

Published in *Studies in World Christianity* 20.3 (2014): 259–281

DOI: 10.3366/swc.2014.0095#

Edinburgh University Press

<http://www.euppublishing.com/doi/abs/10.3366/swc.2014.0095>

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Homosexuality, Politics and Pentecostal Nationalism in Zambia

ABSTRACT

Building upon debates about the politics of nationalism and sexuality in post-colonial Africa, this article highlights the role of religion in shaping nationalist ideologies that seek to regulate homosexuality. It specifically focuses on Pentecostal Christianity in Zambia, where the constitutional declaration of Zambia as a Christian nation has given rise to a form of ‘Pentecostal nationalism’ in which homosexuality is considered to be a threat to the purity of the nation and is associated with the Devil. The article offers an analysis of recent Zambian public debates about homosexuality, focusing on the ways in which the ‘Christian nation’ argument is deployed, primarily in a discourse of anti-homonationalism, but also by a few recent dissident voices. The latter prevent Zambia, and Christianity, from accruing a monolithic depiction as homophobic. Showing that the Zambian case presents a mobilisation against homosexuality that is profoundly shaped by the local configuration in which Christianity defines national identity – and in which Pentecostal-Christian moral concerns and theo-political imaginations shape public debates and politics – the article nuances arguments that explain African controversies regarding homosexuality in terms of exported American culture wars, proposing an alternative reading of these controversies as emerging from conflicting visions of modernity in Africa.¹

Keywords: homosexuality, Pentecostalism, nationalism, politics, Christianity, public religion, Zambia, Africa

INTRODUCTION

A variety of African countries have recently witnessed heated public and political debates about homosexuality and so-called ‘gay rights’.² In some cases, these controversies have been widely reported in the international media, with Uganda’s Anti-Homosexuality Bill being the most well-known example. The question of why homosexuality has become such a key political issue and

¹ I wish to thank the American Academy of Religion for awarding a 2012–2013 Research Grant to the project ‘Homosexuality, Christianity, and National Identity in Postcolonial Zambia’, which enabled fieldwork in Zambia. Earlier versions of this article were presented as papers at a combined conference of the British and European Associations of the Study of Religions at Liverpool Hope University, 3–6 September 2013, in the panel ‘The Oppositional Pairing of Religion and Homosexuality in Public Debates: Tracing the Controversy in Case-Studies from Europe and Africa’, convened by Anne-Marie Korte; and in a Religious Studies Seminar of the School of Divinity, University of Edinburgh, 13 November 2013, convened by Afe Adogame. I wish to express my thanks to the organisers and participants of both events, as well as to the anonymous reviewer for this journal, for their critical questions and suggestions.

² In the Zambian context (and elsewhere), the shorthand term ‘gay rights’ is the popular way of referring to human rights as they specifically apply to gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex people.

central social concern, and why the general public seem to be so passionate about it, remains open for discussion. Popular perceptions in the Western world about a general homophobia in Africa that is rooted in the continent's traditionalism and backwardness (in contrast to the liberal and modern West) obviously do not suffice as an explanation. Recent scholarship draws attention to the politicisation of homosexuality in Africa (Awondo 2010; Awondo, Geschiere and Reid 2012), highlighting how it is being made into a central public and political concern, and how homophobia is being produced in specific social and political contexts. This process of politicisation follows different trajectories in different countries as it relates to local social, cultural and political factors, as well as to global discourses and politics. In this article, I present a case study of Zambia, examining the interrelationship between religion, nationalism and anti-homosexual politics, with particular reference to Pentecostal Christianity.

The focus on nationalism is inspired by the work of Basile Ndjio (2013), who highlighted the link between nationalist ideologies and sexuality in post-colonial African societies through a case study of Cameroon. The crucial role of nationalism in making and regulating sexuality is not new – see, for example, the work of George Mosse (1985), Carl Stychin (1998) and, more recently, Jasbir Puar (2007). However, as Ndjio observes, references to nationalism are almost absent in studies of sexuality in Africa – an absence that is striking because

in many African countries, sexuality has become a political and social landscape of privileged intervention by the post-colonial state seeking to purify the body of the nation ... It has also become a key site where the myth about African cultural unity is enacted by those who see a complex continent and its diverse populations through the lens of homogeneity and uniformity. In addition, sexuality has been made a cultural tool through which Africanity is expressed, and nativist ideologies are dramatized. Moreover, in this part of the world, sexuality is increasingly appearing as a marker of citizenship, and especially a critical mode either for claiming one's citizen's rights or denying other people their rights as citizens. (Ndjio 2013: 126)

In the context of post-colonial Cameroon, Ndjio distinguishes four 'strategic units' that mark the deployment of sexual politics: 1) the sublimation of procreative and reproductive sexuality; 2) the essentialisation and racialisation of Africans' sexuality; 3) the segregation and symbolic 'othering' of gay and lesbian people; and 4) the criminalisation and demonisation of same-sex practices. The use of these strategies can also be observed in other African countries, although they are manifested in a variety of different forms.

