftdom. The chief, however, went on to tell us a story of a flying object that was used by an individual in his village to confirm to us that he had come in contact with flying objects before. I believe it is essential to question who labels such objects as it determines how they are perceived and to some degree interacted with. In advocating for museum labels to change, I am asking for these institutions to become more cognizant of the cultures they obtain artefacts from. If transcendence is defined as going beyond limitations then having museums change the way in which they negatively label certain material culture would in turn be a form of transcendence.

Journalist Heidi Holland in her book *African Magic*, also stresses the importance of contextualising practices and being careful not to dismiss or mislabel what is perceived as foreign or does not fall under a Eurocentric knowledge system. Speaking about the absurdity of the negative labels placed on people’s spiritual beliefs Holland (2001:1) states “Roman Catholics, who think nothing of gaining spiritual strength by symbolically eating the body and drinking the blood of Christ, will be astonished at the African who immunises himself against evil by rubbing lion’s fat into his skin.” Her intention is to challenge the ways we perceive spiritual practices that are different from what is perceived as the norm. In the same way, I believe it is necessary to question labels such as “witchcraft” and the function they play and what connotations such labels carry.

I do believe that the ambivalence attached to flying objects may also stem from their physical make-up and the secrecy attached to their use. This, in turn, contributes to the stigma of witchcraft that surrounds their narrative. I have not as yet come across a story where flight in a Zambian cultural context is framed as something positive; each time such stories emerge they are mixed with scepticism and condemnation for the accused party (such as the story of the 75-year-old woman above). I do not intend on changing

the perception of the objects, but I would like to advocate for a better understanding of what they are and how they are used and what role they play in Zambian culture by providing an avenue for individuals to achieve transcendence through flight.

CHAPTER 2: Christian Representation Through Iconography and the Oppositional Gaze

In this chapter, I aim to explore how the oppositional gaze is used as a tool to shift the representation of Christian iconography for it to become more representative of black people. I shall also interrogate the adverse effects on black people's psyche when only white people are used to represent Christian iconography. Furthermore, I shall explore why the depiction of images used in Christian art should be allowed to shift depending on where in the world they are located. That is to say, the image of Christ and the saints should take on an array of racial representations and not be confined to only being represented as white.

2.1. The Importance of Representation in Christian Iconography

In Christianity, flight has predominantly been represented through Christian iconographic images; an example would be Jesus ascending into heaven (Fig. 1). As a child, I enjoyed art, and one of my earliest reference books was our family Bible, where I saw images of Christ and other characters depicted as white individuals. Another place I encountered similar depictions was during the few times I attended Catholic mass with my cousins. Over time, I noticed that black and brown people were not represented in these images, even in spaces that were meant to be inclusive, such as the church. Philosopher Arthur Gibson (2003) speaks on representation by arguing that "there is a need to find revolutionary ways of depicting God, miracles and the resurrection." Through Christian iconography, individuals have visually represented concepts and ideas relating to the faith. I believe that this is a great tool to exercise a revolutionary depiction of God, such as Gibson suggests; however, most times, Christian icons remain fixed in Eurocentric depictions of Christianity. In Zambia, several Catholic churches maintain a Western representation of Christianity, where Christ and the saints appear white. An example of this can be seen in the altarpiece painted for the Sacred Heart Church in Kitwe, Zambia (Fig. 4).



Fig. 4. Artist Unknown, (no date), mural in oil, Sacred Heart Church, Kitwe, Zambia. Photo courtesy of Aaron S. Mulenga (2019)

Though I find nothing wrong with the depiction of Christ as white, I believe it is necessary for such a depiction to shift depending on its context. I aim at critiquing the “universalised” depiction of Christ as a white man in Christian iconography, be it in the Catholic Church or family Bibles containing illustrations. In so doing, the image of Christ becomes relatable to local people as one of their own. Gibson (2003: 25) questions whether humans have the disposition to recognise pictures of God or perceive metaphoric portraits of God. He further queries whether the impact of the environment and context could serve to influence such recognitions. I believe there is a need to grapple with and consider what images are used to represent prominent figures of Christianity such as Christ or the saints and to consider what these mean for their viewers. Even as Gibson states, it is necessary to consider the context within which such images appear and the meaning they hold.

In his book *The Christ Face in Art*, James Burns (1907: xiii) notes that there exist many efforts to obtain the ideal face of Christ and each artist is influenced by their nationality and tradition. Though this book focuses on European representations of Christ, it serves the purpose of tracing early depictions of him. Burns (1907: xiv) asks “Is the face which we instantly recognise in Art as the face of Christ an actual likeness of the “pale Galilean” who stood before Pilate’s throne, or is it merely a conventional type of feature which gradually formed itself, then became fixed, and has since been imitated?”. If indeed the image we recognise as that of Christ is one that was created and subsequently imitated (which is the premise Burns proposes), then is there any reason why it should not keep evolving in order for it to be more relatable for more people, rather than to have it fixed looking like a white person? That is to say, when in Africa should this image not be able to shift to look like the (black and brown) people in the countries where the image appears?

Tracing the history of Christianity, Burns (1907: xix) outlines that due to persecution from the Roman Empire, early Christians congregated in catacombs and the earliest pictures of Christ in those catacombs were not portraits but symbolic representations. For example, sculptures existed of Christ as the “Good Shepherd”, thereby drawing on his metaphoric characteristics revealed in scripture (Fig 5).



Fig. 5. Artist Unknown, (no date), marble, Lateran Museum, Rome. (Published in *The Christ Face in Art*, 1907)

Burns (1907: 06) claims that only after the Christian faith had established itself and its doctrine did artists start to consider creating an image of Christ that “could be conceived as our Lord’s actual appearance on earth”. Burns looks to the works of the Byzantine era as responsible for setting a precedent of what the image of Christ would look like, pointing out the work in St Apollinaire Nuova in Ravenna (Fig. 6) as an apt example of a mediaeval depiction of the face of Christ. According to Burns, through such imagery, the face of Christ has received an archetypal appearance. Burns goes further by interrogating various regions around Europe, which have iterated this image of Christ². This depiction of Christ did not remain in Europe but found itself exported to Africa through missionary projects. My focus is on the Catholic Church and the imagery they use to represent Christian iconography, specifically in Zambia – the focus of my study.



Fig. 6. Artist Unknown, (no date), Mosaic, St Appollinare, Ravenna. (Published in *The Christ Face in Art*, 1907)

² In each of the images Burns interrogates, Christ appears as a white European man.

It is believed that the earliest recording of missionaries in Zambia was that of the White Fathers in 1891, who were the largest missionary society and amongst the earliest to settle in the country. They stationed themselves amongst the Mambwe people in the Tanganyika-Malawi corridor (Hinfelaar, 2003: 440). This was a period of colonial rule in the country (at the time called Northern Rhodesia). The British South Africa Company (B.S.A.C) gained control over Northern Rhodesia in 1890 through the Lochner Concession. During that time the B.S.A.C only established one school under its administration – the Barotse National School (Carmody, 2002: 777). The missionaries were the ones who set up schools to educate the local people, ensuring that these schools played a role in converting the local population into Catholicism. Carmody (2002: 779) states that “It was these ‘schools’ that became the missionaries’ mode of access to the local population”.

It is important to note that these schools were predominantly used as a way to convert local people into Christianity, but to some degree, they also served as mechanisms of control. Carmody (2002: 780) explains that there were very few schools that trained individuals in an academic sense, which in turn meant that many local people had a very narrow or limited education, adversely affecting their interaction with people outside of their immediate circles as hierarchies based on qualification were already in existence. It is necessary to know the background of missionary education in Zambia because it indicates how the local people were governed even through education. Similarly, such forms of educating the local (majority black) population were also employed in other southern African countries.

It is believed that through the missionaries, Christian art was brought to parts of Africa. Elizabeth Rankin (2003: 85) states that “Christianity brought a range of images to Africa, whether simple Bible illustrations ... or the whole panoply of sacred art in the service of Anglican and Catholic churches...” This statement shows how the Catholic missionaries introduced imagery they thought best represented the Christian faith, including images of Jesus that maintained a Western representation. One can only imagine that due to the power dynamics of the time, it was difficult for the local people to contest the images used to represent Christianity in Africa.

As African countries have received their independence and freedom of expression has become possible (to some degree), one can see artists across Africa contesting structures of power, even images used to represent Christ and Biblical characters. I believe it is necessary that these images continue to shift depending on the location they are found. For instance, when the church has its establishment in various parts of Africa (such as Zambia) there is a need for the image of Christ to appear black, or if the church established in Asia or South America, Christ's depiction must mirror that local population. In so doing, Christ becomes “all things to all people” just as the Apostle Paul states in 1 Corinthians 9:19 – 22 (Holy Bible, 2011); that for him to win souls for Christ, he must assimilate into something that the people can relate to and understand. In the same way, I am advocating for Christ to be represented in a manner relevant for the people engaging with the imagery attributed to him.

19 Though I am free and belong to no one, I have made myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. 20 To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. 21 To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. 22 To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some.

Cultural theorist, Stuart Hall (1997:15) speaks about representation as “an essential part of the process by which meaning is produced and exchanged between members of a culture. It does involve the use of language, signs and images, which stand for or represent things.” In this regard, images used to represent the Christian faith in Zambia must also be in alignment with the people and culture of the country. Not only will the local people better relate with the iconography, but I believe a more profound sense of belonging to the Christian faith can be inculcated through the use of relevant imagery. Going by Hall's definition, being represented in Christian iconography also provides an opportunity for the local people to make better sense and meaning of the images and the messages they carry.

John Mbiti (1975: 46) highlights the importance of using images to represent God as a

means to aid people's understanding of God, he says "[the use of images] does not mean that God is looked on as a human being. These images ... assist the mind to have a working knowledge of God... and make people feel close to God even though he is their Creator." Images also play a part in grounding the concept of God for him not to appear aloof or appearing unrelatable with human beings. The Bible relates that God came in the form of a human being, Jesus Christ, further solidifying just how relatable God should be to humans. In John 10:30, Jesus states that "I and the Father [God] are one". This scripture shows Christ's humanity, as well as his divinity, which may highlight why some people would want an image that can help them better relate to or understand God as Mbiti puts it.

A key case study in my research is the Marian Shrine (Fig. 7), which is a Catholic parish in Lusaka, Zambia, established in 1974. In this parish, in the majority of the images Jesus and the saints are depicted as black people, showing how artists can play a role in challenging a predominant narrative, that is, the depiction of Jesus as a white man. The artists also usher in the opportunity for transcendence to take place through Christian iconography. By this I mean through the images depicted by the artists, the viewer can imagine themselves in a similar state as the subject portrayed, for example, if Jesus is shown flying or walking on water, the viewer can imagine themselves performing similar feats. Consequently, the shift in representation allows black people to visually engage with this form of transcendence and see themselves depicted in an environment they have not been in for such a long time. Such representations echo Smiths (2000) definition of transcendence, which speaks about "going beyond a limitation or boundary". Furthermore, as Christoffersen (2015: 195) states, "believers move into dimensions of the holy space and holy time" through the use of the icon. Therefore when black people see themselves depicted in these icons, they too have an opportunity to better relate to such imagery and to move into the dimensions of holy space and holy time through the process of transcendence.



