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# Ishita – Atemporality in Bemba Eco-existentialism

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*This article delineates Bemba eco-existentialism of atemporality. It demonstrates inshita as lived which is deeply entrenched in the quest to become Lesa (God). Bemba atemporality is never conceived in terms of the past or the future. Rather, as the locus of intercourse, a critical site of spiritual interaction, transaction, and exchange aimed at actualizing equilibrium of all vital relationships that make up the cosmos. In this way, inshita is lived and a manifestation of meaningful actions that promote flourishing-becoming of all things.*

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## **Keywords:**

*Inshita; Eco-relationality; Bemba Eco-existentialism; Lesa; Atemporality*

## **Introduction**

The focus of this article is *inshita* - atemporality in Bemba eco-existentialism. The Bemba-speaking people are a dynamic and fluid constellation of ethnicities forming the largest unofficial ethnic group(s) in Zambia<sup>1</sup>. They occupy much of the Northern Province, Muchinga Province, Luapula Province, and are found in large number in the Copperbelt, along with those who are scattered in various provinces within the country and those living in the diaspora. The Bemba are matrilineal in social, political, and spiritual organization.

This article frames the Bemba philosophy of *inshita* within a contemporary global search for planetary well-being and wholeness. Indigenous philosophies that embrace and recognize all life forms as kith and kin are increasingly perceived as offering viable options for rethinking human (a)temporalities. This process of rethinking is connected to what Karen Barad (2007: 3) has argued as the inseparability of “matter and meaning” - “are inextricably fused together and no event, no matter how energetic, can tear them asunder.” Human beings live in a primordially meaning-entrenched and meaning-making cosmos. Every question concerning meaning relates to the universe as becoming an everyday existence, and the disturbing implications for either collective flourishing or doom. The existential humiliation this evokes is an invisible thread through which the Bemba idea of *inshita* is articulated. Despite being aware that the *inshita* is translated uncritically as time, I am reluctant to classify the percept as such.

To avoid the pitfall of losing the meaning of *inshita* in translation, I engage the concept from Catherine Malabou's plasticity. In plasticity, all things, including the past and future; the invisible and visible, are mutually constituted and radically entangled in the mutual eco-relational dialogical process of becoming. Plasticity allows for permeable boundaries between all modes of existence – past as present and future as past (an always atemporality), time of time, complex terrains of multiplicities of reality. The existence which is resistance to easy categorization and taxonomization. To exist and experience in the multiplicities of reality. Malabou argues, to posit the reality "as 'plasticity' amounts to *displacing* the established definition of the future [and the past] as a *moment of time*" (2005: 5-6, italics as found). Malabou's view of reality subverts "ordinary connotation, that of the 'future' as a tense. It is not a matter of examining the relations between past, present, and the conventional sense of the future" (2005: 5-6). Plasticity resists the linear logic of grammatical categorizations of time as tenses of temporality. Plasticity is "an agency of disobedience to every constituted form, a refusal to submit to a model" (Malabou, 2008:3). Indeed, many scholars have underlined that the whole idea of 'Western mathematically and the linear oriented notion of time' distorts and fractures concrete indigenous perceptions and conceptions of (a)temporality<sup>2</sup> and existence (Mbiti, 1966; Masolo, 1994; Adjaye, 1994).

Therefore, to delineate *inshita* as plastic means, first, to appeal to its intrinsic plasticity to transform it into the sort of comprehensive concept that grasps the multiplicity of the whole existence. *Inshita* itself is plastic and should be treated plastically. In other words, the received indigenous concept of *inshita* is inherently plastic which makes it open to receiving a new form. The process of writing is plasticity, a way of giving form or substance to the concept. To write is to give birth, to give existential content to the concept. It is to see it becoming itself and that power to see a plastic concept allows us to see coming plasticity itself. As Malabou argues, "A continual transformation and radical interruption, a process and an explosion, plasticity, and gelignite" (2005: xiii). Nimi Wariboko (2014:173) stresses, "with plasticity, there is no going back, no return to any original form;" but carries "the power of formative destruction of forms," anyone or anything including God that seeks to thwart planetary flourishing. Plasticity is about fashioning purposeful meaning for the planetary flourishing and maintaining the equilibrium of forces between meaning and the lived reality. The inquiry into Bemba atemporality is plasticity, because *inshita* is an in-betweenness of giving and receiving form and meaning.