It is striking that Ndjio does not address the link between religion, sexuality and nationalism in his research, since it is widely acknowledged that religion does play a crucial role in the political economy of African societies today (Love 2006) and, historically, it has had a substantial impact on the construction of African nationhood (Hastings 1997). With reference to the contemporary 'African postcolony', Achille Mbembe points out that proliferating religious movements 'constitute visible, if ambiguous, sites where new normative systems, new common languages, and the constitution of new authorities are being negotiated' (Mbembe 2001: 93). The case of Zambia is particularly interesting here because this country, according to its constitution, is 'a Christian nation'. Whilst religion and politics are closely related in Africa generally (Ellis and Ter Haar 2004), Zambia presents us with a unique case, as a particular type of Christianity – Pentecostalism – is being nationalised there, and thus the nation is being Christianised. What particular trajectory of the

politicisation of homosexuality does this bring about? Taking up this question, I will examine how the rhetoric on the Christian nation shapes public and political discourses regarding homosexuality and gay rights in Zambia. This article will thus contribute to the study of the public and political role of (Pentecostal) Christianity in Zambia (Cheyeka 2008; Gifford 1998b) and Africa more broadly (Gifford 1998a; Marshall 2009). It will examine the implications that the emergence of Pentecostalism as a public and political force has had for sexual politics in Zambia. Further, the article contributes to the study of the politics of homosexuality in post-colonial African societies generally (Awondo 2010; Epprecht 2013; Tamale 2013) by providing in-depth insights into some of the religious rationales informing these politics, which are certainly relevant beyond the Zambian context (Gunda 2010; Sadgrove et al. 2012).

The article is based on an analysis of a variety of resources, including newspaper articles, articles on Zambian news websites and the comments posted in response to these articles, and several statements from church organisations. Most of these materials were published in the period 2011–13, when homosexuality became a major issue in Zambian public and political debates, but reference is also made to one earlier controversy on the topic. Together, the materials give an impression of both popular discourses and formal religious and political discourses on homosexuality in Zambia. During June–July 2013, I also conducted interviews with leading figures from the Evangelical Fellowship of Zambia, the Council of Churches in Zambia, and the Zambian Episcopal Conference, as well as with individuals involved in human rights activism in Zambia. Although I do not quote from these interviews in this article, they have informed and enriched the analysis presented here.

ZAMBIA AS A CHRISTIAN NATION

On 29 December 1991, President Frederick J. T. Chiluba, without prior consultation with his own government and in the presence of prominent Pentecostal Christian leaders, declared Zambia to be a Christian nation (Phiri 2003; Gifford 1998b). This declaration needs to be understood against the background of Zambia's post-colonial political history. Under the leadership of Kenneth D. Kaunda, the United National Independence Party (UNIP) ruled the country for a period of twenty-seven years beginning at its independence in 1964, and did so mostly under a system of one-party democracy that promoted a philosophy of 'Zambian humanism'. As historian David Gordon points out, this socialist-oriented philosophy was not purely secular, having spiritual undertones through which it 'promoted itself as a religion, with Kaunda as its chief prophet' and, as such, it 'was brought into competition and sometimes in conflict with the churches' (Gordon 2012: 165, 167). In the 1980s, President Kaunda became associated with Eastern religious traditions – something that was not appreciated by many Zambian Christians, particularly those who had joined the Pentecostal churches that were rapidly growing in that period and who started to associate Kaunda with the Devil and Satanism. In the process towards the first multiparty elections since 1968, held on 31 October 1991, Zambian churches – most enthusiastically the evangelical and Pentecostal churches, comprising the Evangelical Fellowship of Zambia – supported Frederick Chiluba's Movement for Multiparty Democracy (MMD; Phiri 1999: 338–43). The victory of Chiluba, the defeat of UNIP and the subsequent end of Kaunda's presidency were celebrated by born-again Christians, who considered this historical turn to represent a divine intervention in answer to their prayers. When President Chiluba declared Zambia to be a Christian nation after only two months in office, Pentecostals believed that this marked the beginning of a new era – an era of combating the influence of the Devil in the life of the country, and of recommitting the nation to Christ. The

declaration both reflected and generated, in the words of American Pentecostal theologian Amos Yong (2010: 9), a sense of 'Pentecostal nationalism'. Excitement among Pentecostals was further strengthened when the declaration was enshrined in the preamble of the country's constitution a few years later. The Catholic Church and the mainline Protestant churches (the latter organised in the Christian Council of Zambia, now known as the Council of Churches in Zambia) were, and have continued to be, highly critical of the Christian nation declaration for various reasons, not least because of their concerns about the growing public and political influence of Pentecostal churches in Zambia (Hinfelaar 2011).

