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SAWUBONA: A theo- ethic for everyday decolonial gestures

ABSTRACT

This article takes a pentecostality engagement with the Zulu notion of Sawubona to construct a theo-ethics of everyday decolonial gestures of life-giving, affirmation and enhancing in the context of global coloniality and cultures of death that define and determine life in modern capitalist societies. Pentecostality is grounded in the Spirit's freedom to greet (Sawubona) creation as happened on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2) with pneumatic gestures of redemption, liberation, emancipation and co-recognition of the singularity of life and co-becoming of all things in the universe. I demonstrate how indigenous forms of greeting embody pentecostality resources that could be mobilised to construct a theo-ethics of everyday decolonial gestures. I underline that such an approach helps to perceive indigenous greetings such as Sawubona as dynamic philosophical terms saturated with incredible meanings deeply rooted in the pro-existential spirituality of care for life.

Indigenous forms of greeting continue to be some of the most significant everyday gestures of ethics of care in postcolonial Africa. African words of greetings embody pentecostality principle of care, cosmo-visions of life, meanings, and values that people hold dear and upon which the foundation of societies and eco-relationalities are established. In this short article, I attempt to demonstrate and explicate how indigenous forms of greeting could be utilised as cultural resources for everyday decolonial gestures in contemporary Africa. Specifically, I pay brief attention to the common Zulu word for greeting, *Sawubona* ("I-we" deep gaze through you) as an embodiment of

lived decolonial gestures. I am aware that *Sawubona* is not a concept devoid of ethnical sentiments. While acknowledging such sentiments, my aim is to go beyond the normative and original cultural intent behind the gestures. As Frantz Fanon (1963:40) stressed,

Everything up to and including the very nature of [precolonial societies], so well explained by [our ancestors and their collective philosophies], must here be thought out again (see also Wariboko 2022: xiv).

I have argued that engaging *Sawubona* from a pentecostality viewpoint unveils it as a dynamic philosophical term, saturated with incredible meanings that are deeply rooted in the pro-existential spirituality of care (Kaunda 2023b). The idea of pentecostality refers to the capacity to recognise gesturally that all things (including God) shoulder the burden of existing for the other. This is the pro-existential care capacity to hold everything in dynamic tension *not* because it is a communal obligation, but because to act ubuntunomously *against self-interest* in the interest of the fullness of life (or the common good) is the condition of being-and-becoming authentic and dignified humanity in the world. To claim the ubuntunomous power of “I am” in the “I am because we are” is to recognise the perennially inescapable and unpayable co-existential debt that all things owe each other.

This also means that *Sawubona* should be taken as an infinitely irreducible term that includes a much broader vocabulary which is ever plastically transforming. As Catherine Malabou (2009, 2008, 2007, 2006) observes, there is plastic transformability at the core of every concept, a plasticity that always disrupts meaning and experience of the language. Therefore, I have reflected theologically and constructively on the idea of *Sawubona* as a potential theo-ethics of everyday decolonial gestures. In other words, I have taken a decolonial gesture as interpretative approach in light of theo-ethical considerations. The idea of theo-ethics is about a radically humane way of becoming and being committed to creating new possibilities for the flourishing of human beings and all things. It is an ongoing search for understanding of how actual practices and everyday experiences and common gestures mask humane and lifegiving-affirming resources for constructing a decolonial lifestyle (Kaunda 2015). It seeks to bring awareness of such hidden resources to create a critical mass for evolving intentional everyday decolonial gestures. This theo-ethic is grounded in radical interconnectedness of existence, the perennial fact that everything *is* everything *through* everything, that existence is co-substantively bestowed upon everything by everything (Kaunda 2023a). This also means that everything is creatively constituted by relations, and that nothing pre-exists relationships, including God (God is eternally relational). This is what I describe as intra-carnations. I understand intra-carnations not in the sense of the existence of “a single mega-body” (Keller 2017), but rather in

the sense of ubuntu super-sensibility, empathy and hospitable recognition and appreciation of the inclusive differences of all things as dynamic and relational manifestations of one and the same ultimate life. This affirms intrinsic relational intra-inter-connectedness and interdependencies of all things as grounds of flourishing becoming. Let me now turn to creating a theory of everyday decolonial gestures.