Fig. 7. Image of the Marian Shrine, Lusaka, Zambia. Photo courtesy of Aaron S. Mulenga (2018)

My focus in this paper is on images in the parish created by Laurence Yombwe, a Zambian painter who incorporates his cultural background into the work he creates. I have also studied his work not found in the parish but which explores the integration of Christianity and Zambian cultural practices. By incorporating his cultural beliefs in his art, Yombwe visually reinterprets the message of the gospel and its relevance to a Zambian audience. He allows the viewer to see that the shift in the images used to represent Christian iconography is not only about changing skin colour, but also involves the infusion of cultural narratives that resonate with a local Zambian audience. This reinterpretation lets local Zambians engage with Christian iconography in a manner that affords them the opportunity to find a place of belonging and fulfilment in the Christian narrative. It debunks the notion that Christian iconography and the Christian narrative is a reserve for white people (who are constantly depicted in such artworks). Before looking at Yombwe's art, which directly references Christianity, I would like to introduce a curious piece he painted in the Marian Shrine that brilliantly depicts an aspect of Zambian spirituality, called *Prayer of People in Africa before Christianity* (Fig. 8)

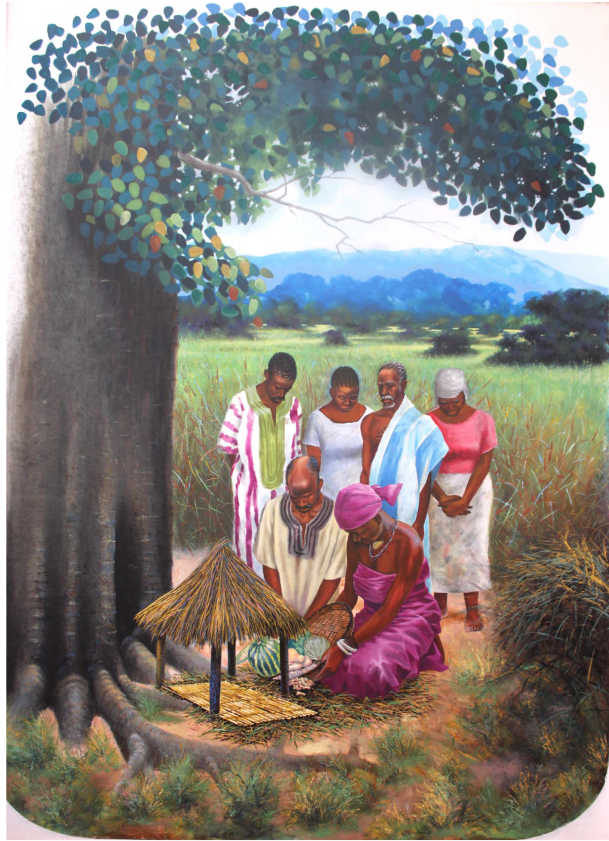


Fig. 8. Laurence Yombwe, *Prayer of People in Africa before Christianity* (2010), mural in oil, Marian Shrine, Lusaka, Zambia. Photo Courtesy of Aaron S. Mulenga, (2018)

In this work, we see a group of people with their heads bowed and eyes closed in a contemplative manner before what appears to be a family shrine under a tree. It may seem strange that this painting exists in the church; however, it is necessary to consider the conversation raised by the artist. Yombwe (personal communication, 2018), narrates that this artwork depicts how people in Zambia would pray and the site of worship they chose. The painting may exist in the church to show the varied forms of spiritual worship present in Zambia. Subtly this painting creates a tenuous connection between the forms of spirituality depicted in the painting and those used to power the “aeroplanes” located in the museums. Both the painting and the aeroplanes express a local form of spirituality. I believe the visual reference created by this work and the fact that it is located in the church, shows the importance of engaging or rather respecting the varied religious beliefs present in the country. As Yombwe says “not all aspects of tradition or culture should be perceived as bad”. I believe through such an artwork, he reminds us not to throw the baby out with the bathwater, even when new religious practices are introduced.

In contrast when one sees similar depictions of Zambian individuals through photographic forms in the Zambian museums, individuals are mostly viewed through an ethnographic Eurocentric lens. In this painting Yombwe depicts the individuals in a way that presents an air of dignity to their practice; the viewer is not positioned as a voyeur of the ceremony but could actually be a participant in the event. As the painting is in a Catholic church, it has the ability to make a statement about what forms of worship are given room for free expression without the need for them to be hidden away for fear of persecution.

Yombwe's choice to display the individuals in what would be considered "traditional African clothing" such as the patterned wrap around the woman on the far right, or the striped blue and white cloth slung across the elderly man's torso, are an indication that for Yombwe spirituality does not need to be depicted in a manner that conforms to a Eurocentric representation. The fact that this piece appears in the Marian Shrine opposite another artwork depicting Christian saints in similar attire also speaks to the way that culture and faith (particularly Christianity) are not mutually exclusive but can exist together. A closer look at the other elements present in the image such as the construction of the shrine made of dried grass and a reed mat where the food is being deposited, give an indication of the various ways that offerings to spiritual entities were conducted. This could be seen in comparison to the way that an offering basket is passed around in a church, and Yombwe could be presenting an alternative way for us to think about the presentation of our offerings within the church.

2.2. Understanding the Christian Icon

According to the scholar Lyudmila Milyayeva (2014:8), the cult of the icon was synonymous with the Byzantine Empire; it only won approval after the years of iconoclasm (8 – 9th century). Iconoclasm is the rejection or destruction of religious images as heretical. The Byzantine style of art originated after the use of icons received doctrinal justification for use in religious ceremonies. The name icon is a transliteration of the Greek word for a likeness or image (Milyayeva, 2014: 10). Iconography and the portrayal of the divine has not always been acceptable, and at one point it was equated with idolatry. Paul Finney (1994:7) argues that those who advocated against the use of images in Christianity (called iconoclasts) believed it to be idol worship and against God's command as outlined in Exodus 20:4 (Holy Bible, 2011), which states that no idols must be made using images from heaven or the earth or the waters. Finney believes the earliest Christians rejected the iconic view of divinity where God would be represented in an anthropomorphic form (human characteristics ascribed to nonhuman things) because they believed it went against God's commandments. This argument may have held its ground in the Catholic Church for some time; however, as the use of icons in the church continues, their meaning and function must also be interrogated.

The view that images should not be used in the church did not last; Finney (1994:186) points to the Callistus Catacombs as being a space where some of the earliest depictions of religious icons were found stating that “images are both ambiguous and fluid; one needs to tread lightly guided by the associative character of the images.” Some believe that the association the images depict should be the focus of worship as opposed to the actual image. Christoffersen (2015: 199) quotes John of Damascus's argument for the use of images during worship by expressing that “it is foolishness to want to depict the Old Testament God; but since this God chose to become man, wholly and fully, it is reasonable to depict God incarnate.” Christoffersen (2015: 199) further clarifies how John justifies the use of imagery by saying:

John's theology expresses the attitude or understanding that on one hand an image is only an image, not to be taken for the primordial image [a reference to

God]³, but on the other hand the image is in no way something banal or less essential, since it is theologically and epistemologically an exceedingly central and faceted phenomenon.

I understand Christoffersen to be highlighting why some individuals would see the need for icons within the Christian Church because for them the icon is embedded with meaning and can carry a message relating to the gospel of Jesus Christ; as long as it is not misunderstood as the actual image of God. In turn, this ties in with Mbiti's statement above, who believes that the use of images can be an aid to help people understand God's nature. As the use of images continues in the Catholic Church, I believe the figures representing Christ or the saints must continuously be interrogated so that they are inclusive of the people to whom the message of the gospel is preached.

Images can also be didactic without the use of words, and for this reason, one can read stories or messages relevant to Christians in an icon. As I have pointed out above, the earliest depictions of Christian art were found in catacombs. As the scholar Andre Grabar (1980:8) states, "these paintings of the catacombs are not meant to represent events – they only suggest them ... the paintings are schematic – that is, they are image-signs, which appeal above all to the intellect and which imply more than they actually show." Grabar points out the story of Jonah as an example of a depiction in the catacombs that has resonance within Christianity (Fig. 9). He shows how Jonah's story could be seen as a parallel to that of Christ, because, just as Jonah spent three days in the whale, before being vomited out, Christ spent three days in the grave before resurrecting. Grabar (1980:9) states that "image-signs, as found in the catacombs, fulfil their purpose successfully only in so far as they are clear; but the concept of clarity is a function of the training of the viewer." This statement shows the need for the viewer to have prior knowledge of these biblical stories or at least an understanding of scripture to read these icons effectively. Through the icon, even people unable to read text can gain access to the messages shared in Christianity. An opportunity for people of different languages to gain access to the essence of the Christian faith also becomes possible by using icons. For this reason, I would argue that the accessibility given by images in the Christian faith is a justifiable reason to keep using icons in Christianity.

³ Brackets inserted



Fig. 9. Artist Unknown, (no date), *The Story of Jonah*, marble, Lateran Museum, Rome. (Published in *Christian Iconography: a Study of its Origins*, 1980)

2.3. The Importance of Looking for Transcendence to Manifest in Christian Iconography

The concept of looking is linked to the concept of representation in Christian iconography; that is to say, if there are going to be iconic images, then these images must be engaged with visually. The depiction of said images will give viewers the necessary cues through which to read them. I surmise that images and objects inherently possess power, which is why, in the past, I felt disillusioned when I saw many Christian icons that did not visually represent black people. Cultural theorist, bell hooks (1996: 247) states that “there is power in looking”, and she analyses how looking can be a political tool. hooks’ text on *The Oppositional Gaze: Black Female Spectators*, examines the concept of looking, as she argues the importance for black women (and black people by extension) to be imaged in a positive light and afforded the right to look in a manner that does not render them powerless, either through omission or by being imaged as subservient.

hooks (1996: 260) states that “Those black women whose identities were constructed in resistance, by practices that opposed the dominant order, were most inclined to develop an oppositional gaze.” For her, some of the practices that are needed to oppose the dominant order come with looking critically, as opposed to accepting everything that one sees as factual or mere entertainment. I believe this form of critical viewership can extend beyond cinema and television (which was the focus of her argument) to images that an individual looks at within the context of art, such as those found within

the Catholic Church. hooks (1996: 261) further elaborates on the role of criticality by asserting, “We do more than just resist. We create alternative texts that are not solely reactions. As critical spectators, black women participate in a broad range of looking relations, contest, resist, revise, interrogate and invent on multiple levels.” hooks is showing that looking critically, must allow for a creation of something new. This form of looking may be within the system one is critically engaging with or even simply in the mind of the individual practising this form of critical looking.