The constitutional, political and juridical meaning of the Christian nation declaration has never become clear, and is therefore open to different interpretations and subject to on-going debate, especially in the recent (and not yet fully completed) constitutional review process. This debate was intensified during the presidential election campaigns in 2011, when the ruling MMD party insinuated that Zambia's character as a Christian nation would be jeopardised if the main opposition party – the Patriotic Front (PF) – under the leadership of Michael Sata, a Catholic, were to be voted into power. There were rumours that Sata would start promoting homosexuality and gay rights if he was elected as President, and his political opponents used this as an example of how Sata and the PF would not respect Zambia's status as a Christian nation. After Sata won the elections, he addressed these concerns by publicly stating that his government would rule the country according to the biblical Ten Commandments. This is only one recent illustration of the link between public and political controversies about homosexuality and Zambia's status as a Christian nation that will be explored in this article.

As Gordon points out, Chiluba's declaration of Zambia as a Christian nation reflects a distinctly Pentecostal political theology, as it subjects the nation as a whole to the discourse of being 'born again in Christ' and to the project of combating the influence of Satan in the life of the nation. It also fits with a broader pattern of the way in which African Pentecostals pursue a highly political agenda within the public sphere (Gifford 1998a; Marshall 2009; Maxwell 2000). In Zambia, it is not so much that Pentecostal leaders have consistently supported a single party or candidate since the 1991 declaration, but rather that Pentecostalism has 'provided the spiritual discourse appropriate to discussions over the onset of multiparty democracy and a neoliberal economy' (Gordon 2012: 197) and, more recently, also over issues of sexuality and human rights. This is a powerful discourse, not only because Pentecostal beliefs and world-views have been popularised and spread to the wider community – leading to what some scholars have called a Pentecostalisation of popular culture and the public sphere (Parsitau 2008) – but also because of its totalising tendencies, framing questions and debates in a dualist scheme of good versus evil and God versus the Devil.

NATIONALISM AND ANTI-HOMOSEXUAL POLITICS

Homosexuality first became a major public issue in recent Zambian history in 1998, when Francis Yabe Chisambisha publicly came out as gay in a three-page-long interview in the independent newspaper *The Post*, and shortly after established the Lesbian, Gays, Bisexual and Transgender Persons Association (LEGATRA). These actions sparked a 'mammoth scandal', with church leaders, NGO officials, students and professors, government ministers and politicians all voicing their horror of homosexuality (Long, Brown and Cooper 2003: 34–46). President Chiluba initially remained silent on this issue, but then contributed to the debate, stating, 'Homosexuality is the deepest level of depravity. It is unbiblical and abnormal. How do you expect my government to accept something that is abnormal?' (quoted from Long, Brown and Cooper 2003: 40). As a result of this strong

opposition, LEGATRA was prevented from registering as an NGO, and ceased to exist within a year of its launch. Since then, issues of homosexuality have frequently returned as a subject of public and political controversy, especially in recent years. Of particular note here are the campaign, mentioned above, for the presidential elections in 2011, in which the opposition candidate was associated with a pro-homosexuality stance; the February 2012 visit of United Nations General Secretary Ban Ki-moon, who, in a speech to the Zambian parliament, called for the recognition of the human rights of sexual minorities; and the mid-2013 arrests and prosecutions of some same-sex couples and of AIDS and sexual rights activist Paul Kasonkomona.

In public debates on homosexuality in Zambia, reference is often made to the notion of Zambia being a Christian nation. Unsurprisingly, these references are used as arguments against the acceptance of homosexuality and the recognition of 'gay rights' in the vast majority of cases. This does not only apply to arguments made by church leaders and Christian organisations, but also to those made by political leaders and 'ordinary Zambians'. The Christian nation argument is adopted as a basis for opposing the acceptance of homosexuality in Zambia by commentators ranging from the highly respected first republican president Kenneth Kaunda³ to many of the anonymous commenters on popular Zambian news websites, who are always quick to express their opinions. Minister of Justice Wynter Kabimba is quoted as having said that there is 'No room for gays in Zambia', arguing, 'As Zambians, we declared that we are a Christian nation and there is no way we can allow this un-Zambian culture. I want to urge all Zambians to rise and denounce this vice' (Namaiko 2013). Likewise, shortly after Ban Ki-moon's visit, Felix Mutati – a Member of Parliament and the President of the opposition party MMD – pre-emptively ruled out his support for any legislation that the PF Government may table to decriminalise homosexuality, on the grounds that 'Zambia is a Christian nation and Christianity is against homosexuality, so any position to change the status quo [of the current clause in the penal code] will be a tough one' (Mwaanga 2012: 1). Similar comments are frequently posted by a variety of commenters in response to homosexuality-related articles on Zambian news websites.

It thus seems to be considered as self-evident in popular and political discourses in Zambia – and thus to require no explanation – that homosexuality is incompatible with Christianity. At most, a simple reference to the bible is seen to suffice as an explanation, as when prominent Pentecostal leader Bishop Joshua Banda referred in a radio programme to 'biblical scriptures and values' that needed to be respected in a Christian nation.⁴ It tends to be ignored that, from a global perspective, there are strands within Christianity that adopt different interpretations of the bible and that, even in the Zambian context, there are dissident voices (as shown below). Thus, Christianity is depicted as a monolithic faith, which is then used normatively to define the social and political character of Zambia as a Christian nation.