The pentecostality as divine gestural presence in creation is embedded in the ritualistic Pentecost principle as pro-existential care for all life. It is the first principle of intra-carnation-ability. It is the performance of ecological entanglement through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit as divine distribution of agency. It is the Holy Spirit distributed like tongues of fire as a primordial divine Sawubona of creation (God deep gazing into creation to see God). The question is, how can pentecostality as an approach to Sawubona help us to formulate a theo-ethics of everyday decolonial gestures? Pentecostality is grounded in the Spirit's freedom to greet creation as on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2) with pneumatic gestures of redemption and co-recognition of ongoing intra-carnations through life-giving ways of seeing and thinking the world. I argue that the Spirit is both the primordial principle and the divine agency of intra-carnations. Let me now say something about everyday decolonial gestures.

1. EVERYDAY DECOLONIAL GESTURES

Everyday decolonial gestures explore such overlooked intricacies of everyday life as encapsulations of spiritual natality (ever-never ending beginnings) of emancipatory freedom. As Mike Michael stresses, the

everyday life can entertain 'moments' in which it is possible to glimpse the world transformed (however diffuse that vision might be)

and is filled with "tactics in which subtle resistances that invoke the past and recreate the present momentarily rupture" (Michael 2006:16). Michael further argues that it is in the particularity of "everyday life in which creative human capacity, constrained by rigid roles and niches, is routinised and commodified". This means that everyday life is not "simply a constitutive part of what it means to be a human social being" (Michael 2006:17), rather a site of natality, of human action.

The decolonial scholars who have understood the power of engaging lived experiences as decolonial resources are African women theologians. Specifically, of the postcolonial theologians, the most experience-based article I have read was from Musa Dube, who has written extensively on the Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible. Dube realised that there

was a dichotomy between the westernised theology that she studies, and everyday experiences of HIV and AIDS, patriarchy and coloniality. With all the contradictions in the everyday life, Dube (2018) felt that

The stories of the gospels seemed to be a mockery of our context. What was their relevance? I did not really know. I had no textbook on reading the Bible from the HIV and AIDS context.

She realised that “to find out the meaning of these stories and their relevance,” she needed to turn to the very everyday experiences as decolonial resources for designing the curricula and teaching methods (Dube 2018). This proved to offer critical ways of decolonisation and emancipation from an everyday-based approach.

The conviction is that examining the cultural meanings and values of the local and insignificant everyday gestures may lead us into crucial insights into practices of decolonial lifestyles already at work in the usual everyday gestures. In fact, in many African societies, the apparently small gestures, encounters and exchanges of everyday life are instilled with cosmo-spiritual ethics that inspire right and relentless emancipatory relations in the functional community of life (ubuntu) which consists of God, divinities, spirits, ancestors, human beings, non-human beings and non-beings. The greetings capture the everyday practices of ubuntu (I am because we are, and we are because I am). There is no separation between the individual and the community or between God and the community. The quest is to recover the dormant meanings and values embodied in the everyday greetings by articulating them through a decolonial framework as a mobilising discourse for advancing everyday decolonial gestures. This makes decolonial gestures a way of reclaiming, re-learning, reconstituting and legitimating indigenous greeting gestures as everyday practices of decolonial, humanising and liberatory freedom. Here we are dealing with rethinking the very process of thinking. This is not just about the meaning of decoloniality but also *the very process, the how and the theological practice* of everyday decolonisation and emancipation.

The “everyday life-based approach” is significant because the current quest for decolonial Africa, human, cultures, imaginations, mentalities, knowledge, religion, politics, economy, sexualities, and other issues seem to have turned out to be unattainable illusions. The concept of decoloniality itself has become something of a buzzword among African scholars, especially in South Africa. Publications on the subject continue to proliferate without a formulated vision of decolonial praxis (see numerous works such as Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013a, 2013b, 2018; Snyman 2014; Kaunda 2015; Ramantswana 2016). Talk is cheap! African written decolonial knowledge is incommunicable because it has promoted a dichotomy between oral and written material. It

gullibly espouses neo-colonial communication ideals, always claiming to be writing for the emancipation and flourishing of the masses, yet, like every neo-colonial ideology that exploits African struggles to advance itself, much of the written communication has been advanced separately from the power of lived knowledge which is expressed in the people's everyday encounters, exchanges, and interactions. The agenda of written decolonial projects remains unclear because an important feature of daily gestures of decolonisation has not yet received the attention it deserves. The African everyday life is permeated by gestures of struggles and resistance against coloniality and everyday politics of death arising from neo-colonial political accounts of the present. Nelson Maldonado-Torres (2007:243; 2010:97) argues that coloniality is so pervasive that "as modern subjects, we breathe coloniality all the time and every day."