Though hooks’ focus is on the black female gaze, I would argue that both men and women must practise the oppositional gaze because most Christian iconography omits them both. hooks (2003: 247) narrates how she was punished as a child for staring in a way that was read by adults as confrontational or giving a look that was perceived as resistance. For her, looking has always been political, and in a way looking remains political for most black people who find themselves negotiating their presence in places of worship such as the Catholic Church, where images of white Jesus cover their walls.

However, an unfortunate reality is that “many black women [and men] do not ‘see differently’ because their perceptions of reality are so profoundly colonized, shaped by dominant ways of knowing” (hooks, 1996: 261). I believe this “mental colonisation”, therefore, is something that causes black people not to engage critically with Christian iconography, causing them not to see a need for these images to be changed. The realisation that mental colonisation exists, leaves me asking: how can more black people begin to see the need for Christian iconographic images that represent them? And, can the oppositional gaze be taught to black people for them to use it in spaces where they are not represented, but should be?

The benefit of the oppositional gaze is that it has the potential to shift reality. hooks (2003: 248) states that “by courageously looking, we defiantly declare: Not only will I stare. I want my look to change reality.” I believe it is through such defiance that indeed, reality can change. When I take for instance the artwork of Laurence Yombwe in the Marian Shrine, his work utilises the oppositional gaze by shifting the depiction of the icons found in the church so that they better represent the local people. In shifting these representations and through the oppositional gaze transcendence begins to take place because, as Sager (2002) states, “transcendence is a change in a person’s psychological

or physiological state that produces an awareness or sensation of going beyond one's usual experience." Yombwe, through his depictions, allows for the local population to engage in this process of transcendence by being represented in images of the divine. He allows for the possibility of a shift in the psychological state of the local people who look at these images and engage with them. Yombwe also provides an alternative way of seeing and representing Christian iconography.

2.4. The Psychological Effects of Looking at Images of White Divinity

This shift in the images used to represent Christianity reveals how transcendence can take place at a psychological level by giving black people the opportunity to envision themselves in positions of power, such as being represented through images of Jesus and the saints. Psychologists have conducted studies to show that there is a need for black people to be exposed to more Christian iconography that represents them. Simon Howard and Samuel R. Sommers conducted a study to show how exposure to images of white Jesus has a negative impact on the psychological state of black people. From their study they believe that such exposure promotes notions of anti-blackness towards black people, across racial lines.

Howard and Sommers (2017: 508) contend that "White religious iconography may play a role in the maintenance of ideological white supremacy (i.e. the belief that biological and cultural whiteness is superior, whereas biological and cultural blackness is inferior...)." They theorize that "not only do depictions of religious iconography such as Jesus Christ symbolize ideological white supremacy, but this symbolism also reinforces, for black and white people alike, conscious and unconscious associations of whiteness with godliness (e.g., moral and physical superiority) and non-whiteness or blackness with ungodliness (e.g., inhumane, immoral, physically inferior)."

Through their study, they tell of how detrimental the use of white people alone in Christian imagery is on the psyche of black and white people alike. In turn, this reveals the urgent need for such images to be challenged and changed for the benefit of a wider society. In Zambia, while conducting my research at the Marian Shrine, I conversed with a few of the grounds staff. I asked them what they thought of the image of Jesus as a black man in the church. One of the individuals said he believed it was good for

Jesus to be depicted as a black person because it reflected the people of Zambia. However, another adamantly said to me that Jesus was white, and he seemed perplexed that someone would want to change Jesus' appearance. Though my conversation with these individuals was brief, their responses showed me that the representation of Jesus is certainly contentious and there remains a need for this image to be interrogated by a larger majority of people, even in Zambia.

For this reason, I find the study conducted by Howard and Sommers (2017: 509) pertinent to my research because they believe that "if such exposure [to white Christian iconography]⁴ increases ... anti-black implicit attitudes, this potentially could lead to negative effects on black people's overall psychological well-being... correlated with their psychological health and overall life satisfaction." I would go further to state that the lack of representation within the Catholic Church or in Christian iconography would cause black people to fail to transcend in such a setting as they would be robbed from the opportunity of seeing themselves imaged in Christian iconography that engages in spiritual activity. Furthermore, this would negatively impact their ability to go beyond their usual experience of life and possibly impede a psychological shift from taking place because they would not be in places of worship where blackness is attributed to godliness (borrowing the words of Howard and Sommers).

Steve Biko (2004: 63) also spoke about shifting the structure of the church in favour of black people by saying that "many a black church man say that whites are in power within the churches because the churches are modelled on Western lines, which white people know best. In order to be able therefore to change the churches, we have first to gain ascendance over them... then turn that model into one we ... understand, and one that is relevant to us. (sic)"

Biko highlights how having a structure that does not favour black people works to their disadvantage. Similarly, if all the art within the church only represents white people, this too works against the psyche of black people and it is a structure that must be changed to better reflect black people and their presence within Christianity. Howard and Sommers (2017: 509), acknowledge that there may be many reasons why black

⁴ Brackets inserted

individuals may internalise anti-black attitudes. However, they do acknowledge that religion, in particular, its iconography, has a part to play stating that “perhaps white Jesus ... would unconsciously exaggerate a white supremacist ideology in black individuals.” They argue that this constant presence of white Jesus would, in turn, cause black people to have a preference for whiteness over blackness.

Howard and Sommers present data to back up their claims, which in turn puts numbers and statistics to an intangible issue that serves to justify their findings. Such analysis is helpful for me to be able to explain why one of the grounds staff at the Marian Shrine would be so adamant in stating that Jesus is white and must only appear as such. Their findings also help me understand why some people (blacks included) would not want to change the image of Jesus or the saints and would not want to see images appearing as black people. This resistance to change Christian iconography maybe as a result of people’s internalised anti-black attitude and their belief that whiteness is better. For this reason, I view Yombwe’s artwork as corrective for those who do not even realise that they need a shift in perspective. Yombwe’s work allows us to ask, “What do you think of Jesus as a black man?”

2.5. Christian Iconography in the Art of Laurence Yombwe

In the Marian Shrine opposite *Prayer of People in Africa before Christianity*, another painting, called *African Saints in Heaven* (Fig. 6), displays how a shift in the depiction of Jesus and the saints can positively affect the representation of Zambian cultural beliefs in Christianity. This painting also depicts how transcendence through flight can materialise, as it shows Jesus ascending into heaven. The proximity that these two pieces have with one another suggests the need to recognise and not dismiss the varying forms of spiritual worship that exist in the country. I believe these images ask the viewer to consider how cohesion and integration can take place during worship and how to view culture and faith as integrated rather than opposing entities.



Fig. 10. Laurence Yombwe, *African Saints in Heaven* (2010), mural in oil, Marian Shrine, Lusaka, Zambia. Photo Courtesy Aaron S. Mulenga(2018)



St. C. Lwanga



St. Augustine



St. Catherine

Close up view of the names of the saints depicted in the artwork.

In *African Saints in Heaven*, one can see Mary (the mother of Jesus) and a handful of saints surrounding Jesus in adoration as he ascends further into heaven. A look at the names of the saints suggests that some of them are Zambian, such as St C. Lwanga, while other the other saints depicted are from the Christian canon, such as St Augustine. Each of the saints is dressed in robes and positioned in adoration of Jesus. Saint Catherine plays a trumpet, while Saint Lwanga plays a traditional Zambian drum, similar to those that would have been used in traditional ceremonies. Yombwe

deliberately paints some of the saints as black, and others white because although he is choosing to shift the representation of Christian art; he appears to leave room for the representation of white individuals in his work. This may show the need for an ongoing dialogue between white and black people on how they appear within Christian iconography in Zambia (and the broader church community). His choice to depict white people as saints in this image may also show how the Catholic Church in Zambia has both white and black people in it. Jesus can be seen ascending into the clouds with his gaze upwards in a manner that is reminiscent of earlier Christian iconographic works such as Rembrandt's "*Ascension*" (Fig. 11).



Fig. 11. Rembrandt, *The Ascension of Christ* (1636). Oil on Canvas, 93 x 69 cm, Alte Pinakothek: Munich. (Reproduction from <http://www.artway.eu/content.php?id=2354&lang=en&action=show>. Accessed 27/06/2019)

Through this work, Yombwe begins to employ aspects of the oppositional gaze by taking a pre-existing image and reinterpreting it in a manner that shifts the reading of the narrative through representation. Yombwe (personal conversation, 2018) states that he is not trying to rewrite history by depicting Jesus as a black man but rather, to view it through a different lens. Going by hooks' argument, I would say that Yombwe's

“looking” has allowed him to “change reality” because, through his art, he affirms that the image of Jesus and the saints can change to mirror a broader demographic of people and cultures in Christian iconography found in the Catholic Church. A closer look at Jesus’ appearance shows him split in the middle, where one side appears black, and the other is white.



Fig. 12. Laurence Yombwe, Close up of *African Saints in Heaven* (2010), mural in oil, Marian Shrine, Lusaka, Zambia. Photo Courtesy Aaron S. Mulenga(2018)

N.B. This image depicts Christ split in the middle, appearing as a black man on one side and a white man on the other.

The artist presents a tension that exists with shifting the representation of Jesus through this split image of Christ. Yombwe narrated to me how during the conceptualisation of this work, some people were in opposition to him displaying Christ as a black man; they wanted him depicted as a white person. The fact that these individuals were not

able to look critically at the image of Jesus and allow for it to shift shows how they lack the oppositional gaze and require to see Christ through a new perspective. The split displayed in Yombwe's figure reveals the tension that exists not only by physically changing the image of Christ but the split figure could also represent the challenge of integrating cultural values within the Catholic Church.

Journalist Heidi Holland narrates the story of Father Milingo, a controversial Zambian archbishop who was famed for having healing powers in the early '80s. Milingo "immediately began Africanising the liturgy, introducing drums during services and forming a choir dressed in traditional Zambian costume to accompany him on confirmation tours in the archdiocese" (Holland, 2001: 119). This was seen as bizarre at the time because people did not understand why Milingo was using what would be considered cultural elements during worship and for the nuns' attire. He was pushing against established dogma to create something new and inclusive of parts of the Zambian culture that it appeared strange to those who first saw it. Likewise, Yombwe pushed against existing imagery to depict Christ in a manner that would cause people to question what they were looking at. For some viewers, this depiction has brought discomfort while others felt affirmation in the fact that Christian iconography could be made relatable for them by having images that looked like them in the church.

African Saints in Heaven (Fig. 10) begins to explore the notion of transcendence through flight by depicted Jesus in a state of flying as he ascends into heaven after his resurrection. For the congregant looking at this image, transcendence becomes possible when they can see themselves mirrored in the image before them. If we take Sager's definition of transcendence as a change in a person's psychological state, it is possible to imagine that the moment a person's psychological state shifts through the image they see; they would be able to imagine themselves attaining similar feats. Reverting to Jesus' words in John 14: 12 (Holy Bible, 2011); "I tell you the truth, anyone who believes in me will do the same works I have done, and even greater works, because I am going to the Father.", it is not farfetched for Christians (even in Zambia) to image themselves experiencing flight through transcendence. The challenge of attaining flight may arise when one considers what mechanisms a person who believes in the words of Jesus would have to employ to make flight a possibility.