It is important to note here that both the government and the churches are committed to working together to defend the Christian character of Zambia, especially when it comes to the rejection of homosexuality. Thus, Minister of Home Affairs Edgar Lungu, who has been very vocal on the issue, recently called upon churches to provide 'biblical guidance' to the nation in relation to homosexuality (Mvula 2013). Likewise, the previously quoted Minister of Justice, Kabimba, has

³ See 'KK Says No to Homosexuality.' 2010. *Lusaka Times*, 20 October. <http://www.lusakatimes.com/2010/10/20/kk-homosexuality/> (accessed 6 December 2013).

⁴ 'Zambia Can't Respect Gay Rights.' 2012. *Times of Zambia*, 29 February. <http://www.times.co.zm/?p=31> (accessed 25 April 2012).

appealed for the support of churches in fighting the attempts that ‘foreign elements’ have made to ‘impose’ homosexuality on Zambia – something that he represents as being ‘against our Christian values as well as our traditions’.⁵ The representation of homosexuality as a foreign and Western imposition reflects, in the words of Ndjio (2013: 128), ‘the moral economy of alterity which cultivates homogeneity and dramatizes authenticity’, in which ‘homosexuality and other transgressive desires have been denounced as influenced by neocolonialist forces attempting to realienate or reacculturate the minds that African nationalists set free of such burdens and “purified”’. Remarkably, this moral economy is supported by reference to both Christianity and Zambian traditions – something to which I will return later.

Church leaders and church organisations have called upon the government to take a firm stance on homosexuality, and to resist global pressure to recognise gay rights. Churches in the country may have generally abandoned the ‘manifestly political functions’ they possessed, both in the colonial period and during the time of Kaunda’s one-party democracy (Phiri 1999: 347), but clearly that does not mean that they do not play a prominent public role or address political issues. Shortly after Ban Ki-moon’s 2012 visit and the public discussion that followed it, many church leaders spoke out in the media against any recognition of homosexuality in Zambia. Both the Evangelical Fellowship of Zambia (which represents evangelical and Pentecostal churches and organisations in the country) and the Council of Churches in Zambia (representing the mainline Protestant churches) published pastoral statements in which they made it clear that they opposed Ban’s call to recognise the human rights of sexual minorities. EFZ explicitly stated that they ‘applaud the Government of the Republic of Zambia for announcing recently its commitment to maintain the current Penal Code – Chapter 87 of the laws of Zambia’ (Evangelical Fellowship of Zambia 2012). Indeed, EFZ director Revd Mwanza has personally been very vocal on issues relating to homosexuality. It might be that the strong position of EFZ on the matter has also forced CCZ, which tends to be theologically and politically more moderate (Gifford 1998a: 210), to speak out against it as well.⁶

It is important to note that the Catholic Church takes a different stance in this debate. The Zambian Episcopal Conference (ZEC) – the body representing the Catholic bishops – also made an official statement through their spokesperson, Fr Samasumo. This statement, however, did not refer to the legal and political dimension of the issue; it rather stated that whilst homosexual acts are sinful, people with a homosexual orientation are ‘fellow human beings’ who ‘must not be discriminated against’ (Samasumo 2012), which echoes a combination of Catholic moral theology and Catholic social teaching. Together with the church’s rejection of the Christian nation in favour of a secular state (Hinfelaar 2011), this raises the question of whether the Catholic Church does oppose the current criminalisation of same-sex practices in Zambia. In any case, the church appears to be concerned about the harsh and violent language and hate speech used in discussions about homosexuality. Whatever the precise position of the Catholic Church is, the three so-called ‘church mother bodies’ (CCZ, EFZ and ZEC) participated in a consultative meeting on homosexuality and gay rights organised by the government in April 2013. According to the *Times of Zambia*, during this meeting ‘it was resolved that the country will not recognise any practice that abrogates the biblical, cultural and social norms of society’ (Kunda 2013). Thus, Zambia being a Christian nation, Church

⁵ ‘Wynter Seeks God’s Aid over Gays.’ 2013. *Zambia Daily Mail*, 17 April. <http://www.daily-mail.co.zm/uncategorized/4552> (accessed 28 August 2013).

⁶ Another possible factor is the increasing Pentecostalisation of the mainline churches represented in the CCZ – a development that has not yet been documented, but is mentioned in passing by Gordon 2012: 253 n. 3.

and State have joined forces to ensure that a practice presumed to be un-Christian will never be accepted in the country.