Lamentably, there is still a chasm between everyday practices and academic discourses on coloniality and decoloniality. Adequate consideration has not been given to how everyday social and relational acts of African greetings may conceal decolonial rudiments. It has been easy for many scholars to pay attention to conspicuous events which often have a short lifespan, such as riots and protests like #Rhodesmustfall and #Feesmustfall and all kinds of fallisms and resistisms. This is not to disqualify the value of such protests and resistances, as they function to sharpen the arrows of critique, indignantly taken from the quivers of lived experiences of global coloniality. For instance, when Chumani Maxwele threw human excrement at the Rhodes statue, he raised awareness of the coloniality of Khayelitsha from which he took this excrement. As Frantz Fanon (1963:38-39) observes:

The zone where the natives live is not complementary to the zone inhabited by the settlers. The two zones are opposed, but not in the service of a higher unity ... The settler's town is a strongly built town, all made of stone and steel. It is a brightly lit town; the streets are covered with asphalt, and the garbage-cans swallow all the leavings, unseen, unknown and hardly thought about. The settler's feet are invisible, except perhaps in the sea; but there you're never close enough to see them ... The settlers' town is a well-fed town, an easy-going town; its belly is always full of good things. The settler's town is a town of white people, of foreigners. The town belonging to the colonised people, or at least the native town, the Negro village, the medina, the reservation, is a place of ill fame, peopled by men of evil repute. They are born there, it matters little where or how; they die there, it matters not where, nor how. It is a world without spaciousness; men live there on top of each other, and their huts are built one on top of the other. The native town is a hungry town, starved of bread, of meat, of shoes, of coal, of light. The native town is a crouching village, a town on its knees, a town wallowing in the mire.

In addition, the student protests are also a critique of the university curricula as a locus of reproduction and perpetuation of global coloniality, as such curricula do not speak to their lived experiences, language, cultures, politics, economics, or religious traditions. Such lived knowledge highlights awareness to the wider society about the need to rethink critically African realities of struggle in the light of everyday decolonial gestures. However, history has shown that all social movements that depend entirely on a few charismatic leaders often lose their impetus and if care is not taken, become altogether prescriptive.

Black consciousness, for instance, in South Africa has remained only as an academic jargon that has no clear bearing on the praxiological consciousness of the masses who seek for human consciousness rather qualifying it with the idea of “blackness” which remains an ontological problem yet to be resolved. Historically, blackness has not been about pigmentation but about an ontological negation of the people of African descent. The legacy remains in the continuous Africanisation of underdevelopment and poverty, global discrimination and misrepresentation, and neo-colonial exclusion and marginalisation. Such ideological constructions of the people of African descent have entombed them in the abyss of a desperate ontology of violence and everyday struggle, as most African nations have fallen into the hellish zones of the lived death. Trapped in these zones of fictionalised and non-being existence, I am arguing that many decolonial projects have failed to engender a collective decolonial emancipatory consciousness among the masses. Should African people continue to uphold ontological blackness with its negations?

The mandate of decolonial imaginations should have been to promote critical solidarity between the academy and the masses, to give rise to emancipatory consciousness which is the power, capacity and ethical indignation among the masses that could oblige them to seek to define and determine themselves as subjects of history and confident guardians of their destiny. Africans owe it to themselves to take charge, to be in control of the future of Africa and the destiny of her humanity, and to make the most of what they have before other nations that are ever watchful for opportunities, take advantage of those who seem stupid and supine. I am arguing that academic decolonial talk in the African academy is a decolonial problem that has essentially become another talk within the black hole of the legacies of colonialism and its invention – neo-colonialism. Without engaging everyday decolonial gestures, academic decolonial talk is an impractical solution to global coloniality. The continent is bombarded with decolonial theories that not only do not arise from everyday life but also have no bearing on concrete experiences and social problems. If we can unmask everyday decolonial gestures and help the masses recover consciousness of the meanings and values embedded in their everyday acts

of being in the world such as greetings, there is a possibility of creating actual practices of decolonial lifestyle. In what follows, I demonstrate how indigenous forms of greeting embody pentecostality resources that could be mobilised to construct a theo-ethics of everyday decolonial gestures.