### ***Inshita Yaba Shani? Inquiry into Atemporality***

*Inshita* is a Bemba construction, experience, and perception of atemporal reality or symbolic (liminal) order. I am contending that the pre-assimilative nature of indigenous philosophical notions enabled them to resist total erasure and surrender as empty receptacles to be uncritically filled with the modern scientific content of reality. Their pre-assimilative power enabled them to reconstruct and reappropriate their own content of reality within the framework of postEnlightenment and postmodernism without losing indigenous essence. The indigenous philosophical systems have risen outside “the universal house of knowledge” as “‘options’ and not ‘alternatives’” (Mignolo, 2011. xxviii). They have resisted positioning themselves as the only palatable systems of knowledge that can adequately promote eco-emancipatory imagination. Rather, they respect various “existing options” among which they have entered “claiming its legitimacy to sit at the table when global futures are being discussed” (Mignolo, 2011: xxviii). Indigenous people are “not looking for alternative modernities but for alternatives to modernity” and scientific secular epistemology. The search to reconstitute indigenous ideas of life and (non)humanisms is not about revivalism, rather reformism to provide life-giving meanings to life worlds. Rauna Kuokkanen (2007: 25) argues “that indigenous philosophies offer a timely [option] paradigm for the entire world, which is increasingly characterized by tremendous human suffering and environmental destruction.” Indigenous philosophies of atemporalities such as *inshita* are inhospitable to such dichotomies as visible and invisible; linear view of past and future; sacred and secular; human and nonhuman forms; and other dichotomies. Rather they are deeply entrenched in the oneness of life in which all (in)visible (non)beings and (non)human forms mutually participate in the ultimate life.

Such conceptions and perceptions of atemporality can best be described with Catherine Malabou’s idea of plasticity. To argue for the plasticity of *inshita* is to plasticize it as a means for resistance against erasure by the prevailing dark side of modernity. *Inshita* has been outspeeding and pre-empting the powers of colonial modernity as a counterbalance to the chaotic modern vagaries which have exorcised African people out of history and fictionalized them into metaphysical and ontological temporalities of fantasies. Plasticity “may be said to comprise a ‘poetics’ in the broad sense of that term - an exploration of the human powers to make (poiesis) a world in which we may poetically [and liminally] dwell” (Kearney, 1998: 9). Plasticity as an approach seeks to transcend “both the empire of reason and the asylum of un-reason” (Kearney, 1998: 9). The Bemba atemporality (*inshita*) is dynamic and fluid; open-ended; clandestinely subversive and yet reflects ongoing adaptations; and always in

motion and involving contingency at the level of form and meaning. It is a distinctive atemporal mode of existence underpinned by the quest to maintain the equilibrium of cosmic forces (humans, nonhumans, the living dead, spirits, God). It calls for living *supersensitively* and *supernaturally* (not in mystical terms but a poetic imagination that affirms that there is more than one way to understand and interpret reality) within the *immediacy of the always*. This is a ritualistic understanding of life and atemporality as the moment of the always, where the past, present, and the future have always primordially collapsed into each other, that only the (in)visible reality exists. The always moment, the space of multiplicity and totality, where (in)visible reality realizes its fully plastic moment and is completely entangled in a totality of experience from nonbeginning to nonending. *Inshita* has to do with every incomplete, every becoming and unbecoming. It is a peripatetic or nomadic spin oscillating existence that is not linear or circular but dynamic, fluid, and filled with truncations of the excursions, detours, reverses, and contradictions. Becoming is not a smooth sailing process but an expedition filled with furious seas, untamed storms, avenging ghosts, and inner contractions. The conscious species, such as humanity, is always in danger of regressing or obliterating its humanness into primal animality (*Iciswanga*).