It appears that for many people – both religious and political leaders and ordinary Zambians – homosexuality is the litmus paper for the Christian character of the country. As an evangelical minister explained in the popular radio programme ‘Let the people talk’ on Radio Phoenix, ‘If we say Zambia is a Christian nation, then we should stop doing secular things. All our actions should be based on what God is saying. So what does God say about homosexuality; he condemns it, we should condemn it too’ (Kalito 2013: 1)). The framing of homosexuality – and of gay rights and human rights in general, for that matter – as a ‘secular thing’ is significant because of the political function of the particular opposition that is created here (Asad 2003). By framing homosexuality as ‘secular’, while associating heterosexuality with ‘God’s order of creation’, the status of homosexuality becomes something that simply is ‘not debatable’ in Zambia (Mwewa 2012: 6). Moreover, the opposition between Christianity and ‘the secular’ relates to a dualist world-view in which Zambia has the divine mission to defend truly Christian values and principles in ‘a world that has become secular, immoral and humanistic; a world of shifting norms’, and to provide the ‘strong and moral leadership which the world so desperately needs’ (Bupe 2013). Inspired by Pentecostal political theologies, this is even considered to be a cosmic battle, with the Devil using Western leaders and international institutions to impose homosexuality and gay rights on Africa (Van Klinken 2013). Zambia is believed to be a particular target here, precisely because of its Christian character. ‘It won’t be long before serpent the devil declares Zambia a secular nation and impose gay rights on you’, one website commenter prophesies.⁷ The demonisation of homoeroticism and same-sex relations, which is also observed by Ndjio in Cameroon, takes a particular form here: it is informed by an ideology of Pentecostal nationalism with a millennialist undertone. The sexual purity of the Zambian nation has eschatological significance, as it is believed that these are ‘the last days’ before the end of the world, in which the Devil has set his mind on Zambia – precisely because it is a Christian nation in the heart of Africa – with the promotion of homosexuality being the focal point of his satanic attack (Van Klinken 2013: 528–31).

The defence of Zambia’s purity, then, becomes both a nationalist duty and a religious obligation. Those fighting the acceptance of homosexuality in Zambia are presented as ‘warriors in prayer’ and as ‘the new freedom fighters, fighting this immoral genocide ... under Jesus’s authority’ (Mwanawakwitu 2012). Another website commenter, using the name ‘Zambia is a christian nation’, writes that, on the basis of their stance on homosexuality,

the true christians will be separated from the false christians and the patriot Zambians who cherish and protect the Zambian culture and traditions will be separated from the ones that do not love our land, traditions and cultures and do not cherish what our freedom fighters fought for and what our fore fathers stood for. (Zambia is a Christian nation 2012)

These quotes reflect the ‘growing tendency among the local population to equate heterosexuality with patriotism, localism, and Africanness, while homosexuality is generally associated with globalism and strangeness’ (Ndjio 2013: 128). Interestingly, in the Zambian context, Christianity directly serves this nationalisation of African sexuality. Both in popular discourse and in the rhetoric

⁷ Churchical Chants. 2012 (26 February, 11:28). Comment on ‘SDA Says Call by Ban Ki-moon to Respect Gays a Sign that End Is Near.’ *Zambian Watchdog*, 26 February.

of political and religious leaders, Christianity and Zambian culture are deployed as almost interchangeable canons for arguing against homosexuality, which is considered as an un-Christian, un-Zambian and un-African practice. This convergence of Christianity and Zambian and African culture can be observed, for example, in Minister of Justice Kabimba's claim that in a Christian nation, 'there is no way we can allow this un-Zambian culture' (Namaiko 2013).

In addition to a monolithic understanding of the Christian tradition, a selective and static understanding of 'Zambian culture' and 'African culture' (the terms themselves being recent inventions) is also indicated here. This discourse ignores the 'cultures of discretion' surrounding same-sex relationships that existed in various pre-colonial African societies (Epprecht 2012: 522) and rules out the possibility of sociocultural change concerning this issue in modern Zambia. In a highly Pentecostalist context, rejecting homosexuality on the grounds that it is un-African may come as a surprise, as Pentecostalism generally presents a rhetoric of 'breaking with the past' and is not interested in an authentic 'Africanness' (Meyer 2004).

Although there is a deep sense that homosexuality conflicts with Christian and cultural values, there is little explication of the specific values that are at risk, except for vague references to 'family values'. The concern about family values was expressed, for instance, in the pastoral statements published by EFZ and CCZ shortly after Ban Ki-moon's visit:

Zambia being a Christian nation and also having a rich African and traditional heritage, requires a consistent upholding of highest moral and family values. Therefore, we re-affirm our stand for hetero-sexual marriages only, as in the current constitution. Same sex relationships are condemned in the Bible and are widely unacceptable in our society. (Evangelical Fellowship of Zambia 2012)

The Council of Churches wishes to reiterate their stand on family values. Marriage is between male and female and no other way. We believe that homosexual relationships are contrary to the order of nature as designed by God the Creator. We therefore wish to state categorically that we are opposed to [the] legalization of homosexuality and all its forms of derivatives. We believe in strong family units because they are the basis of a strong and orderly community. (Council of Churches in Zambia 2012: 5)

The language of 'family values' is reminiscent of the American evangelical movement, where the defence of traditional family values and the subsequent opposition to homosexuality are central to evangelical Christian identity and politics (Reimer 2011). As an illustration of the transnational dynamics found within contemporary world Christianity, this discourse has also come to shape the discourses on sexuality in African Christian contexts. However, the quotes just above are not simply copied from American evangelicals. Crucially, these two Zambian 'church mother-bodies' present family values not only as biblical, but also as truly African. EFZ suggests that family values are derived from both Christianity and the 'rich African and traditional heritage'. CCZ refers to a divinely ordained 'order of nature' – a typical Christian theological concept, derived from the biblical account of creation – which is believed to have also shaped and manifested itself in 'African culture'. Clearly, an undefined set of family values is considered to be at the heart of Zambia as a Christian and African nation. Since homosexuality would conflict with these values, it is considered a threat to the religious and cultural character of the nation.