Art historian Graeme Sullivan (1951:15) speaks about visual arts as a site for cultural production, stating that “seeing has always been central to the sensory-based traditions of visual arts.” This is important especially in the work of an artist such as Laurence Yombwe because through his artwork a connection to the Zambian culture is brought into the church, which has predominantly displayed Eurocentric depictions of the Christian faith. Furthermore, Yombwe has created a unique artistic style that draws from Bemba⁵ cultural practices. In *The Last Supper* (Fig. 13), Yombwe presents Jesus and his disciples as figures clad in garments made of shapes and patterns which have rich symbolic meaning originating from the Bemba *Mbusa*⁶ ceremony. The teachings of the *mbusa* are meant to remain a secret, but in recent years, several Zambians who have undergone the ceremony (such as Yombwe) have begun speaking openly about some of the secrets shared within this ceremonial practice.

Fig. 13. Laurence Yombwe, *Last Supper* (2010), oil on canvas, Artist Collection, Lusaka, Zambia. Photo Courtesy Aaron S. Mulenga(2018)

Yombwe’s *Last Supper* draws its reference from earlier imagery, such as Leonardo da Vinci’s *The Last Supper* (Fig. 13). Scholar Alicja Zelazko (2018) speaks about Da Vinci’s portrayal stating, “It depicts the dramatic scene described in several closely connected moments in the Gospels, including Matthew 26:21-28 (Holy Bible, 2011), in which Jesus declares that one of the Apostles will betray him.” Da Vinci, innovatively chose the moment when Jesus announced his betrayal, to capture the reaction of the disciples. Yombwe’s piece, however, takes a more meditative and

⁵ Yombwe is part of the Bemba tribe of Zambia.

⁶ A marriage initiation ceremony predominantly practiced by the Bemba people of Zambia.

sombre portrayal as the artist focuses on the moment Jesus blesses the meal he is about to share with his disciples, moments before he announces his betrayal.

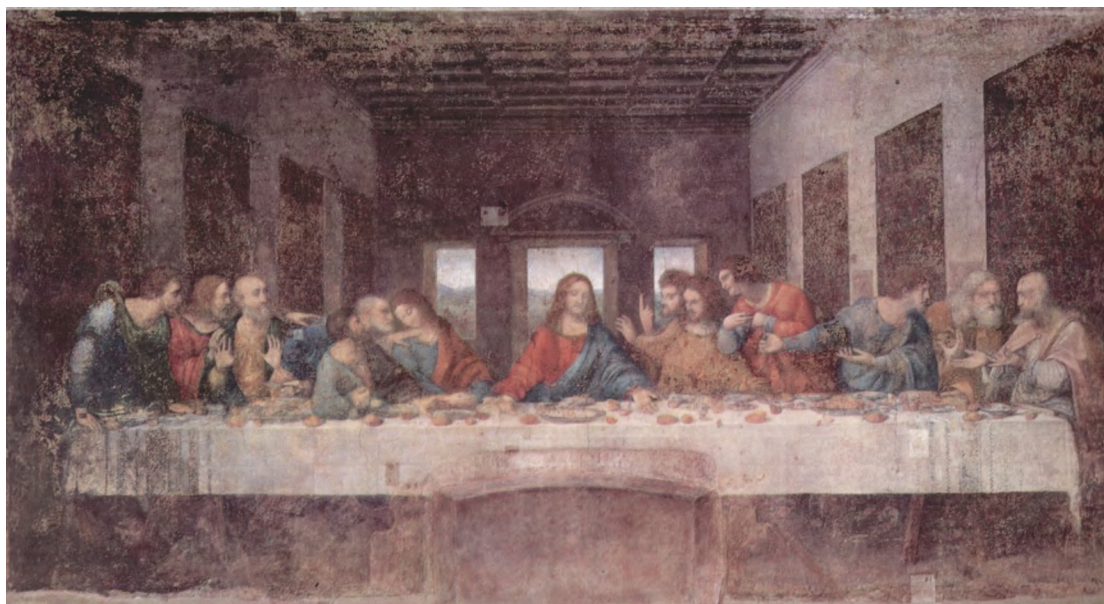


Fig. 14. Leonardo Da Vinci, *The Last Supper*, (1495/97), Fresco, 88 x 46 m, Convent of Santa Maria delle Grazie, Milan. (Reproduced from Wikiart: <https://www.wikiart.org/en/leonardo-da-vinci/the-last-supper-1495> Accessed: 17/07/2019)

In *Last Supper*, Yombwe's depiction of Zambian customs and traditions shows that there is room for a reinterpretation of Christian art, which draws on a variety of cultural symbols and meanings. It is my opinion that this form of artistic representation is a manifestation of transcendence that allows Zambian people to connect with Christian iconography in a new way that lets them see aspects of their culture reflected. Matilde Battistini (2002: 6), states that "symbols are an integral part of the artwork's structure; if we cannot decode them, we cannot comprehend the story that the images tell and the message they want to convey." The use of symbolism is especially important for some of Yombwe's work because each symbol holds a meaning that aids in the reading of the work.

For instance, in *Last Supper*, Yombwe revealed to me that each of these symbols derives from motifs used during the *Mbusa* ceremony. Yombwe also explained during one of his exhibition openings that "most of my works are themed around the ceremony's imagery. These are secret emblems with hidden meanings about life and are used as teaching aids during marriage and coming of age (for girls) ... with the aim

of moulding young men and women into responsible citizens” (Tembo, 1995). Though he did not explain how the symbols function within the ceremony, Yombwe described what the symbols are meant to represent. The triangular shapes represent a woman’s menstrual cycle, while the dots symbolise seeds. The ‘U’ or ‘V’ shaped symbol represents unity, while the straight lines symbolise a reed mat. Having an understanding of the marriage ceremony or *Mbusa*, gives the viewer better accessibility when interpreting Yombwe’s piece, which employs this symbolism. The symbols open up another layer of meaning beyond the recognition of its Christian representation. The use of symbols allows Yombwe the flexibility to utilise cultural knowledge as a way to ‘Africanise’ Christian art and open more avenues for transcendence to take place through his art.

This use of symbols and reinterpretation of art created by Yombwe, gives a framework for other artists who are interested in reshaping the representation of Christian art. He shows how seamlessly ideas can integrate when combining culture and faith. I believe it is through such integration that artists can begin to play their part in addressing some of the more pertinent issues affecting black people’s psyche by providing images, that represent them and their diverse cultures within the Christian faith. In so doing, artists tap into effective strategies such as the oppositional gaze. Yombwe successfully uses elements of inculturation to fuse Zambian culture with Christian symbolism. In the next chapter, I interrogate how inculturation is an effective tool to open spaces for individuals to experience aspects of transcendence in Christian iconographic representations.

CHAPTER 3: The Role of Inculturation in Christian Iconography

In this chapter, I aim to discuss how individuals realise transcendence through the concept of inculturation, and how the church (particularly the Marian Shrine) uses it as a tool to incorporate Zambian beliefs, with the aim of providing a space of belonging and fulfilment for the Zambian people within the church. Inculturation is a broad topic that touches on a variety of aspects of the Catholic Church, but for this paper, I shall focus my discussion on the visual images created by Laurence Yombwe found in the Marian Shrine and what role they play to make Christian iconography more relatable to the Zambian public. I shall also introduce my work and explain how I factor in aspects of inculturation so that I can effectively draw from concepts within Christianity and Zambian culture.

3.1 What is inculturation, and what role does it play in the reinterpretation of Christian iconography?

In 1940, Celso Costantini created the theory of inculturation, proposing that the church should encourage Christianity to flourish within the local culture (notably, its artistic expression) rather than imposing European culture when spreading the gospel (Bridger, 2012: 18). In this way, inculturation allows for local Christians to express their faith while also holding onto aspects of their culture and the fundamental truths of the gospel of Jesus. Dr Martin Ott has written a book addressing the concept of inculturation called *African Theology in Images*. He uses the following theological definition of inculturation by A. Quack:

Inculturation can be defined as the dynamic relationship between Christian faith and culture. It refers to the insertion and adjustment of Christian life within a given culture. It is a process of critical reciprocal effort resulting in the mutual adaptation of Christian life to the culture encountered by it. Inculturation in the Church is the integration of the Christian experience of a local church into the culture of their people in such a way that the experience is not merely expressed by the elements of the culture but actually becomes the force that stimulates and enlivens the culture, gives it direction and renews it. Thus, a new unity and

community rises within a given culture, which at the same time is enriching for the universal church. (Ott, 2007: 25)

Dr George Nche et al. (2016: 2) define inculturation as “a process whereby cultural values can be transformed through their exposure to the Christian message and the insertion of Christianity into indigenous cultures. Specifically, it refers to a movement for the *Africanisation* or indigenisation of Christianity in Africa.” What stands out for me is the intention for inculturation to be viewed as a reciprocal effort between the local culture and the church, resulting in a mutual adaptation of the Christian life for its believers and converts. Also, the realisation that the Christian faith must be *Africanised* for it to be relevant on the continent, as opposed to importing entirely foreign cultures and beliefs to African people and their cultures. Though this is the intention, it is not always seen this way, hence the introduction of Christianity to various regions of the continent has brought conflict as cultures and belief systems have clashed. Christian missionaries have been encouraged to adapt the Christian faith to the new cultures they encounter for it to become more acceptable and relevant in the new environments in which it exists.

During the Second Vatican Council, held in 1962, a strong case was made for the cultural adaptation of Christianity in Africa, declaring that “the church is not tied exclusively or indissolubly to any race or nation, to any one particular way of life, or to any customary practices, ancient or modern” (Nche et al, 2016: 1). This declaration aimed to free the expression of Christianity in the various regions of the world that it exists because many individuals on the continent of Africa expressed a sense of being bound by foreign practices, even after converting to the Christian faith. This tension is expressed in the words of an Igbo man from Eastern Nigeria as quoted by Nche et al. (2016: 1):

Does being a Christian mean that I cannot take the Ozo title? That I cannot bury my dead in the traditional way? Why should I change my name that arose out of my matrix and which has meaning and relevance in that matrix for a foreign name which [my] people find difficult to pronounce? ... Why does the liturgy of the church bypass the liturgy of traditional religions that have always mediated transcendence to our people?

Inculturation is believed to be the bridge that connects culture and faith, so that they are not viewed as disparate entities but rather through a “critical reciprocal effort” an individual (such as the example above, experiencing ambivalence towards Christianity) should be able to practise both in tranquillity. However, it is clear to see the tension experienced by this individual who echoes the sentiments of others in a similar position. I believe this is the challenge Christianity will forever face. It will have to constantly adapt to new cultures, while still holding on to the truth in the gospel of Jesus. There is a need to find a way to listen to legitimate cries made by people struggling to make sense of where they fit into the Christian faith, without their being told to simply adjust, but rather to take into consideration how best their views can be met.