2. THE WORD AS A FORCE OF LIFE

I am also aware that most contemporary gestures of greetings in Africa have lost their pre-colonial foundational meanings and values. They have become mere social tools for engaging others without the consciousness of the intrinsic meanings and values that such gestures were intended to communicate. In African worldviews, words are not mere passive things, rather, they are vital forces (among the Bemba people of Zambia, words of greeting are described as *ifi-ntu* – vital spirits or spirits of life), just like human beings and other vital elements that make up the universe. Words are not mere *means* of acting in the universe; rather, they are *ends* in themselves. As Jesus argued, words “are Spirit, and they are life” (John 6:63). This means that words have their own agency and potency. To speak is to breathe life *into*, is to give spiritual meaning *to* and to create the world, making the cosmos a living being (Genesis 1). The one who speaks words of life, gives life. Once spoken, words become, and can either *increase* or *decrease*, life. Hence, words are not taken lightly among many African societies. For example, curses are perceived as dangerous words spoken with the intention of harming another human being or other vital forces. This also means that words are actions and actions are words. Therefore, decolonial talk in Africa should be understood as an action of recovering spirituality, meaning and values in everyday interactions, exchanges and encounters among the masses which are concealed in simple gestures such as Sawubona greetings. In other words, it is recovering the *vital force* as an African *force of life* primed to act relentlessly in history, not because we were once enslaved and colonised, but because these seemingly small vital gestures of everyday expressions and everyday encounters are means of *becoming*, and readily available emancipatory tools waiting to be wisely used to change the lot of Africa. There is no way decolonisation can be achieved without the masses. Decoloniality is *about* and *for* the people. Any decolonial thinker must look intently for aspects of embodied decolonial spirituality among the masses, and must help them become aware of such so that they can turn them into consciously lived practices. This is not about looking for a new language to envision a decolonial humanism through which emancipatory theology and theological education becomes possible to bring about decolonisation. No! The imperative of decolonial spirituality in Africa is about reclaiming and reconstituting a meaning and value ethos in African everyday metaphors such as Sawubona as resources to construct

everyday decolonial consciousness and intentional practices of de-centring, deconstructing, and challenging everyday mentalities and behaviours that reproduce and perpetuate the legacies of colonial-neo-colonial relations of power, heteropatriarchy, and all socio-relational injustices. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson (1980:3) remind us that the human “ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature.” They argue that,

The concepts that govern our thought are not just matters of the intellect. They also govern our everyday functioning, down to the most mundane details. Our concepts structure what we perceive, how we get around in the world, and how we relate to other people. Our conceptual system thus plays a central role in defining our everyday realities (Lakoff & Johnson 1980:3).

The African conceptual system “is largely metaphorical,” meaning, “the way we think, what we experience, and what we do every day is very much a matter of metaphor” (Lakoff & Johnson 1980:3).

This also means decolonisation does not only take place in academic offices or fallisms, because it is about transformation in collective *thinking* and modification in people’s everyday social actions. Hence, Sawubona as a pervasive metaphor is a critical locus for creating a decolonial practice because it is an everyday gesture from below. Decolonial gestures are about everyday life as it unfolds. They are about being “transformed by the renewing of your mind” (Romans 12:2). Decolonial spirituality arises from a collective emancipatory consciousness wrought by indignation and genuine commitment to becoming authentic humans and it is possible only by mutual recognition of each other as “I am because we are” (ubuntu) as the subjects of history, irrespective of the roles and social status.

3. I SEE YOU! GAZING INTO “THE FACE OF THE DEEP”

Sawubona is a functional aspect of ubuntu for mutual recognition of the life of all things that make up the universe. Sawubona means “I-we” deep gaze at you. I use the “I-we” notion because greeting among the Zulus and many African people is not individualistic but a locus of collective encounters, exchanges, and experiences of eco-relations. It is about how African greetings constantly disrupt, navigate and reorder eco-relations by diffusing all possible dangers in the strangeness of the familiar reality. To Sawubona something is to be locked in a constant disruption of the order of things so that they remain fluid, malleable, dynamic, ecstatic, and mystical. In Sawubona, it is

not a mere face-to-face encounter as in Emmanuel Levinas' (1969) argument, it is the life-life experience or encounter – the *life-selves* as “I/we-we/I” – singular-plural-plural-singular. In this encounter, the face is only a symbolic window through which to gaze at the life-self. It is not about seeing the face but deep gazing (not staring) through the face to really see the life-selves. The face is only a symbolic mask of a much bigger reality before another equally the same reality. Hence, the self as singular is a problematic concept to use in reference to much of the thought of African systems. Sawubona is a functional vital force of Ubuntu (vital force), primed to achieve or maintain an intricate equilibrium of all forces or “selves” that make up the whole reality. In many African systems of thought, to be muntu (vital force – human) is to be selves, a centreless liminal site for an assemblage of vital forces.¹ The muntu is ironically, ambiguously, and creatively “the’ multiplicity of symbiosis and becoming” (Deleuze & Guattari 1987:240). The logic of “I am” in the “I am because we are” is an assertion of the singular-plurality (multiplicity) of “the self as the selves”. Everything including God is affirmed by “I am”.