The convergence of Christianity and Zambian or African culture in this perception of family values is significant in view of our interest in the nationalisation of sexuality. I refer here to the first of the four previously quoted 'strategic units' distinguished by Ndjio, through which a hegemonic heterosexual identity has been constructed or internalised in post-colonial Africa. According to Ndjio, the promotion of a normative ideal of the heterosexual family, as well as the policing of sexual desires outside this script, has been a key part of the nation-building project that post-colonial African leaders embarked upon under the influence of pan-Africanist thought, which actually continued the 'civilising mission' of the colonial administrators and missionaries (Ndjio 2013: 126–9). In the Zambian context, Kaunda's 1975 Watershed Speech and the Zambia Moral Code introduced by the UNIP party shortly after, which both sought to restrict 'immoral' and 'un-Zambian' media and behaviour, serve as examples of this (Gordon 2012: 165–6). In concordance with Ndjio's argument, Desiree Lewis points out that in post-colonial African states,

discourses of national belonging have been anchored in familial scripts and the invention of nations as biological families. In constructing sexuality, the family and personality in terms of a familial frame, the 'natural' reproduction of communities and the 'rightful' belonging of individuals within these collectivities are assured. (Lewis 2008: 107)

In Foucauldian terms, this complex process of the naturalisation and Africanisation of heterosexuality and the idealisation of the family as part of a project of nation-building could be conceptualised as the discursive workings of biopower, shaped by the conditions of the African post-colony. Biopower is also at work in the discourse of 'family values' that construes homosexuality as an un-Zambian and un-Christian practice. In this context, it is noteworthy that the header of the paragraph on homosexuality in the CCZ statement quoted above is 'The Foundation of a Strong Nation', suggesting that the CCZ considers homosexual relationships as one of the most serious threats to Zambia being and remaining a strong nation. Even though CCZ is rather critical of the Christian nation declaration, it does not hesitate to subscribe, like EFZ, to a discourse of national belonging anchored in a script of family values. By following this script, both church organisations not only reinforce a normative, exclusively heterosexual definition of the nation, but also explicitly support the state's criminalisation of same-sex practices. Appealing to the bible and a divine order of creation, as well as to an invented traditional Zambian or African culture, they 'baptise' a post-colonial Zambian nationalist ideology in which heterosexuality is normalised while homosexuality is suppressed and construed as a threat to the nation's moral order.

CHALLENGING THE CHRISTIAN NATION

The vast majority of references to Zambia as a Christian nation are used in arguments against the acceptance of homosexuality and the recognition of 'gay rights'. However, there is some evidence to suggest that this attitude is not as prolific amongst Zambians as these discourses suggest. For instance, the fact that Michael Sata was elected President in 2011, even though his political opponents spread rumours associating him with a pro-homosexuality stance during the election campaigns, suggests that this issue was not a primary concern for many Zambian voters. Moreover, the dominant anti-homosexual rhetoric voiced in the media has begun to be questioned and challenged by some dissident voices. These voices can mainly be found on the internet, where they form a minority of the commenters active on Zambian news websites. In a context in which the government-owned newspapers, *The Times of Zambia* and the *Zambia Daily Mail*, are at the

forefront of opposing homosexuality and gay rights, and in which the independent newspaper *The Post* has kept remarkably silent in recent years, the internet appears to be the primary forum where dissident opinions are voiced, and where gay and lesbian Zambians themselves occasionally speak out and make themselves heard. These dissident voices often refer to and frequently engage with the Christian nation argument. Some do so in a critical way, by simply denouncing the idea of Zambia being a Christian nation, pointing to the irony that Christianity was introduced by Western missionaries and is now being used by Zambians to reject homosexuality – something that existed in Africa before the missionaries came – as a Western phenomenon. Others address ‘the hypocrisy the Christian society is exhibiting’, with so many ‘un-Christian practices’ – such as drunkenness, prostitution, corruption and witchcraft – occurring and being tolerated or accepted in the country while homosexuality is singled out (Senkwe 2012: 6). Yet others highlight the inconsistency in the criminalisation of homosexuality, wondering why other sins mentioned in the bible are not prohibited in the country.

There are also voices that employ the Christian nation argument to make a more constructive case. They criticise the level of hate speech and intolerance that prevails in public debates regarding homosexuality in Zambia, and call for an attitude of tolerance and respect. For instance, one online commenter writes, in a response to other comments on website articles,

What kind of Christian nation is Zambia, we are not a christian nation because if we were and follow the teachings of Jesus of love your neighbor as you love yourself some of you would not even think of saying bad words about our brothers and sisters who are gays. What kind of Christians who have already passed judgement on others, your holy bible tells you to leave the judgement to your God. (Mushe 2012)

A popular verse quoted from the bible to support this reasoning is John 8: 7, where Jesus says to the Pharisees who bring an adulterous woman to him, ‘Let him who is without sin among you cast the first stone.’ In the same way that Jesus in this text does not say that adultery is not sinful, the line of reasoning provided by these commenters does not assert that homosexuality is not a sin. However, these commenters contend that an attitude of non-judgement and non-discrimination, and of showing love and respect, is more ‘Christ-like’ than the harassment, persecution and hatred expressed towards gay and lesbian people in Zambia.