Even with the optimistic aims of inculturation, clashes continue to exist between Christianity and cultural beliefs, but it is also evident that as a concept inculturation serves the purpose of creating potentially positive avenues for people from varied cultures to freely express themselves within Christianity. In Zambia, the artist Laurence Yombwe has worked with the concept of inculturation to visually merge his cultural beliefs and Christian faith within the artwork he produced for the Marian Shrine, such as *African Saints in Heaven* (Fig. 10). Through his artwork, Yombwe shares the message of the gospel while altering the figure of Christ and the saints to fit into a representation that is relatable for a Zambian audience.

“It was not easy to arrive at these images, some of our people are not used to seeing different images of Christ”, Yombwe narrates (personal conversation, 2018). “I did a lot of meditation, and I think I was led by some Spirit” Yombwe says, in reference to the Holy Spirit. His artistic process involved a fair amount of meditation, spending at least two weeks contemplating what he would create and the meaning behind each piece, before laying a brushstroke onto the church walls. According to Yombwe, one of the challenges he faced when creating the artwork in the Marian Shrine was opposition from certain members of the committee set up to oversee the commissioned works. The head of the committee, who happened to be Zambian seemed to have a problem with Jesus being depicted as a black person. Yombwe however, felt strongly that the image of Christ should match the environment that he was operating in, which in this case was Zambia. He asked the head of the committee a question that set him

straight. “How does your father look in comparison to you? Is his appearance foreign or does he look like you?” With this question, Yombwe was highlighting the need for the image of Christ to be as relatable as the image of one’s father.

In shifting this image used to depict Jesus from a white man to a black man, Yombwe begins to employ concepts of transcendence which seek to bring about “a change in a person’s physiological or psychological state engendering an awareness of going beyond one’s usual experience of time, place or being” (Sager, 2012). Local Zambians have an avenue through which transcendence can take place, because Yombwe makes the image of Christ more relatable by depicting him as black. The artist also allows for local people to psychologically engage with the image of Christ through cultural references he depicts around the image of Jesus, such as the traditional drums (Fig. 10), or through the *Mbusa* symbols (Fig. 13). Levesque (1997) states that transcendence is essential for religion to be made manifest, so Yombwe’s choice to shift the image of Christ, further shows the extent to which he intends to make transcendence manifest for the local Zambians within the Catholic Church engaging with this form of Christian iconography.

One may ask why there seems to be a strong desire by some individuals (even those from an African context, such as the committee member who oversaw Yombwe’s commission), to maintain the imagery of a white Jesus? I believe this may be as a result of the mental colonisation hooks (1996) refers to in her text: because people are unwilling (or unable) to engage critically with images or question the validity of what they are looking at. Furthermore, as Howard and Sommers (2017) state, regarding the image of white Jesus; it “reinforces, for black and white people alike, conscious and unconscious associations of whiteness with godliness ... and non-whiteness or blackness with ungodliness ...” Therefore, by this argument, it would make sense that on a subconscious level, some individuals would argue for the maintenance of white Jesus, as they have been conditioned to believe it is closer to godliness. For this reason, I believe more artwork that pushes against the status quo in conservative spaces like Zambia is necessary for more black people to be able to associate blackness with godliness, just as they have done with whiteness.

Though Yombwe was given some artistic freedom on how he could represent the artwork in the Marian Shrine his case reveals the challenges that come with inculturation and how it is not easily accepted, because, for the most part, it pushes against the boundaries of what is perceived as the norm. Inculturation has been employed as a tool in various parts of Africa, such as in Nigeria. Art historian, Nicholas Bridger in his book *Africanizing Christian Art*, writes about how inculturation was used as a tool to set up the Oye-Ekiti Workshop; that was active between 1947 and 1954 in Nigeria. The workshop produced Yoruba-Christian art, fusing traditional Yoruba expressive culture with Christian iconography. Bridger (2012: 5) states that

The Oye-Ekiti workshop envisioned a new hybrid art form as a replacement for the highly Romanticized nineteenth-century European Christian visual expression used by European missionaries. In European colonial settings, a blond, blue-eyed Christ could be (mis)- interpreted as a partner in the imperial power system.

This innovative style of fusing Christian artwork with Nigerian culture allowed local artists to express themselves in ways that drew from a long history of traditional Nigerian knowledge and art practice. This new artwork provided an opportunity for local Nigerians to relate to the artwork they saw from a personal level while aiming to make Christianity appear less foreign to them. As Bridger points out (2012: 12) “Christianity does not belong to a single people, place, race or culture but it has relied on an expansion that has involved, the serial, generational and vernacular penetration of different cultures.” I am inclined to agree that Christianity is not a faith that can be claimed by one group of people. Though its principles can be agreed upon and the fundamental tenets of the faith can be considered unchanging, how Christianity is presented is something that can and should be altered to communicate better the message of the gospel with those it is preached to.

The Roman Catholic Church was believed to have become the first religious body to operate at a global scale between 1400AD to 1800AD. However, for the most part, missionaries did not recognise their targeted populations as complete cultures. In general, nearly all mission-related churches required new converts to renounce almost all contact with traditional systems of worship and related practices, including their arts

(Bridger, 2012: 13–17). I believe some of the challenges that are experienced currently with inculturation are as a result of early missionaries dictating to new converts that they had to neglect their cultural background for them to become genuine Christians. It was only to the end of the 19th century that the Roman Catholic Church began to take corrective measures to become more culturally aware and inclusive of other cultural groups and people (Bridger, 2012: 17). However, by this time, a significant amount of damage had been done as people internalised a sense of self-deprecation by believing their culture (either in part or as a whole) was something they needed to discard to become Christian. Scholar Anthony Kanu (2012: 243) says it best: “Many Africans see their traditional poetry, including freelancing with songs, dancing, and theatrical renditions, as pagan. When we lose our culture, we lose our identity; we suffer self-alienation because we become less African, and unfortunately never European.”

Kanu (2012: 243) goes on to cite inculturation as a plausible remedy to the conundrum of one’s loss of culture by stating that “to achieve our goal in inculturation, we must liberate ourselves from this negative self-image syndrome.” There are other benefits that inculturation brings to the table, such as the affirmation of people’s indigenous practices as well as their cultural beliefs. Inculturation is believed to have begun the process of decolonisation in the Catholic Church by providing a space for cultural pluralism and opening spaces for more indigenous clergy (Bridger, 2012: 19). Though it may be challenging to accept the nuances that come with inculturation, so far it seems to be the most plausible option for bringing about a lasting integration between faith and culture, even in places like Zambia and Nigeria.

3.2 Decolonisation as Perceived Through Inculturation

Frantz Fanon (1963: 33) describes decolonisation as “...the replacement of a certain ‘species’ of men by another ‘species’ of men.” He further notes that “the restoration of nationhood to the people, commonwealth: ... or the new formulas introduced, decolonization is always a violent phenomenon”. I am inclined to agree with Fanon’s definition based on the amount of opposition that arises the moment a new representation of the Christian faith is brought forward; especially when this representation includes the depiction of black people in it. Looking at the examples above both Yombwe and artists in the Oye-Ekiti workshop speak of the opposition they

endured when shifting the representation of Christian iconography to depict Christ and the saints by using black people, which in a way references the “change in ‘species’ of men” that Fanon speaks of in order for decolonisation to take place.

The Reverend Patrick Kelly, who later became the Bishop of Benin City in 1950, had a vision of setting the foundations of Christianity using the lens of the Nigerian people. He believed that the artists or ministers had a better understanding of local culture; therefore, it would be easier for them to lead new converts “to the higher and purer value of Christian faith morals.” He also believed that the only sure foundation for the faith was for the African people to take ownership of it through the aid of their culture (Bridger 2012: 24). It is necessary to see the significance that culture plays in grounding a people and what role this grounding has in steering the direction that an individual takes. Ott (2007: 28) defines culture based on the Vatican Council as follows:

The word ‘culture’... indicates those factors by which man refines and unfolds his manifold spiritual and bodily qualities... It includes the fact that by improving customs and institutions he renders social life more human both within the family and in the civic community.

The Oxford dictionary (2019) defines culture as “the ideas, customs, and social behaviour of a particular people or society.” I believe that this constant integration of cultural practices and beliefs within the Christian faith is a form of decolonisation that inculturation brings about making room for a different ‘species’ of man⁷ one who is not European, but one who is African, and able to hold their cultural values on the same plane that they hold their Christian beliefs. Through the work in the Oye-Ekiti workshop, one can see how missionaries such as Kelly were able to look to the local people to champion the Christian faith from their cultural perspective, as opposed to using European artwork to share the faith.

In the same vein, through his art Yombwe draws upon the Zambian culture, thereby legitimising the use of Zambian history to share the message of the gospel from the perspective of the Zambian people. I believe this carves out a necessary space of

⁷ In this instance man is being used as a short for “human” encompassing both male and female.

belonging as well as giving Zambian people a sense of pride to be able to express themselves from their vantage point without the need to conform to a Western or European standard of Christianity. In so doing the process of decolonisation begins to take place by visually shifting the depiction of the Christian narrative. This shift in representation makes it possible to dialogue over elements of transcendence, such as flight, from a Zambian perspective by bringing cultural aspects from Zambia into Christian artwork. Hitherto, flight by spiritual means for me has been considered taboo, as I recall conversations that associated flight with witchcraft.

A great deal of Yombwe's artistic expression draws from symbolism found in the Bemba tribe (which he belongs to). *Saints in Heaven* (Fig. 15) is an early sketch he created for "*African Saints in Heaven*" (Fig. 10). In this work, one can see human figures with heads that look like ceremonial pots turned upside down. During this phase of the project, Yombwe was working in his signature style that depicts semi-abstract forms. Though Yombwe opted to portray his final artwork in the church as a more literal depiction, (without the use of the Bemba symbols), he still faced opposition with his choice to represent Christ and a number of the saints as black people. I believe the opposition he faced was as a result of mental colonization on the part of those who refused to accept Yombwe's representation of Christ as a black man. This is because Yombwe was shifting the status quo through inculturation, and the discomfort experienced by some people who saw these artworks caused them to respond in a way that made them question why Jesus and the saints had to be depicted as black people. Yombwe also experienced some artistic restrictions when creating the artwork for the church, as he had to follow a brief. He noted this to be a challenge an artist experiences when working under commission.



Fig. 15. Laurence Yombwe, *Saints in Heaven*, (2010). Sketch for “African Saints in Heaven” artwork. Photo courtesy of Aaron S. Mulenga (2018)

A similar story is told in the work of George Bandele, who was a prolific woodcarver at the Oye-Ekiti workshop. Bandele was commissioned to carve a nativity scene (Fig. 16) in a traditional Yoruba style; however, he felt that he did not have the freedom to completely create the piece in a way that he wanted to. These restrictions, Bridger (2012: 35) record, “reflects the control that the missionaries preferred to exercise over Bandele’s efforts and their inability to provide clear guidelines and priorities for the artist”. Both Bandele and Yombwe could have been frustrated as artists for not being able to fully express themselves in a manner that reflected their skill and inner creativity. However, it appears that they considered these projects as commissions and were able to use the opportunity to present a new form of cultural expression within the Catholic Church by depicting a new form of Christian iconography.