Therefore, Sawubona carries such inexplicable and profound meaning that has been lost even among most Zulu people in South Africa. The one who greets is never an individual, never neutral, but intentionally political because he/she is a collective presence of an assemblage of all forces that make up the universe. The Sawubona is a metaphor that expresses inexplicable intra-experience (within) that takes place between subjects entangled in the Sawubona vital union. Sawubona is a site where the cosmos encounters, exchanges, and experiences *its* cosmological self. Hence, the response is equally the same, “yebo, Sawubona!” yes, “I-we also gaze through you.” The *yebo* is not simply “yes” – affirmation – it is an overwhelming response of sacral awe; that is of fascination and a gazing through in amazement as if one is shocked by the presence of the reality in front of them. It is as if you meet yourself and become overwhelmed with a holy shock. This is because every moment of encounter is always holy. It also creates a holy space, and everything in that space is holy and must be treated as holy. Only Moses’ response to his encounter with God in the burning bush in Exodus Chapter 3 comes close to the “yebo, Sawubona” experience. This is not seeing as in perceiving with the eyes or determining something visually; it is gazing *through* and *through* to see all things to finally see *the* self in all things. It is gazing through in order to have a revelation of the self as the noumenon (the imperceptible reality) manifested as you and now is before you.

Sawubona is an indigenous word that was constructed to enable people to be able to deep gaze through and see with cosmic intuitions (deep seeing)

1 I have given full attention to this view in my book titled, *The Paradox of Becoming* (Kaunda 2023b).

each other, seeing with transcendent eyes to see beyond the appearances or observables of the phenomenon to see the humanity of another, see the cosmos, see all life as it manifests in its singular eco-self in time and space. There is no encounter without deep seeing into reality. The person who has lost the capacity to deep see into reality is essentially disentangled from the self or estranged from the cosmic self. That is a cosmic sin. A cosmic sin is that sin that cannot see that creation is being devoured back into the primal chaos, darkness, and void, that cannot hear the excruciating “groaning in labour pains” of creation (Roman 8: 22), that cannot see the pain, suffering and corpses of the living neighbours (Luke 10:25-37), cannot hear the unsettling silent moans and imperceptible sufferings of women and sexual minorities (John 4:4-26) because that person has become convinced that they are the centre of the universe and that everything begins and ends with them. They have the right to eat from the forbidden tree so that they become a god (Genesis 3).

Coming back to the point, deep seeing is the kind of seeing that St. Luke speaks of in the Sawubona encounter between Simeon, a righteous man who “was waiting for the consolation of Israel,” and the baby Jesus in Luke 2:25, 28-32. Luke observes,

Simeon took [Jesus] in his arms and praised God, saying: ‘Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have *seen* your salvation’ (italics added for emphasis).

Simeon enacted emancipation and decolonisation of Israel from the Roman empire through deep gazing into the baby Jesus. He saw through and through until he saw through the baby the redemption of Israel, cosmic de-satanisation or redemption. That is a reality that was masked by the face of baby Jesus. This kind of symbolic thinking is nonliteral interactionism – a way of conceiving and interacting with reality as the symbolic order. Symbolic interactionism can also be applied to Genesis 1:2 which argues that

...the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the *face of the deep*. And the Spirit of God moved upon *the face* of the waters.²

Perhaps we can imagine for a moment that the Spirit of God was not aimlessly “moving” on the surface (face) of the waters, but rather was deep gazing through the face of the waters. The Genesis waters were a symbolic manifestation of the face of the abyss. The Genesis abyss has a face, a symbolic window through which the Spirit of God, like Simeon, Sawubona-ed the fullness of reality and that fullness of reality Sawubona-ed back. Here, creation becomes

2 I have intentionally quoted from KJV and added italics for emphasis.

a site of liminality, a space of intra-action, intra-dialogue through the mutual deep gaze between the Spirit of God and reality in the face of the deep. Here we can argue that reality is a mutual co-creation or co-construction; we co-arise ourselves, we co-redeem ourselves, we co-decolonise ourselves, we co-emancipate ourselves, by first deep gazing into or through ourselves until we really see. Sawubona is an incessant reminder that every reality we encounter, conceals its own redemption or its own decolonisation and only together in a space that accords mutual intrinsic value, non-judgemental, non-prescriptive, non-determined mutual co-deep gazing can we really see life. Life is always flourishing in the very depth of the faces we encounter. It is always Sawubona! Always gazing into us.