Recently a local NGO has adopted a similar stance. In response to an accusation by the Minister of Home Affairs that some Zambian NGOs are supporting ‘gay rights’ in order to receive funding from Western donors, Dette Resource Foundation published a statement in which it explained why human rights also apply to gay and lesbian people, and why the Zambian government has the duty to respect these rights. The statement explicitly appealed to Zambia’s status as a Christian nation in order to make its point:

We suggest that, as a nation dedicated to Christ by virtue of Zambia being declared a Christian nation, we need to reconsider our position on Homosexuals ...Jesus, the man whose name Zambia has been declared, never condemned people, sinners or persons with different sexual orientation.⁸

⁸ ‘Dette Supports Homosexuals’. 2013. Tumfweko, 29 April. <http://tumfweko.com/2013/04/29/dette-support-homosexuals/> (accessed 1 September 2013).

This statement, however preliminary in its nature, illustrates the possibility of offering a counter-narrative in which Zambian society demonstrates tolerance and love towards homosexual people, recognising their dignity and rights precisely because it is a Christian nation. It could be read as an example of what American Pentecostal philosopher James K. A. Smith calls 'a catholic critique' of Pentecostalism – that is, a critique that is not secular but comes from prophets who 'appeal to criteria internal to the Christian story' (Smith 2010: 688). In view of the prevalent idea that homosexuality is part of a Western agenda, it is particularly important that in this case the critique does not come from the West but rather from other Christians in the same country.

The dissident voices present only a preliminary beginning of the querying of Zambia as a Christian nation, and the impact of such critiques on the hegemonic discourse in Zambia is currently very limited. As can be expected, these voices meet firm resistance. In the case of Dette Resource Foundation, the Minister of Home Affairs even announced that a criminal investigation of the NGO would be undertaken. On the internet, people have responded with the usual rhetoric, associating the organisation with the Devil and calling upon fellow Zambians to be firm in faith and not fall into this satanic trap.

CONCLUSIONS

Social theorist Carl Stychin has pointed out that 'when the nation state perceives a threat to its existence, that danger is frequently translated into sexualized terms. Same sex sexuality is deployed as the alien other, linked to conspiracy, recruitment, opposition to the nation, and ultimately a threat to civilization' (Stychin 1998: 9). If we are to analyse the Zambian nationalist ideologies that aim to exclude homosexuality in this way, we need to consider what danger is being translated into sexualised terms here. Stychin refers to a number of studies that examine this phenomenon from a gender perspective, in terms of the maleness of the state being under threat and therefore also being reaffirmed by powerful forces. More specifically in African post-colonial contexts, critical theorist Neville Hoad has suggested that we 'read homophobic strands in African nationalisms as displaced resistance to perceived and real encroachments on neocolonial national sovereignty by economic and cultural globalization' (Hoad 2007: xii–xiii).

These are plausible suggestions to consider. Indeed, reflecting on the question of why homosexuality has recently become such a major issue in many African societies, and why the response to this perceived threat is through nationalist religious discourses, one has to acknowledge globalising discourses on sexual rights and LGBTI identities and the subsequent increased visibility of sexual minorities in Africa, on the one hand, and the politics of Western governments and institutions in supporting these sexual minorities in their quest for rights and recognition, on the other. As a response to these developments, the politics of heteronationalism in post-colonial African societies has developed into a more explicit politics of anti-homonationalism.⁹ From this perspective, religious anti-homosexual discourses in Zambia and other African countries are just another version of the more general politics of anti-homonationalism.

However, although theories interpreting such attitudes and responses to homosexuality in terms of post-colonial resistance to the West and the negotiation of modernity or globalisation are interesting and relevant, they also run the risk of being reductionist. Religious discourse is then interpreted as a medium for a message about something else. In her study of Pentecostalism in

⁹ I use these terms as useful variations to the term 'homonationalism' conceptualised by Jasbir Puar (2007).

Nigeria, the political scientist Ruth Marshall (2009) underscores the importance of taking religious faith seriously in a non-reductive way. She proposes to understand Pentecostalism, with a Foucauldian term, as a 'political spirituality', or a political theology, which resists the distinction between sacred and secular and presents a re-enchantment of the world. The born-again project of conversion does not just concern the individual, but is a political project that, as we have seen, subjects the nation as a whole to the discourse of being born again in Christ and combating the influence of the Devil. In the words of Chiluba – in the speech in which he declared Zambia to be a Christian nation – in order for Zambia to prosper, the entire nation needs to be submitted 'to the Lordship of Jesus Christ' and the country needs to be 'governed by the righteous principles of the Word of God' (quoted from Gordon 2012: 199). It is against this background that homosexuality, as the symbol of 'rampant immorality', came to be perceived as a major threat to the purity of the nation and become the focal point of contemporary Pentecostal political energies. In view of Marshall's argument (2007) that Pentecostalism, as a political theology, is characterised by a profound internal instability, it can also be suggested that it needs homosexuality – imagined as a demonic Other – to create a collective identity and further develop its political project of 'Christian nation' building.