*Inshita* is an atemporal struggle, where there are no quick claims to victory or defeat. The struggle is the condition and the essence of being. Creation is trapped in an incessant struggle for the realization of eco-relationality – the fullness of life embedded in *Lesá*. For every victory is at once a fresh defeat; every defeat is at once a victory to begin again. As Slavoj Žižek (2012: 20) argues, “– victory and defeat - these are all absent; the ‘truth’ of the struggle emerges only in and through defeat.” The seeming victories and defeats are simply the gaps and ruptures that visibilize the constant struggle. *Inshita* is a site of struggle to become what humanity and nonhumanity have primordially been, namely, *Lesá* (I return to this point below). However, it is important to point out that Bemba people do not perceive struggles for justice and dignity of all-things as following a logical straight line. As David Ngong (2021:36) maintains, the forces that humanity struggles against in the search to become are never “transcended or left behind with each new victory.” The chaos or void is always in collision with order and abundant life. The struggle to become is the condition of being – victories and defeats are mutually constituted forces of becoming. To be a conscious being is nothing other than a step toward the creation of new forms of life.

Here, we can agree with Mbiti, “When Africans reckon time, it is for a concrete and specific purpose, in connection with events but not just for the sake of mathematics.” However, Mbiti’s “time is a composition of events” (1969:

19). In some ways, *inshita* might be thought of as ‘composition of events’, if every human action could be defined as an event. The weakness of Mbiti’s time is that which moves, and people set their minds on events that have already taken place. Mbiti considered that such an understanding differentiates the African concept of time from the linear notion with its unitary accounts of the indefinite past and future, or from antiquity and to futurity. For Mbiti, the indefinite future is virtually absent in the African system of time because events that lie in the future have not taken place. They are abstract, unrealized, and cannot, therefore, constitute ‘African time’. Mbiti might be right about some Africans not thinking in futuristic terms because of their conception of reality and not necessarily a lack of future tenses. However, to argue for time as a movement, or an orientation, either forward or backward is to misunderstand the ritual theoretical world of some African people such as the Bemba people. In the Bemba thought system, *inshita* is a locus of “struggle aimed, ultimately, to produce life, to eliminate the forces that combine to mutilate, disfigure, and destroy life” (Mbembe, 2021:228). Achille Mbembe, (2001:14) underlines, “*time as lived*, not synchronically or diachronically but in its multiplicity and simultaneities, its presence and absences, beyond the lazy categories of permanence and change beloved of so many historians.” He sees time as a combination of several temporalities “made up of discontinuities, reversals, inertias, and swings that overlay one another, interpenetrate one another, and envelop one another: an *entanglement*” (Mbembe, 2001:14). Mbembe is not arguing for the movement of time but for multiplicities of reality that co-exist, intermingle, clash, embrace, contradict, negate, affirm, interpenetrate and possibilise each other either for cosmic flourishing or sometimes for cosmic doom. *Inshita* is a site of cosmic exchange and intercourse in the search for the viable meaning of life that can promote cosmic flourishing. *Inshita* is an atemporal struggle for meaning within the material universe. It is the condition of the possibility of becoming, a foundational character and framework for apprehending the meaning of life. Let me say a few things about the relationship between *inshita* and meaning.

### ***Inshita* and Meaning**

We cannot deal with the Bemba idea of *inshita* without giving attention to meaning. *Inshita* is a framework through which Bemba people perceive the meaning embedded within the fabric of the universe. Humanity lives by making sense of this cosmic meaning. As Karen Armstrong (1994: 457) observes. “Human beings cannot endure emptiness and desolation; they will fill the vacuum by creating a new focus of meaning.” This temporality is an “inescapable entanglement of matters of being, knowing, and doing, of ontology,

epistemology, and ethics, of fact and value, so tangible, so poignant” (Barad, 2007: 3). In the Bemba eco-relational ontology, there is a subtler and more complex relationship among the material and spiritual aspects of life. In the dilemma to make sense of reality, the meaning becomes an unfathomable prison of human existence. The human is entangled with making meaning that makes meaning out of the human. The power to make meaning or sense out of the cosmic abyss of the meaning of existence is the human condition. The human materializes itself and contributes to the cosmic household as the shadow draws meaning and existence from its substance. The power to make meaning is not just the power to (be)come, but the power to act even (un)become, the power to create mastered aspects of reality from the untamed, volatile, and malleable primordial ultimate symbolic order. Because meaning is lived reality, we can assume that the meaning human beings give to their reality is real and significant in themselves. As the ancient Stoic philosopher Epictetus declared, what unsettles the human mind is not events, but rather, the meaning created from them. Meaning is socially constructed and is determined by preserving social conditions. This signifies that the lived meaning is not given but a dynamic product of human interpretations, interactions, and intra-actions with the material symbolic order (reality).