Hence, Sawubona co-establishes things/persons as witnesses to all life, the life that is simultaneously witnessing the presence of life (not another life because there is only one life) – the life that witnesses itself in holy amazement. The consequence is a radical acknowledgement, an affirmative surrender; as if one is overpowered or subdued by their gaze into a holy presence – *yebo*, “I-we”, “we-I” gaze through each other. The holy space becomes a site of a covenant of life. This could be described as everyday ritual performance in the liminal of usual unusualness. For example, among the Bemba people of Zambia, the greeting word which is often directed to a person who has not been seen for a long time is *Mwapoleni* (you are all healed/whole). The interesting part is when the two who greeted each other have gone their separate ways and are asked about that encounter. The response is fascinating – *we healed them*, or *we made them whole*. The one who greets is always a healer because the African greeting spaces are liminal spaces and as liminal spaces, every *Mwapoleni* encounter is a locus of healing, of wholeness not just for individuals encountering each other but for all creation. This is because, in most African societies, a ritual is a cosmological event in which all creation is always present. Hence, African spaces of greeting are liminal sites of exchange, intra-active experience, intra-action, and intercourse of life itself (Kaunda 2023b). Greeting brings an obligation to promote life. It is an invitation to the tabernacle of life as a form of vital participation in each other’s presence. It creates freedom and vulnerability as each Sawubona is a gift of the presence of life. Sawubona is a site of decolonial spirituality of grace. The presence of each other is the presence of grace. Neither one takes for granted that they deserve each other’s presence; rather they perceive the presence of each as a gracious gift given for the other to participate in its unfolding. It is an eco-relational consciousness, participation in the web of life, affirmation of the bondedness of the presence of all being as actively collective present at the very moment of encounter. It is a site of equality, a space of mutual recognition, a site of unveiling the hidden presences of vital forces, a locus of affirmation of such

presences. Sawubona is a resistance to the diminishing of life, an opposition to the devaluing of life, a covenant to promote a smooth flow of life. It is a total mutual surrender to the other – an intra-mirroring of the selves as unified, as the presence of *the one* and *the same* cosmos. This is not mirroring in the sense of “the ‘I’ sees itself as reflected in the other but does not see the other looking back. The other is reduced to a mirror for oneself” (Cornell 1992:22). It is rather an intra-mirroring site mutually animated by all beings and non-beings – God, divinities, ancestors, the living and yet-to-be-born and every created thing – visible and invisible are present. It is a radical awareness that the presence of one is the presence of all. You kill one, you’ve killed all. It is the capacity to recognise and affirm the intrinsic value of all things. The only scriptural injunction that comes closer to Sawubona vital force is “love your neighbour as yourself” (Matthew 22:39), except in the Sawubona, there is no idea of neighbour, there is only “I” who is “we” and the “we” who is “I”. To be precise, the “I” and the “we” do not exist in a conventional understanding of the terms – there is only the fullness of the cosmic presence. The Sawubona before “me” is never a stranger, it is “me”, it is “us” and every “us” is at the same time “me”. Sawubona site is a space of awe, a holy gaze into everything as a singular reality that manifests itself in plurality – everything there has been, there is, there will, and those that will never be – we are here. It is a site of *deep gazing, gazing, and gazing* until we *really see* those who are never *seen* – the fictionalised, the reduced to statistics, the marginalised, and those and everything de-essentialised.

4. PNEUMATIC GESTURES OF LIFE: A THEO-ETHIC OF EVERYDAY DECOLONIAL GESTURES

From the foregoing discussion on *Sawubona*, I want to draw on critical implications for constructing a theo-ethic of lived decolonial gestures of life. I utilise pentecostality as performed and acted as the vital energetic agent of divine gestures of redemptive, dignity and freedom with active potential to transform history and everything. The Spirit of Pentecost in Acts 2:1-4. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit is not a coincidence or mere divine spectacular display of the Holy Spirit. It was a divine gesture of inter-intra-carnations of all things including prevalent worlds of the day. The pentecostality articulates and entrenches in the metaphor of “greeting or encounters” and “speaking” in and “recognising” a multiplicity of “tongues” and/or other-than-human modes of seeing, encountering and relating with all things. It is the capacity to speak from a particular place in the multiplicity of tongues. It is greeting and speaking the world in its multiple manifestations. Greeting and speaking the world is the power of Sawubona. The Spirit greets the world with divine gestures of

redemption and unconditional love and the human responds by speaking the world in the tongues of the Spirit as creating conditions of flourishing becoming. This multiplicity of tongues as many tongues of inter-intra-carnations of becoming both resists erasing the differences and unawesome and exclusive pluralities. Pentecostality in the framework of Sawubona is a theo-ethic of everyday decolonial gestures of seeing and living in the opposite to everyday contradiction – familiarity in unfamiliarity, ordinariness in strangeness, usualness in foreignness. This means to greet and speak the mysteries of the Spirit as recognising multiple languages of becoming and flourishing. Amos Yong (2005: 196 note 63) argues, “the tongues of Pentecost are a polyvalent testimony to the beautiful artistry of the Creator God.” Yong (2011: 28) stresses,

the many tongues of Pentecost not only suggest a theological anthropology that recognizes the diversity of human ways of being in and knowing the world but also illuminate a pluralistic theology of interfaith practices as well as a public theology of various political, social, civil, and economic postures.