Some scholars, most notably the Zambian-born and US-based researcher and activist Kapya Kaoma, have highlighted how contemporary anti-homosexuality campaigns in Africa are fuelled by external forces, particularly the American Christian Right, which has exported its 'culture wars' to Africa (Kaoma 2009, 2012). This argument certainly has some pedigree, as there clearly are links between American and African Christian leaders, and it is also true that certain perceptions of homosexuality are reproduced and distributed through transnational networks, including the above-mentioned discourse of family values. However, this account also runs the risk, not only of overlooking the agency of African actors (including religious and political leaders) in the development of homophobias and anti-homosexuality politics in African societies, but also of identifying Pentecostal forms of Christianity in Africa too easily with American conservative evangelicalism, while there are in fact significant differences between these two strands. Just as African Pentecostalism (itself enormously diverse) has not simply been imported from North America but is firmly rooted in African social, religious and political realities (Kalu 2008), the emergence of anti-homosexual discourses in African Pentecostal (and broader Christian) circles has not simply been driven by an American evangelical agenda, but is related to broader post-colonial African cultural dynamics and nationalist impulses as well.

In the case of Zambia, I have seen little evidence of a direct and strong American evangelical interference in debates about homosexuality. As this article shows, the Zambian case presents a religio-political mobilisation against homosexuality that is profoundly shaped by the local configuration in which Christianity, thanks to Pentecostal influences, over the past twenty or more years has come to define national identity, and in which Pentecostal-Christian moral concerns and theo-political imaginations increasingly shape public debates and politics.

A question that has not yet been raised, and that cannot be explored in depth here, concerns the (in)compatibility of Pentecostalism and nationalism. The close relationship between Pentecostalism and national identity is not as self-evident as the Zambian case might suggest. After all, as a transnational network and a globalised religious form, Pentecostal Christianity creates a global community of 'the saved' in a way that is 'proper to the forms of diffuse, individualized, and nonisomorphic forms of connectedness' in the contemporary world (Marshall 2009: 208). Theologically, at the heart of the Pentecostal faith is the belief that the Holy Spirit is 'poured out on

all flesh' and transgresses boundaries of language, ethnicity and nationality (and potentially, one could argue, also of sexuality). On this basis, Pentecostal theologian Amos Yong criticises the way in which Pentecostal spirituality 'has been shown to be too easily hijacked by uncritical national aspirations ...and dangerous political agendas' (Yong 2010: 134). It could therefore be argued that 'Pentecostal nationalism' is, theologically speaking, a *contradictio in terminis*, showing the relevance of the distinction made by Nigerian-born and US-based Pentecostal theologian Nimi Wariboko between Pentecostalism as an empirical phenomenon and what he – in a variation on Paul Tillich's Protestant principle – calls 'the Pentecostal principle' (Wariboko 2012). The manifestation of a form of Pentecostal nationalism in Zambia can possibly be explained by the 'a priori preference for the institutional forms of democratic political life' (Marshall 2009: 211), including the idea of the nation state, that Pentecostals have adopted as a means to realise their programme of born-again conversion and redemption.

As shown above, the ideology of Pentecostal nationalism, reflected in the idea of Zambia as a Christian nation, is such a dominant discourse that even many of those who argue for the recognition of sexual minorities ascribe to it, tailoring it to their own ends. Only time will show whether this is an effective strategy. Currently, the anti-homosexual discourse is so powerful that every Zambian who presents a more nuanced account of the subject, or expresses sympathy for human rights in relation to sexual minorities, is directly associated with the Devil or the Antichrist (Van Klinken 2013). This illustrates the fact that the Zambian public sphere 'appears as a site of negotiation and struggle' (Meyer 2010: 157) in which a Pentecostalist discourse is overbearingly present and powerful, marginalising other voices. Obviously this makes an open public and political discussion about questions of homosexuality and human rights (let alone an adequate public health policy towards sexual minorities) almost impossible. Thus, the Zambian debates on homosexuality in a Christian nation raise much broader, critical questions about the role of Pentecostalism in the public sphere, and the relation between Pentecostalism and democracy and between Pentecostalism and human rights. Taking into account that both Pentecostalism and the discourse of homosexuality and LGBTI rights in Africa are products of modernity and globalisation, what we are facing in the Zambian case (and also in other African controversies about homosexuality) is not so much a 'clash of civilisations' between Africa and the West, but a clash of conflicting visions of modernity in Africa – a clash that centres around questions of the relation between religion and the public sphere, religion and politics, and religion and human rights. How this complex socio-cultural dynamic will unfold in Zambia and other African societies cannot be predicted.

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