The material world is the theatre of meaning and the site of unfolding social dramas of existence. As Victor Turner (1966: 26) observed among Zambian ethnic groups, meaning is “a union of ecology and intellect that results in the materialization of an idea.” Once the idea materializes, grasped by the human mind, made capable of being thought about, the meaning becomes mastered and embodied in the collective psyche and appropriated in everyday social life. At that stage, the human has become its own idea, or rather the idea has become the human itself. There is no way of transforming societies without reorienting their collective framework or cultural substratum of meaning-making. This also indicates that it is the meaning attached to the reality that enables them to go beyond or to a more-than-human interpretation and understanding of reality. The human exceeds itself through meaning-making. Reality exists as that which is perceived by the human mind. Asserting the reality of the Bemba percepts of *inshita* is not intended to negate European metaphysics of time or pass a judgment as to the metaphysical reality of time (the nature of temporal reality). The lived reality is not a given fact, but a construction. By implication, once human beings define their reality as real, that reality is real, not in the metaphysical or ontological sense, but in the concrete consequences. Such a reality is no longer a mere abstract concept but a lived experience with real consequences in the real-life experience. This also means that ideas are meaningful to the extent they are appropriated in the real world of human

struggle. However, one does not underestimate the power of an idea for human existence is fundamentally a site of struggle for meaning and ideas are prisoners of contradictions “of words loaded with myths and theoretical phantasmata” (Boulaga, 1977: 26). Human beings cannot know the nature of temporal reality, but only human perceptions of the temporal reality.

To construct reality from a symbolic ultimate signifies resistance to the discontinuity of the indigenous views of reality. *Inshita* functions as an atemporal system of meaning-making for the flourishing of society. The idea of time as progress has failed to receive general validation in Zambia, and thus, has negatively impacted the everyday construction of lived reality. James Ferguson (1999: 252) discovered that many Zambians do not think in terms of, and speak of “being ahead or behind, progressing well or too slowly. Instead, people are more likely to speak in terms of nonlinear fluctuations of ‘up’ and ‘down’... or in terms of niches and opportunities that might provide a bit of space here or there.” He underlined that “Such usages evoke less the March of Progress than an up-to-date weather report—good times and bad times come and go, the trick is to keep abreast and make the best of it” (Ferguson, 1999: 252). He believes that “this new style of understanding is driven by a pragmatic logic, the need to come to terms with a social world that can no longer be grasped in terms of the old scripts” (Ferguson, 1999: 252). Ferguson realized that Zambian people felt imprisoned in “the linear teleologies on which virtually all conventional liberal and leftist political programs have rested.” They have proved inadequate to help deal “with the sorts of challenges raised by the contemporary politics of global inequality, on the Copperbelt or elsewhere” (Ferguson, 1999: 252). Naomi Haynes (2020) also observed what she described as “the expansive present” as “a new model of Christian time” in Pentecostal churches in Zambia. She argued that these churches “collapse the space between the biblical past and the present in order to affect a future that is so near as to be almost indistinguishable from today” (Haynes, 2020:63). However, this view of atemporality, which both Ferguson and Haynes are quick to declare as “new”, is fundamentally an African postmodernist resistance to discontinuity of indigenous understandings and perceptions of lived reality. In the case of Pentecostalism especially, they have been described as taking a complete break with their traditional past in their radical conversions; yet, as Haynes observes, they align themselves with biblical ancestors. As David Shank (1994:171) observes of Prophet William Wadé Harris of West Africa, Zambian Pentecostal churches have “simply changed family connections, now based on faith in Christ as known through the Scriptures but utilizing a spirituality of vital participation totally indigenous to [their] African way of being and which [they identify] with the ‘spirit of Pentecost’.”