Fig. 16. George Bandele, *Nativity Scene* (1951). Wood carving with paint, dimension variable, collection of Pro Civitate Christiana, Assisi, Italy (Published in *Africanizing Christian Art*, 2012)



Fig. 17. George Osodi, HRH Agbogidi Obi James Ikechukwu Anyasi II, Obi of Udumuje Unor (2016). Photograph (Reproduction from *The Guardian*: <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development-professionals-network/gallery/2016/aug/12/kingdoms-thrones-and-crowns-nigerias-monarchs-pictures-george-osodi> Accessed: 17/07/19)

Bandle's artwork utilises inculturation and also employs aspects of transcendence, similar to Yombwe (as outlined earlier in the paper). Bandle's use of decolonisation and inculturation can be seen as he depicts each member of the nativity scene as a black person. The wise men appear dressed as Nigerian Oba's (Kings) in royal traditional attire: Fig. 17 displays an image of a Nigerian Oba from the Okwunye ruling dynasty. Mary and Joseph have halos above their heads while Mary's cradles Jesus in her arms. Though this artwork re-represents the nativity scene, Father Carroll (one of the initiators of the Oye-Ekiti workshop) perceived that a hostile missionary attitude toward local religion not only prevented full embrace of Yoruba culture but also blocked sincere appreciation of its closely related art forms (Bridger 2012: 53). This resistance may have resulted in the eventual closure of the Oye-Ekiti workshop. Such opposition continues to make embracing new representations of the Christian faith difficult; not only for the missionaries but also for new converts to Christianity.

3.3 A Brief analysis of the process of inculturation

When I consider the definition of inculturation by A. Quack, in particular when he says "Inculturation is a process of critical reciprocal effort resulting in the mutual adaptation of Christian life to the culture encountered by it", I sometimes wonder whether or not there is a genuine reciprocal effort from both sides. It appears to me that a compromise needs to be achieved when Christianity and 'non-Christian' cultures meet. I am left asking whether the level of compromise needed for inculturation to take place dilutes or adulterates one or both forms of expression. It is almost as if through inculturation there is a need for one form of expression to compromise for the other to be expressed; so for instance, if one is using a Nigerian or Zambian cultural lens to experience life, then one is required to water down or let go of certain parts of their culture. Those parts that would not be perceived as good or beneficial for the Christian faith must be abandoned. One may question how one decides what to keep or lose once inculturation takes place. As the Bible is a Christian's roadmap for life, it may be the answer to interrogating what aspects of cultural practice must be retained and which aspects must be discarded.

However, the other side of the coin shows how Christianity also needs to adapt for it to be more palatable in the new spaces that it finds itself. Father Kelly stated that "we

ought not to substitute cheap foreign prints for native culture; we ought to transform it and elevate it by Christianizing it.” (Bridger, 2012). This statement shows that there seems to be amongst missionaries the sense that they are transforming culture and elevating its status the moment it is Christianised. Whether or not that happens, it can be agreed upon that inculturation seeks to mitigate the damage that imposing a foreign culture onto local people produces when introducing Christianity to them.

A Catholic cardinal Malula, from Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo is recorded to have said in discussion “Yesterday, the expatriate missionaries Christianized Africa. Today, the black Africans will Africanize Christianity.” (Ott, 2007: 21). This statement further reveals the tension that is still present when integrating Christianity with African cultures, because there exists a notion that one belief system must take over the other. I find the question posed by Dr Ott to be fitting for the quest for a middle ground where inculturation is concerned. He asks, “How can Christianity be a concrete contextual religion that really touches human life in different cultures and at the same time understands itself as a universal religion?” (Ott, 2007: 22). He believes the concept of inculturation is the best solution to the conundrum as he quotes the words of A. Shorter, who defines inculturation as the ongoing dialogue between faith and culture or cultures (Ott 2007: 26). What makes this definition relevant is the fact that dialogues can be ongoing and have the potential to shift as new ideas are brought to the table, showing that there is room for continuous improvement in both faith and culture.

The chief aim of inculturation is the same as that of Christianity; the conversion of people into the Christian faith, as Kanu (2012: 237) states, “When all is said about inculturation, it must not be forgotten that it is a conscious and conscientious effort to help the people of Africa be converted down to the very roots of their culture. As its prospect, it strives at attaining a confluence between the conversion of mind and the conversion of the way of life, so that African Christians would be able to live their faith in all its depth and be able to give it expression in their own way.”

Can one say the aim of inculturation is a good or a bad thing? Does this highlight an unequal balance between Christianity and culture? I do not know, but what I am certain of is that inculturation was created to help Christians from various cultural groups mitigate the ambivalence they experience when practising their faith side by side with

their culture. So whether or not the process of inculturation is perceived as bad or good is something to be interrogated but what is clear is that it serves to bring people of varied cultures into the Christian faith together with the intention of their understanding Christianity from their cultural perspective.

Introduction to the work of Aaron Samuel Mulenga

3.4 Influence of Zambian Culture in the work of Aaron Samuel Mulenga

The history of the Zambian people cannot be shared without mentioning the array of tribes who have created intricate knowledge systems to allow them to navigate through life. A fitting bridge that connects the Zambian culture with that of Christianity is inculturation, as it provides an opportunity for faith and culture to be blended together in a manner that draws from the rich history of both. It is this sharing of knowledge that has allowed me to create artwork which draws from my Zambian heritage and my Christian faith, while exploring what it means to transcend, particularly through flight. I believe there is a need to constantly interrogate our past and the way in which knowledge is shared, for us to pave a meaningful way for our future. Steve Biko (2004: 8) states that:

One of the most difficult things to do these days is to talk with authority on anything to do with African culture. Somehow Africans are not expected to have any deep understanding of their own culture ... other people have become authorities on African life... perhaps a sincere attempt should be made at emphasising the authentic cultural aspects of the African people by Africans themselves.

I agree with Biko as I believe there is a deep need for more African people to write their unique and individual stories without being clustered into a monolith of what or who “Africa” is. The African continent has such a diverse array of people and cultures in it, which is why I see the need to draw from specific aspects of my Zambian heritage in the work I create. My work *To Know the Future, Know Your Past* (Fig. 18), depicts the need for humans to keep looking back into the past so that we can know the way forward into the future by drawing from knowledge passed down from our ancestors

before us and learning from their actions. The idea of being able to look to our past and future simultaneously has highlighted my need to draw from both Christianity (in particular scriptures from the Bible) and the Bemba culture (the tribe I originate from in Zambia). On the faces of my sculpture, I place my version of body markings, which are reminiscent of body markings I have seen on my mother and other Bemba people. My mother revealed to me that particular marks on the face called *mpoloto* were used as a sign of identity for the Bemba people. In an attempt to stay connected with my cultural heritage, I took similar motifs and placed them in my artwork through the markings on the sculpture's faces.



Fig. 18. Aaron S. Mulenga, *To Know the Future, Know Your Past*, (2018), clay, 60 x 50 x 10 cm. Photo courtesy of A.S. Mulenga, (2018)

My artwork draws sculptural similarities from older motifs and the meanings they hold, such as the representation of the god Janus (Fig. 19). In the ancient Roman pantheon, Janus was believed to be the god of beginnings, transitions, time and duality amongst other things. This becomes relevant for my exploration of transcendence because I aim to discover new ways that the past and the present can meet, where one can see and explain the connection between culture and faith (particularly the Zambian culture with Christianity). The image of duality with two faces appears in several African masks as

well, such as the Lunda and Luvale masquerade spirit called Lweji (Fig. 20), whose mask has two faces. One face represents a female chief believed to have lived centuries ago, while the other represents the people. This mask was created to teach young Lunda people about their history (Felix, 1998: 86), and it is seen during the *mukanda* ceremony in Zambia which takes place when young boys are initiated into manhood. This ability for an object to be imbued with knowledge is what continues to inspire the sculptures I create.



Fig 19

Fig. 19. Artist unknown, *Janus Bust* (no date), marble, Vatican Museum. (Reproduction from Wikipedia. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Janus> Accessed: 15/07/2019)



Fig 20

Fig. 20. M. Jordan, *Lweji Mask* (1991), Photograph print. (Published in *Makishi lya Zambia*, 1998)

I find myself constantly having to expand my thinking when I seek to create artworks that draw from my cultural heritage, such as the meaning behind masks and initiation ceremonies, for example. I accredit this mostly to my upbringing, as I grew up in a Christian home where most of the conversations I had with my parents (the primary knowledge providers in my life during my formative years) were either about faith or school. Though my parents never prohibited me from asking questions about Zambian cultural history or knowledge, it wasn't information they offered beyond cultural etiquette. To add salt to the wound, I attended a private school whose curriculum was

based on the British IGCSE⁸ syllabus. It meant that during the history classes, I would learn more about European history than Zambian history, further limiting my interaction with local and cultural knowledge. Thus, I experienced ambivalence as I tried to reconcile how people have been able to achieve flight in Zambia through spiritual means and in Christianity through the power of the Holy Spirit. My conflicting emotions could be attributed to the stories of witchcraft that were often associated with cultural artefacts such as masks or even aeroplanes used for spiritual flight. I created the artwork *Allegory of Self: Wealth, Power and Strength* (Fig. 21) in an attempt at exploring what transcendence through flight meant for me.



Fig. 21. Aaron S. Mulenga, *Allegory of Self: Wealth, Power and Strength* (2018), Coffee on canvas, 2.8 x 1.7 m. Photo courtesy of A.S. Mulenga, (2018).

In this piece the man has a halo around his head, drawing from Christian iconography as a way of representing someone holy or in this case, it shows someone belonging to the Christian faith. A tortoise shell hovers above the man's outstretched hand. During my research, I learned that each witchcraft device in Zambia has a power source that is usually referred to as *ichishimba* (personal conversation, Chansa Chishimba 2018). A number of the flying objects (and other witchcraft devices) I encountered in the Livingstone Museum, used the tortoise shell as their power source. Fig. 2b, which I

⁸ International General Certificate of Education (IGCSE)

introduced earlier, shows the tortoise shell being used as a key component for an aeroplane, while Fig. 22a, 22b, and 22c, show other witchcraft objects found in the Livingstone Museum that also use the tortoise shell as a key component of their make-up. These objects were not properly documented, which made it challenging to know what they were initially used for or what they were called by their users.



Fig. 22a



Fig. 22b



Fig. 22c

Fig. 22a, 22b, 22c. Witchcraft objects (no date). Mixed materials. Livingstone Museum. Photo courtesy of Aaron S. Mulenga (2018)

In Fig. 21, the tortoise shell used in my artwork represents the concept of power, or more specifically, spiritual power, which aims to echo its use in Zambian spiritual objects (particularly those used in flight). The bull in the image represents wealth, which is twofold as it denotes a monetary value, which is how cattle in Zambia were used in determining an individual's affluence; in a similar vein, this concept could speak about a wealth of knowledge held and transferred through culture and faith from one generation to the next. Just as monetary inheritance can be passed on in a family, the same can happen through the knowledge shared between generations. Finally, the eagle represents the idea of strength. In Zambia, it is the national animal and appears on the country's flag and coat of arms. It is meant to represent freedom and the people's ability to rise above problems (State House, 2019). In my artwork, the eagle echoes

similar sentiments while also referencing transcendence through flight in a literal manner.