This means, the pentecostality which embodies “many tongues” is a radically life-centred reasoning, interpreting, understanding and becoming in the world which embraces multidirectional, plastic, trans-contextual, trans-religious, multidisciplinary and multiplicities of reality and discourses without compromising the cosmic objective for all life to flourish. Pentecostality is a cosmic principle of eco-care; is the ability to recognise pneumatic gestural intimacies with all things through the power of the Vital Breath. This recognition arises from pro-existence and pneumatically reignited capacity to co-care about all the other existents. Sawubona as an everyday decolonial gesture of pentecostality could help to harness comprehensive compassion that always-already pervades the universe from the very beginning and is deeply embedded within human consciousness. Humanity did not invent compassion but flows through cosmic consciousness through the pneumatic principle that flows and infinitely “directs everything through everything” (Heraclitus cited in Raimon Panikkar 1993: 9). Let me now turn to two theo-ethical implications of this discussion.

4.1 An eco-ethic of life

An eco-ethic of life embodied in Sawubona is about deep gazing *through* to transcendentally see life is the first everyday ethic of life in the African system of thought. For every “Sawubona”, every “yebo, Sawubona” is a site of constructing a new eco-humanism, an alternative destiny, and is always a beginning of a new future. In addition, the person that was encountered, that was experienced, has been actively integrated into the assemblage of vital beings

and non-beings that “I am-we are”. This does not mean that the human being encountered was never part of “I-we”, because to be human is to constantly integrate vital beings and non-beings to become holistic beings. However, there are two processes of integrating vital forces in the self. The first is the *deep-integration* (extensive) which is done through the ritual performances in which only the ritual performer as an active Sawubona integrates other beings – both active vital forces and passive vital forces present at the ritual. However, the second, in the everyday dialogical encounters, both Sawubonas are active vital forces that create an active liminal site of *co-integration* of each other into their being.

We may say, without fear of self-contradiction, that Sawubona, like the Day of Pentecost, is always an event. It is always a radical rupture with the past and the beginning of something new. It is an event because it constantly creates everyday conditions to resist the dangers of becoming standardised by inspiring an intrinsic transcendent and holistic interpretation of the world and everything as vital elements which are the self. Sawubona is an everyday reminder that the “self” is both a constitutive part of what it means to be the cosmos and the manifestation of the cosmos itself. Here the Bemba wisdom can help – *Icalo caba mukulingana nokwelenganya kwakwa Lesa* (The cosmos exists in accordance with God’s own imagination). The cosmos is an event that is always encountered in Sawubona gestures of everyday life. Sawubona itself is an event and as an event, Sawubona upsets or unsettles dominant ideas that define people, relationships, economy, politics, religion, and society. It is an interruption that is constantly shaking legacies of colonial structures and seeking to bring about revolution and transformation of life, beginning with an active Sawubona. Sawubona as an event has the potential to destroy the legacies of colonial order and help to construct an alternative order through an ethic of everyday decolonial practices. Sawubona can be described as an “unpredictable event by which, and through local means, an infinite universal truth is painstakingly constructed” (Ling 2011:17). As Alain Badiou and Peter Engelmann (2015:66) argue, Sawubona “beginning may not last, but it’s not just a result of the past; it’s also a pure present, a radical beginning, a beginning that can’t be inferred from the past.” Here, Badiou and Engelmann’s idea of event builds on the notion of liminality as a spaceless space and timeless time in between manifestations of the same reality in what seems to be two beings who are essentially the one and the same cosmos. The Spirit of Sawubona is the Spirit that interrupts normative reality, historicisation of eschatology, and gives just-relational orientation to everyday encounters and interaction with the world.

4.2 An ethic of co-emptying

Sawubona encounters can be interpreted theologically as liminal sites of intra-carnations. The Spirit always-already comes with unexpected divine gestures of agapeistic love and just intra- and inter-carnations of life. Intra-inter-carnation is not incarnation, as the concept of incarnation has a connotation of a transcendent divine coming from out the material world to take on the flesh, as in “the word became flesh” (John 1:14). Mutual co-emptying is about social disruptions and disordering for the sake of creating a society of mutual flourishing. It is sharing (in) the same Spirit agentially distributed in all and all empowered to mutually distribute in all. In such a society, any idea that denies life, whether capitalism or religions of individual prosperity, is regarded as demonic, which, through Sawubona, must be unmasked, unsettled, and dismantled so that the flourishing life in the faces of Sawubona be realised for the common good. Sawubona becomes an intentional and decisive life force that embraces eros, passionate love and justice as weapons of resistance against utilising life forces as mere means to an end and engage in a mutual struggle for what Rosi Braidotti (2006:235) describes as “sustainable flows of becoming.”