The importation of secular scientific informed notions of time in Zambia, while it appears to have shifted traditional patterns of life, has not transformed the spiritual soul of many Zambians. Many African urbanites especially have imported cerebral-based views of time grounded on analytical, and linear logical thinking. However, at a deeper sacred-secular level, Zambian notions of time remain deeply entrenched in holistic, nontime, and mystical thought. In other words, they embrace *inshita* embedded in the idea of eco-relational theory of naturehood and its potential for limitless flourishing-becoming. Consequently, the continuous function of the mystical view of atemporality and the continuous struggle to replace it with secular linear logic time constitutes an ongoing traumatic encounter with reality that defines contemporary Zambia. Kwame Bediako (1995:5) classifies the ongoing split or fractured, or traumatic reality as a lingering dilemma “of an Africa uncertain of its identity, poised between the impact of the West and the pull of its indigenous tradition.”

### **Plasticity and Reversibility of God**

The Bemba worldview does not spend its energy trying to explain the *how* and *when* God created the universe. There is no concept of *creatio ex nihilo* (creation from or out of nothing). They take it for granted that *Lesá* is the primordial matter of creation. The view is that originally there was only the fullness of *Lesá* – unmultipliable, unaddable, unsubtractable, and indivisible allreality. The all-thing was *Lesá* - boundless, nontemporal, nondefinable always (*umuyayaya nomuyayaya*) divinity. This beingness was disruptive when *Lesá* performed a Cosmic Ritual of Creation. This ritual of self-subversion enacted a paradox in *Lesá*. The alienation of the divine from the divine. This is not to say that *Lesá* is incomplete, but to underline the ritual paradox in atemporalization and visibilization of the nontemporal, invisible God. This is where the ecoexistential concern or agenda of Bemba people is flourishing-becoming *Lesá*. Becoming *Lesá* requires first becoming fully-conscious and nurturing extraordinary capacities for self-determination and freedom, to act in ways that can enable humanity and the cosmos arrive at the original point (*Lesá*). The Bemba worldview does not function with the idea of the coming God, but rather, the God who is to be arrived at. The ultimate singular-plurality of all-things, the convergence of all existence - (in)visible<sup>3</sup>. In the Bemba mind, *Lesá* is not posed as an unattainable beyond, nor is the relation to God conceived as a split between two sides. *Lesá* is that which humans and creation are becoming. The dynamic and impermanency in *Lesá* is the manifestation of *Lesá* as creation. Creation is *Lesá* becoming *Lesá*. The idea of *inshita* is deeply rooted in Bemba eco-existential wisdom. It is driven from atemporal understanding of reality in which *Lesá* is the predominant dimension. *Lesá* is the blueprint and paradoxical

ontological basis of potentiality and thus of becoming. People never worshipped or built places of worship for God because to worship is to act and live justice in concrete ways as giving life to other vital forces in the cosmos.

*Lesá* is the original chaos and the becoming order. This order is constantly realized through acts of justice and life-giving and constantly undone through selfishness and acts that deny others the opportunity to flourish. The Bemba worldview functions with what could be described as subversive sociopolitical evolution – a symbolic journey of creation that started from *KwaLesá* (*kukabanga*, meaning the ultimate) and is the point of fulfilment of all-things. The whole atemporal reality could be conceived as divine ritual space. In Bemba society, *Lesá* is the Cosmic Ritual which is imitated in various micro-rituals. These ritual “theoretical worlds” of Bemba people is mind-bending and remains incomprehensible to those with inflexible linear logic who constantly regarded African rituals as ‘raw data’ which must be analyzed using European theoretical categories. Robin Horton (1967: 52) warns until Africanist intellectuals grasped that ritual thinking forms African theoretical worlds, many of their so-called new contributions to African studies would remain superficial. And at worst, they are likely to fall into the trap of proposing indigenous thinking as new theories or alternative perspectives. To argue that the cosmos is the ritual manifestation of God is to underline the primordial divine action of creation as the original ritual performance. The ritual is a space of liminality- a *Deus Inversus*.