3.5 Influence of Christian iconography in the work of Aaron Samuel Mulenga

I chose to work with coffee grounds because of its rich history in the African continent, but also because I could repurpose it as a medium in my art. Being able to see value in something like used coffee grounds, for me, speaks to the importance of not discarding parts of cultural heritage that would otherwise be considered worthless or outdated. Instead, it shows the need to find ways to adapt cultural heritage for it to become relevant in today's context. The origin of coffee is significant because it traces back to Ethiopia, the place where one of the earliest strands of Christianity on the continent is believed to have originated, as early as the 4th century. Professor Jon Abbink (2003: 1) tells of how "the Ethiopian Orthodox Tawahedo Church is deeply rooted in Ethiopian history, social life and ethics. It preceded the formation and development of Christianity in the West with several hundreds of years."

The ability of the Ethiopian church to adapt and embrace Christianity through its social life and ethics, in a manner that does not need to reference Western culture or social depictions made me think of ways that I could draw on my cultural background as the foundation for my artistic depictions. However, the fact that in Ethiopia, Christianity has had a much longer time to be interwoven with the local culture would undoubtedly mean its portrayal through icons would favour the Ethiopian population. The medium of coffee was one way that allowed me to think about Christianity's history within Africa, while also being able to create images that reference how people have been able to transcend through flight in Christianity and Zambia.

My initial motivation for creating artwork that draws from Christian iconography and referencing Zambian culture goes back to my childhood when I would page through our family Bible without seeing anyone who looked like my family members or myself. Through my art, I would like to play a part in shifting the representation of Christian iconography so that it can be more relatable for black people, just as other artists such as Yombwe have been able to do in their work. I believe in so doing; I become a part of those whose oppositional gaze effects change in real life, to quote bell hooks. I also

think such projects begin to contribute to the process of decolonisation because they introduce new figures (specifically, black figures) into a narrative that has not been particularly accommodating towards their plight.

Steve Biko (2004: 60-61) in an address to church leaders in South Africa states that “The Church in modern-day South Africa⁹, has to be looked at in the way that it was introduced in this country.” He goes on to outline how the church has been used in some instances as a place to lambast black people for perpetuating sin in the form of crime. Furthermore, he challenged the church leaders to see the bigger issue at hand, which was, inequality brought about by an oppressive apartheid regime. As a result, crime became one (amongst many) of the products of inequality. I believe the residue of racial inequalities can still be seen even in countries like Zambia that obtained independence in 1964. The racial inequalities may appear to a lesser degree, such as in the way many Catholic churches choose to represent Christ and the saints as predominantly white individuals giving off a subtle underlying message to black people; “you do not belong here”.

I intend to do more with my art than just change the faces of the individuals being represented from white to black. I aim to incorporate cultural motifs relevant to Zambia so that the history they bear can resonate in my artwork. For example, a recurring symbol I have incorporated in my art is found among the Luvale, Luchazi, Chokwe and Mbunda tribes in the Northwestern and Western provinces of Zambia (UNESCO, 2008). The symbol can be seen on masks appearing during the *mukanda* initiation ceremony. The symbol is called *chingelyengelye*; it is a representation of power mostly found on the forehead of some masks such as the Chokwe mask in Fig. 23. I have incorporated this symbol in my work and it can be seen in the bottom right of Fig. 21.

⁹ I would revise this to be read as “Africa”, because I believe Biko’s sentiments resonate within many African countries.



Fig. 23. Artist unknown, Female Pwo Mask (no date), wood and sisal rope, The Met Museum. (Reproduction from The Met: <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/319264> Accessed: 28/07/2019)

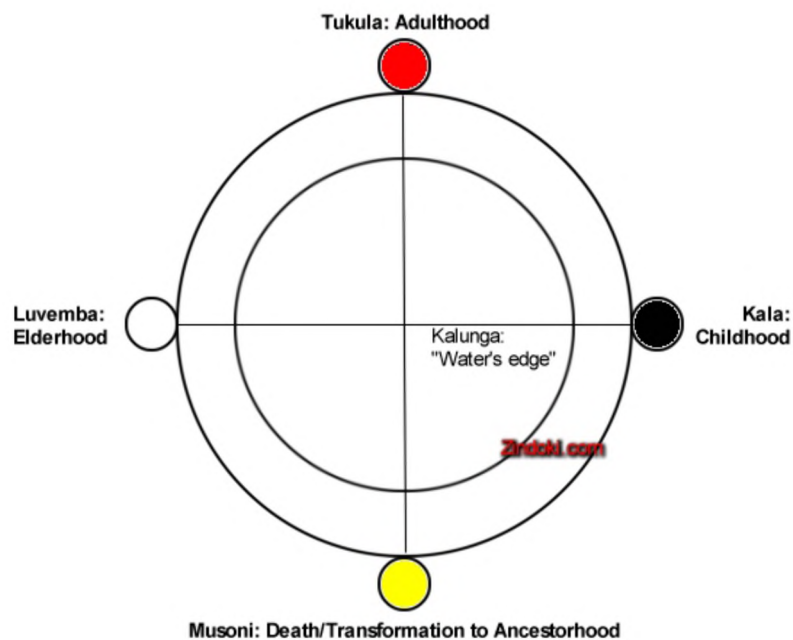


Fig. 24. Dikenga Image, (Reproduction from <http://zindiki.com/getting-started/cosmogramcolor/> Accessed 17/07/2019)

The *chingelyengelye* shares similarities with the *dikenga*¹⁰ (Fig. 24), a symbol used among the Kongo people, which is considered a map of the cosmos that helps an individual navigate through life. It shows man's relationship with nature, society, ancestors and children (World Culture Museum, 2019). Both these symbols speak about an indigenous knowledge system that is used to help an individual navigate life. For me, Christianity has been an anchor that has helped me through my life journey. What stands out is the ingenuity through which a symbol can carry meaning for more than one group of people. For example, the cross can sit comfortably in African motifs such as the *chingelyengelye* or the *dikenga* and similarly in Christianity as a symbol of the Christian faith. I have found that using motifs with relevance across cultures and faith in my art makes it easier to reconcile Zambian culture with Christianity. With this in mind, having more Christian images that reflect various aspects of Zambian culture would make Christianity more accessible to a wider Zambian audience.

Not only does using such cultural motifs as the *chingelyengelye* or *dikenga* make the work I produce layered with meaning relevant for Zambian people, and other cultures that use these symbols; I believe it also makes room for transcendence to occur. In this instance, transcendence is invoked by inserting cultural symbols in works that make refer to or have Christian iconography as a basis for their creation. This is because such artworks provide an opportunity for the viewer (my target being the black viewer or those who connect with these cultural motifs) to imagine themselves in these artworks. The viewers can then see themselves transformed physiologically or psychologically through an awareness or sensation of going beyond their usual experience of time, place or being by inserting themselves in these images, which may contain resonances with their faith or cultural experiences. My intention to target black people whose experiences involve the intersection between faith and culture is deliberate as I believe there is a need for more people to associate blackness with godliness as highlighted by Howard and Sommers.

¹⁰ This symbol is relevant for my art because it speaks about a moment in time when the cross became a shared symbol between the indigenous Kongo religion and Catholic Christianity. It happened after the Kongo King Nzinga, was baptised in 1491 and converted to Christianity, thereby declaring Christianity the official religion of the Kongo people.
https://www.istor.org/stable/181386?seq=1#metadata_info_tab_contents

Part of my artistic practice involves the process of pastiche, whereby I look at the artwork of classical Christian icons and reinterpret these through my artistic style. A project I am currently engaged in involves the 12 disciples of Jesus. I looked at the paintings made by Peter Paul Rubens (Fig. 25) of the disciples and added my artistic style to them in sketches (Fig. 26). I aim to work on these figures in the future by either creating coffee drawings of them or possibly turning them into sculptures. I usually begin my artistic projects by sketching out ideas and framing my concepts in this manner. However, at other times, I could start working on the canvas directly or with a piece of clay and intuitively moving along the surface of the material to allow the art piece to materialise organically. For me, this form of engagement with classical Christian icons is an acknowledgement to say that there exists a rich body of Christian iconography; however, I choose to interact with it differently by highlighting the need for diversity in the subject matter that these works present. That is to say, more black people and their cultures need to appear in Christian iconography, and through my work, I aim to incorporate aspects of Zambian culture into such Christian artworks.