The idea of an intra-carnational ethic of mutual co-emptying perceives the divine from a liminal perspective as reality always manifested paradoxically as the cosmos (Kaunda 2023b). This idea is in keeping with the Bemba worldview in which, traditionally, God is perceived as the manifested *mubuntunse* (in the material elements, or as the material itself). According to this system of thought, the world is a paradox or liminal manifestation of the divine. In liminal thinking, the world is both God and non-God and yet it is a paradoxical manifestation of God as undivine (there is no space for this complicated idea – it is fully developed elsewhere). The intra-carnation (also developed fully in Kaunda 2023a, 2023b) is “the within” the visible manifestation of the divine as creation – the very life that is always flourishing in the faces of the deep. Jesus Christ is the revealed or the visible symbol that gives a glimpse into the intra-relationship of God with the cosmos. God is entangled in a liminal relationality with the cosmos. Intra-carnation is an unveiling of that which has always manifested as material reality demonstrating the divine-cosmos mystery relationship which was hidden but is now revealed. The cosmos is divine liminality. It is a paradoxical reality that is equal and unified with God and at the same time not equal with God and not God at all (this argument is in the tradition of Philippians 2:6). Jesus as an intra-inter-carnation of God encapsulates this symbolic paradoxical manifestation of the divine-cosmos relationship.

God is entangled in a paradoxical relationship with creation within the ambivalent space – the inner relationship of the two natures in the liminal Jesus Christ is the unveiling of such radical representation of the intra-relationship of the divine with creation without confusion or mixing, since the two vital forces (God is also the ultimate vital force in African worldviews) remain irreducible but vital intra-sharing or vital intra-participating in one another's experiences for the sake of flourishing of creation. This can be described as an ethic of entanglement or bondedness. Hence, God experiences everything that creation experiences. The intricateness of such a liminal space can only be described as self-emptying – kenosis (Philippians 2:7). The emptying is a radical, dynamic, and active Sawubona encounter, exchange, interaction, intercourse between the divine and creation (represented by human nature): the divine and creation in a mutual recognition as a radical invitation into an ethic of mutual relations of emancipatory freedom. The Sawubona ethic can be understood in the light of the search for mutual decolonisation and emancipatory freedom for all life to flourish. Christ's intra-carnation is radical liminality in which divine vulnerability and humility reach their limits as God Sawubonas – deep gaze into and through all things with awe, "I am because we are" and creation in a holy awe gaze in sacral affirmation, "we are because you are God". God's liminal gazing is about giving creation emancipatory freedom to be fully human, to be fully creation to deep gaze into and through itself, to see God in its voidness and at its very depth. In this, we can find resources for ethics of collective decolonisation and redemption. The ethic of mutual co-deep gaze into and through each of us is not the *means* but the *end* of all things because it is only to pass the void and negations of each other to reach to the depth – the only authentic site of life, an intra-stage within which life infinitely dances, an arena from which life contests and resists against negations of the faces of all things including God. Creation is the face of God. And only through creation can we genuinely see God. All distortions in creation are disfigurements to God's face. There is no God outside creation. We meet God in the everyday life, in the faces of all things. In the same way, creation's "yebo, Sawubona" response is about affirming the reality of God as that which is always manifested as the depth of material reality and transcends all things *only* by giving them life and empowering them to deep gazing into, through and through themselves to see life. God transcends creation only and only has the *Only* Ultimate Life and the *Only* Giver of life to all things (visible and invisible and God's self too) – *The Life Itself*. However, intra-carnation demonstrates that liminal space is a kenotic space of encounter demanding an ethic of ever-mutual co-emptying for the sake of the flourishing of all life.

5. CONCLUSION

It can be concluded that Sawubona is this radical invitation to a divine feast of mutual emptying of colonial legacies, relations of power, economic exploitation, corruption, sexual and gender injustice, politics of death and all cultures of death that define and seek to determine life in modern capitalist societies. It is about every day creating safe spaces which embody an ethic of life and an ever co-emptying and ever beginning imagination as means to overcome the ever-encroaching “I” of death to ever realise the self as “a collective reality” as a decolonial condition of all being and non-being.

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