Through the divine primordial ritual, God attains a self-inversive being, an ambivalent atemporalization characterized by both disorder and confusion, a locus of the paradox of atemporality and space, singular and plural, finiteness and imperfection or a site of the endless search for the equilibrium of the multiplicity of the self. Creation is divine liminality – the self-inversive God. The creative ritual places God in the ambivalent, abrogated, contradictory space that is at once sacred and defiled; infinite and finite; nontemporal and atemporal, good and evil. Here we are not dealing with logical causality, we are haunted by a conceptual ambivalence, dilemma, aporia or paradox managed by plasticity. For the ritualized God is neither God nor non-God, both God and non-God; neither material nor spiritual, both material and spiritual; neither natal (always beginning and never-ending) nor mortal (always dying and never dying), both natal and mortal; neither the creator nor the created, both the creator and the created; neither sacred nor profane, both sacred and profane and so on. What appears to be millions of years in the atemporality is but only the first move in the divine ritual of the dance of creation. Hence, creation appears as disorder or confusion because it is divine inversive order. This is the

enigma of life and the mystery of existence. And yet, creation is neither God nor non-God, rather a *deus inversus* (reverse of God).

There is nothing orderly about the ritual because creation arises out of chaos. God is the original chaos and the original order. Hence, every ritual among the Bemba is a ritual (restoration, healing, birth, death, infertility, etc.) of performance of primordial chaos and creativity. The ritual is a locus of incessant beginning of chaos. It is the re-enactment of the void into order for primordial creative energies to create life over again. Hence, cosmic atemporality is a journey to realize *BuLesa* existence - an intricate eco-relational balance as found in *Lesa*. Metaphorically, *Lesa* is the Bemba conceptual framework for life-giving relationships, of mutuality, awesome-wholeness, flourishing, and fully balanced existence (Kaunda and Kaunda, 2019). The Bemba notion of *Lesa* seeks to strike an intricate balance between femininity and masculinity on the one hand, and humanity and creation on the other. *Lesa* is conceived as complete perfection, possessing the fullness of all models of being, including human (maternal and paternal) and nonhuman (Hinfelaar, 1994). *Lesa* is the ideal, category, concept, and percept from which Bemba people derive meaning and engage the problem of ultimate concern. *Lesa* serves as a *telos* of society. *Lesa* is the point of the fulfilment and singular plural of all things. Therefore, the idea of *inshita* is itself a liminal view of reality. It is deeply rooted in indigenous concepts and percepts of *Lesa* (God) as the fullness of reality. As argued above, *Lesa* is the cosmic blueprint (agenda), and that which all-things are ever (un)becoming. *Inshita* refers to the symbolic process of intentionally subversive evolution from *kumasamba* (everpresent chaos) to becoming all-things-in-all-things - *Lesa* (*kukabanga*). *Inshita* is essentially about existential chaos and the paradox of the divine search for the realization of *Lesa*. This is the vision and destiny of creation. Thus, the search for gender balance, eco-justice, and flourishing of all-things are imperative to defining humans as an action or a praxis in creation.

### **Realization of the Living**

For Bemba people, *inshita* is atemporality for achieving or becoming *Lesa* (Hinfelaar, 1994:7). This is the autonomous capacity to transcend self-interest to promote the common good. *Inshita* is not the limit of existence. It is the condition of possibility to act in concrete and meaningful ways that promote self-transcendence. To transform and be transformed. *Lesa* is thought of as a transcendent being, not in terms of the supernatural, rather in the ultimate capacity to be the only reality that not only gives life but is the life itself. Since life is the mystery of the material world, in Bemba thinking every action that promotes life is an action of self-transcendence. The meaningful (human) action