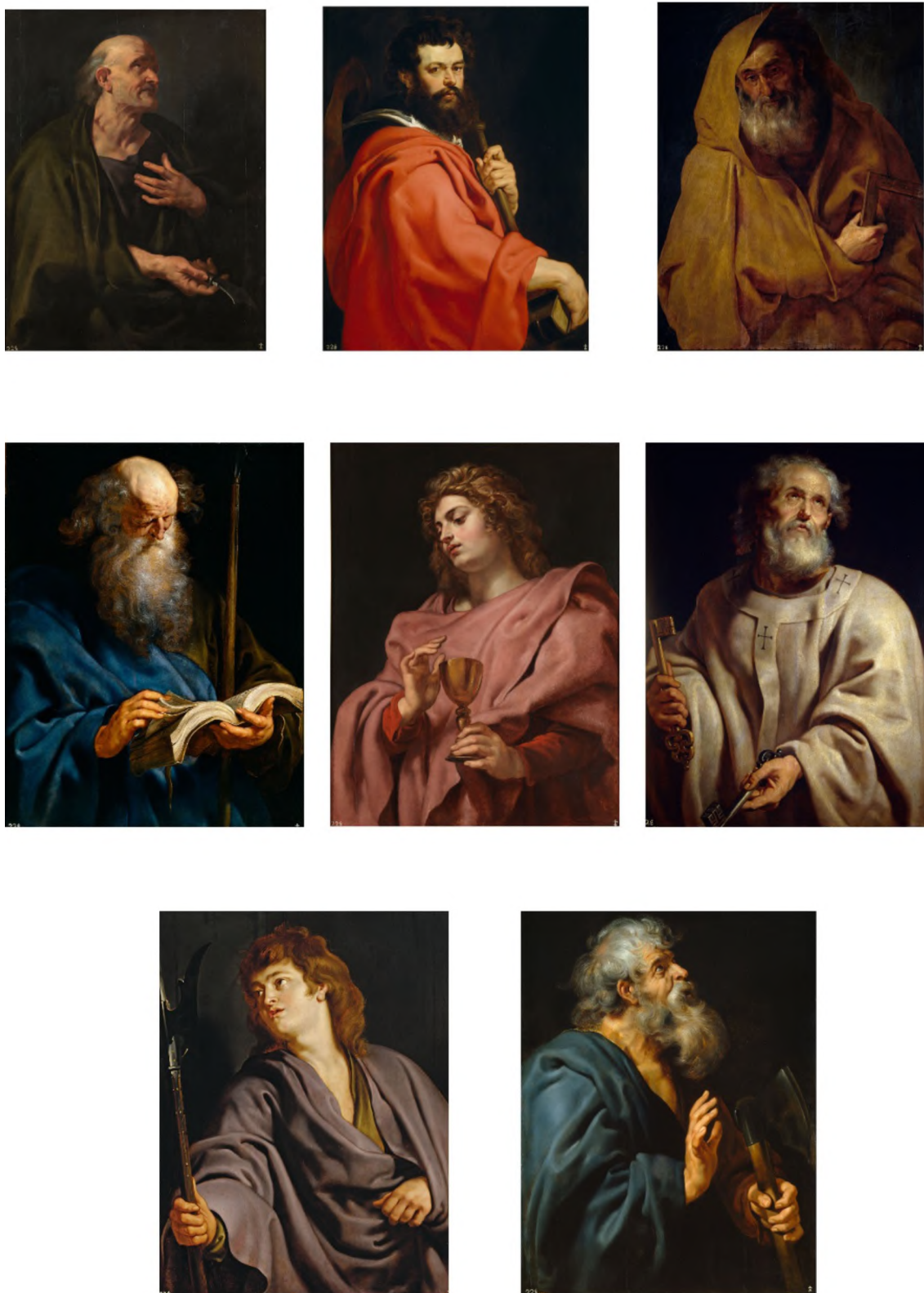


Fig. 25, Peter, Paul Rubens. Collage of eight of Jesus' disciples, (1610-1612) Oil on Canvas, various dimensions, Prado Museum, Madrid. (Reproduction from Prado Museum: <https://www.museodelprado.es/en/the-collection/artist/rubens-peter-paul/099c7adf-d261-4e54-8a3b-7807500ca539> Accessed 28/07/2019)



Fig. 26. Aaron S. Mulenga, Collage of seven of Jesus' disciples, (2018), Pen on Paper, A4 sketchbook. Photo courtesy of Aaron S. Mulenga, (2018).

In most Christian iconography, characters, including angels, are consistently depicted as being white such as the archangel Michael by Guido Reni (Fig. 27). I created *The*

Blessed Truth depicting an angel of the Lord, commissioned to carry God's judgement; it could be read as a contrasting piece to Reni's angel Michael. Part of my artistic process involves reading biblical texts and envisioning how they might appear if I were to see the scene I was reading. This method has been a way for me to reinterpret Christian iconography through my artistic style by visualising what I read in scripture through my cultural lens. My inspiration for *The Blessed Truth* derives from 1Chronicles 21: 15–16¹¹ (Holy Bible, 2011)(Fig. 28).

As I grapple with the notion of flight as a spiritual ability that angels possess I question whether angels in Africa would differ in appearance and ability from angels in the West. One might think it absurd for me to ask; however, considering that most of the depictions of angels I have seen look European (white) I wonder whether the concept of an angel would be perceived differently in an African context, that is, would said angel have wings or even be able to fly in a similar manner? Furthermore, when one considers how Christians are able to fly through the power of the Holy Spirit, are angels involved in this process; would they aid in carrying the individual from one location to another as the aeroplanes in Zambia carry their users? These are some of the unanswered questions I have regarding flight by spiritual means, as I have not yet found anyone who can explain the mechanisms of spiritual flight to me.

¹¹ 1 Chronicles 21: 15–16 ¹⁵“And God sent an angel to destroy Jerusalem. But as the angel was doing so, the LORD saw it and relented concerning the disaster and said to the angel who was destroying the people, “Enough! Withdraw your hand.” The angel of the LORD was then standing at the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite.¹⁶ David looked up and saw the angel of the LORD standing between heaven and earth, with a drawn sword in his hand extended over Jerusalem. Then David and the elders, clothed in sackcloth, fell facedown.”



Fig. 27. Guido Reni, *Archangel Michael Defeating Satan*, (1635) Oil on Canvas, 20 x 29.3 m, Santa Maria Concezione de Cappuccini, Rome, Italy. (Reproduction from wikiart: <https://www.wikiart.org/en/guido-reni/the-archangel-michael-defeating-satan-1635>. Accessed 17/07/2019)



Fig. 28. Aaron S. Mulenga, *The Blessed Truth*, (2018). Coffee, beetroot and hessian on canvas, 2 x 1m. Photo courtesy of A.S. Mulenga. (2018).

3.6 Comparative Study of Yombwe and Mulenga's Work

The focus of my study has been on transcendence, particularly on how flight allows certain people in Zambia to find spaces of belonging and fulfilment within Christianity. When I look at Yombwe's work in the Marian Shrine, it employs inculturation to portray faith through a Zambian cultural lens. In so doing it allows for the process of decolonisation to take place by shifting the depiction of figures used to represent the Christian faith while including cultural motifs relevant to a Zambian audience. In an interview with Yombwe (personal conversation, 2018), he narrates that he created these artworks because there was very little representation of black people in the church. One thing that stands out for me is that his work in the Marian Shrine does not use the *Mbusa* symbols which can be found in other works he created in the same year.

Similarly, when I think about my work, I find that I am free to explore the depiction of Christianity in my way, drawing my motifs from Bemba culture (similar to Yombwe's main source of inspiration). As an artist not working under commission I do not need to follow a particular brief or aesthetic representation; therefore I am free to draw my artistic inspiration from both my cultural background and "traditional" Christian iconography as well as biblical texts. One's depiction of Christian artwork is not confined to a didactic level when it is created outside of the confines of a church commission. This can be seen in Yombwe's *Last Supper* (Fig. 13), which draws heavily on Bemba symbolism and Christian iconography.

I intend to challenge the depiction of images that appear in the Catholic Church in Zambia by proposing that a selection of my works to be installed in a Catholic Church such as the Sacred Heart Church in Kitwe (Fig. 4). Whether or not my art would be accepted for display in such a building is something I will have to discover when I make the proposal for it to be installed there. I believe that as an artwork is displayed in the church it gives the opportunity for those who enter the church to interact with it in a sacred space. This can be seen in Yombwe's work in the Marian Shrine; a believer has more access to this work as the church is open to the public, which may not be the case if an artwork were to be placed in a private collection.

Both Yombwe and I are influenced by aspects of Zambian culture. Whereas Yombwe has had a longer period to hone his artistic visual representation through his paintings, I find myself dabbling in more than one medium. In some instances, this can be a successful way of interacting with a broader audience, as the variety of mediums will speak to a variety of people. However, this could make the work appear incoherent due to the difference in materials I use. To get a better understanding of the mediums I have worked in, I shall list a few. I began my art practice with drawing, then moved to clay, hessian cloth, coffee grains on canvas, plaster and also video work. However, it is this sense of incoherence in materials, which resonates with my exploration of transcendence as it highlights my disjuncture with exploring elements of my culture that have been referred to as evil or taboo (such as flight) while connecting them with the Christian faith I have grown up in. As I seek to bring together seemingly disparate elements in my work that speak to the conflict within myself while exploring transcendence, I hope to find new ways of opening up conversations with other people (particularly black and Zambian people) who may have found themselves struggling in similar ways. Through the concept of inculturation, Yombwe shows how a meaningful bridge can be created to connect the Christian faith with the Zambian culture in visual art, and it is from such spaces that I draw my inspiration as I continue to explore transcendence through flight.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, I have aimed to explore how transcendence through flight has provided an avenue for those that encounter it to experience a sense of belonging and fulfilment. I have made my argument by highlighting how visual art can play a role in bringing individuals to a state of transcendence, through artworks displayed in places of worship such as the Catholic Church. My main focus has been on the Marian Shrine, located in Lusaka, Zambia. I have discovered that, as the figures in Christian artwork, in the Marian Shrine were altered from white to black to represent the local people, some felt more responsive towards the message of the gospel because they felt represented as they could relate to this new image of Christ and the saints. However, others felt that the status quo must be maintained and the image of Christ should continue to appear as a white man.

There are alternative routes that an individual can take to keep pushing against the status quo of representation within Christian iconography. Contemporary art is a viable option which allows for the exploration of a variety of mediums to be used when employing the concept of inculturation. In turn, this brings about a visual depiction of Christianity that draws from both cultural heritage and the wealth of Christian iconography. When black people shift the images used in Christian iconography and insert elements of themselves and their culture into these artworks, I believe a form of transcendence begins to take place. As Rebecca Sager (2002) states, an opportunity arises for an individual engaging such artwork to experience “a change in their physiological or psychological state [by imagining themselves in the scenario set before them through the artwork. This] engenders an awareness or sensation of going beyond their usual experience of time, place or being.” Through the experience of transcendence, a sense of fulfilment and belonging is possible as the individual engages with artworks that represent them.

Furthermore, I discovered that through the interrogation of cultural artefacts such as the flying objects labelled as “aeroplanes” in the Zambian museums, another avenue presents itself to explore the concept of transcendence through flight. Instead of labelling these forms of knowledge as taboo or relegating them to the realm of witchcraft, there remains a need to learn more and understand what function they serve

in contributing to the knowledge of transcendence within a cultural context. The lack of desire to interrogate the meaning or mechanisms behind these spiritual forms of flight by many people in Zambia (particularly those in the museums which keep these “aeroplanes”) beyond labelling them as witchcraft objects poses a roadblock to understanding concepts of transcendence through flight within a cultural context. Inculturation serves as a necessary bridge to open the conversation about transcendence through flight because it draws from experiences in Christianity using the power of the Holy Spirit as well as those revealed within a Zambian cultural context. The use of inculturation in visual arts further allows for the interrogation of transcendence through the portrayal of relatable elements in the artwork. I have been able to demonstrate this by highlighting the need for more studies to be conducted on black artists who reinterpret Christian iconography by creating Christian artworks that include black people in them. My current study focused on Laurence Yombwe and briefly touched on the work of George Bandele to highlight how these artists are shifting the representation of Christian iconography by using black people as the main subjects of their artwork which carries a Christian theme.

My work draws from artists such as these, and through my practice, I intend to join the conversations being had by those who seek a wider representation for black people in Christian iconography. I also intend on finding more ways that culture can adequately be connected with Christianity. Thus far, inculturation has been the tool presented as a viable option, and through my work I have employed this concept to help me grapple with the need that is present in creating artwork that draws from Christianity and Zambian culture.

Furthermore, it is through such shifts in representation that more people will be able to associate blackness with godliness, which is a need that psychologists Howard and Sommers point out. I strongly agree with their findings, as I believe such representations will engender a greater sense of belonging and fulfilment within the Christian faith for black individuals. While I have been able to look at transcendence through flight by highlighting how it appears within Zambian culture and Christianity, the mechanisms of both forms of flight remain a mystery to me. The fact that these methods of flight are documented leaves room for further studies that could open other avenues through which to experiencing transcendence.

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