is the excess of existence over existence. Hence, motherhood is conceived as a social symbol of self-transcendence. Meaningful (human) action is connected to the relationship. God's primordial action is a relational action that sets the pattern for all actions. Meaningful action is an intentional and deliberate socioaction intended to give life to the other or the community. Hence, *inshita* is lived, is an even, an incessant resistance against accepting the current and dominant understanding of reality which is humanly constructed as the best alternative there could be. The human is an eventful praxis. It is realized through relational struggle of becoming. The human is an event. It exists not for itself but as a praxis intended for others. As Katherine McKittrick (2015: 3-4) argues, "Being human is a praxis of humanness that does not dwell on the static empiricism of the unfittest and the downtrodden and situates the most marginalized within the incarcerated colonial categorization of oppression; being human as praxis is... 'the realization of the living'." The human realizes itself or rather becomes truly conscious of itself through relationships and a configuration of actions of abundant life. As Mbembe (2001:6, italics as found) argues, "The African subject does not exist apart from the acts that produce social reality, apart from the process by which those practices are, so to speak, *imbued with meaning*." The eco-relational praxis of life is intended to shape and inform atemporality.

The human itself is a praxis. To be human is the capacity to act meaningfully in creation. Hence, culture is the crystallization of human relationships with the natural world. It is the unification of human thought and perceivable wisdom in nature. It is a dynamic rational and practical wisdom drawn from the knowledge, and the meaning primordially embedded within the natural world. As already underlined, Bemba people's concepts and perceptions of God are deeply entrenched in the way human beings act meaningfully within natural reality. Bemba people affirm their natural entanglement with all things (visible and invisible) and a radical place within and with the natural world of both animate and inanimate and a sense of common origin, mutual interests, and values. The community of life is an eco-relational society of the (in)visible world – symbolically manifested as a physical reality, and a mythical, metaphoric-poetic, and symbolic spiritual reality. God is the ultimate symbol that drives the universe as the reality always becoming. *Inshita* is a cosmo-socio-political event that is a dramatization and passionate action that seeks to promote eco-relationality of all things. It is a synergistic liminal space of undifferentiated reality, an assemblage space where the spiritual and the natural dimensions of the world collapse into each other in the quest for the totality of life. *Inshita* is a site of possibility and locus of creating purposeful meaning that can enable human beings to nurture primordial *supersensitive* and *extraordinary*

capacities to live, act and relate graciously, hospitably, redemptively, and ecologically rooted in the “fact of natality” (Arendt, 1958: 177). The maintenance of the eco-relational equilibrium of forces is regarded as a precondition for the flourishing of all beings.

### **Conclusion**

This article demonstrates that in the Bemba worldview, “the relative material world is not the imperfect nor the compromised. It is the sole realm of reality” (Zuesse, 1991:174). The cosmos carries within itself the burden of infinity. “As a result, one does not seek to separate oneself from the world, but to integrate oneself with it” (Zuesse, 1991: 173). The quest is to become the cosmos by becoming *Lesa*. Hence, as Evan Zuesse (1991: 173) observes, “What some other religions consider ‘secular’ concerns are entirely appropriate spiritual concerns in African religions, and rightly so according to their logic”. *Inshita* does not change; it is meaning and relationships that change. *Inshita* is an event. It is a praxis of transformation and the locus of sociopolitical and religious action. It is site producing life-giving meaning that incessantly strives to transgress or exceed *kumasamba* (chaos). The events of *inshita* are ripples of hope in the expansive reality of contradictions. They bring in the idea of incessant beginning, these new beginnings may not last, but are means for constantly subverting existential chaos. This gives humanity some glimpse of what the fullness of life could look like and inspires the struggle and search for emancipation and social transformation. It is not just God who acts in creation, but rather, creation acts in God as God. To act meaningfully, and what constitutes meaningful human expressions, arises from mutual intra-action of God as human and human as God.

### **Endnotes**

- <sup>1</sup> The Cibemba language is widely spoken not only by eighteen, official, related ethnic groups but generally by most Zambians. There is a distinction between Bemba-speaking people and the official ethnic Bemba people. The official ethnic Bemba people refers to those under the traditional kingship of Chitimukulu.
- <sup>2</sup> I do not want to give the impression that all Africans think the same concerning reality. There are various views of reality.
- <sup>3</sup> This is different from Teilhard de Chardin’s (1959; 1969) omega point which is ‘the cosmic personalizing center of unification and union of humanity with the whole cosmos - the ultimate state of God’.

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