

# EPR WORKING PAPER SERIES\*

## ETHNIC POWER RELATIONS IN ZAMBIA: A CRITICAL DISCUSSION

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### INTRODUCTION

In this short essay, we offer a critical discussion of the *Ethnic Power Relations* (EPR) Core Dataset coding for Zambia. The EPR Core Dataset provides information on access to political power by representatives of politically relevant ethnic groups. By politically relevant ethnic groups, the EPR dataset refers to ethnic identities that matter for political competition and state resource allocation at the national level (Cederman et al. 2010, Vogt et al. 2015).<sup>1</sup> Specifically, the EPR dataset describes the degree of access to executive state power of politically relevant groups for all independent countries with a 1990 population of at least 500'000 from 1946 to 2013 (Vogt et al. 2015).<sup>2</sup> Access to executive power for a given ethnic group is coded along a seven-point ordinal scale, whose three main components may be described as exclusive ethnic rule, power-sharing and exclusion from executive state power.<sup>3</sup> Ostensibly developed

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<sup>1</sup> In the framework of the EPR dataset, ethnicity is defined as "[...] any subjectively experienced sense of commonality based on the belief in common ancestry and shared culture." (Cederman et al. 2010, 98, definition based on Weber 1978).

<sup>2</sup> An ethnic group is deemed politically relevant if at least one organization active in national politics claims to represent it, or if members of the group are victims of state-led active, intentional and targeted discrimination (Cederman et al. 2010, 99).

<sup>3</sup> The exclusive rule category is further divided into two sub-categories, namely monopoly and dominant (where other groups are only awarded symbolic participation in the executive government). Likewise, the power-sharing category is subdivided into senior and junior partner status, depending on the extent of influence exerted over the government. Finally, the exclusion

for the study of civil war and to overcome naïve approaches to the role of ethnicity in conflict, which measure its impact based on the degree of ethno-fractionalization (see for instance Fearon and Laitin 2003 and Collier and Hoeffler 2004), the EPR Core Dataset (along with its associated datasets that comprise the EPR data family) aims primarily at evaluating how the political salience of ethnicity affects mobilization and political violence trajectories. Yet, the dataset may also be of relevance when studying other development-related issues.

## CODING ETHNIC GROUPS IN ZAMBIA

As a consequence of colonial policies (primarily labor migration, missionary education, and institutions of indirect rule), Zambia displays a complex pattern of ascriptive identities that are chiefly centered around 'tribal' (ethnic)<sup>4</sup> and linguistic affiliations (See Posner 2005). While each 'tribe' is considered to have originally possessed its own language,<sup>5</sup> organized labor migration to the Copperbelt mining areas, commercial farms and principal cities led to the gradual emergence of four major official colonial era languages: Bemba, Lozi, Tonga and Nyanja. This process was further consolidated by colonial policies in the field of education and media, in which colonialists often encouraged the adoption of a single regional language. Hence, the only languages that are spoken widely outside their core mother tongue groups are Nyanja and Bemba.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, a few occupational languages, such as Bemba for mining, Fanikalo or Pidgin Zulu for domestic servants and Nyanja for the police and army, emerged during the colonial era, some of which are still dominant in those trades today. Both linguistic and 'tribal' identities have persisted into the post-independence era, albeit in modified forms, and have played an important role in shaping new identities and political mobilization. This had been especially true of electoral campaigns with candidates routinely resorting to ethnic appeals (Posner 2005, Scarritt 2006).

In considering politically relevant ethnic groups in Zambia, the EPR Core Dataset bases its selection of groups on linguistic identities in accordance with its coding rule that requires ethnic cleavages to be salient for national politics (Cederman et al. 2010, 99). While 'tribal' identities are relevant at the regional level, linguistic identities are, in general, primarily relevant for national level politics in Zambia (Posner 2005, 116).<sup>7</sup>

The EPR Core Dataset identifies seven politically relevant linguistic groups in Zambia for the post-independence period, including *Bemba speakers*, *Nyanja speakers (Easterners)*, *Lozi (Barotse)* and *Tonga-Ila-Lenje (Southerners)*. The three remaining groups, the *Kaonde*, *Luvale* and *Lunda*, are all to be found in the North-Western province, where no dominant regional linguistic group emerged owing to the

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category is divided into three sub-categories: powerless, discriminated and self-exclusion (groups that rule over areas effectively separated from the "parent" country.) (See also Vogt et al. 2015, 1331 and Cederman et al. 2010).

<sup>4</sup> Nominally 73, in practice less, see Posner 2005, 54-5.

<sup>5</sup> Most of these 'tribal' languages were mutually intelligible dialects.

<sup>6</sup> Even English, the language of government, is not identified as the first or even second language of most Zambians, according to the 2010 Zambian Census.

<sup>7</sup> The EPR coding rules explicitly exclude identities based on direct kinship ties, such as tribal identities (Cederman et al. 2010, 99 fn 63).

province's remoteness and low population density (Posner 2005, 78-80; see also Papstein 1989). Their languages have official recognition in Zambia and allocated time on the national radio and television.

In general, Zambia has been hailed as a positive case of ethnic power-sharing in executive government (Lindemann 2011). From independence to this day, successive Zambian governments, starting with the first president Kenneth Kaunda, have attempted to balance distinct ethnic factions within the ruling elite by appointing representatives from all ethnic groups to ministerial and other key positions in the government (Posner 2005, 127; see also Lindemann 2011). Thus, for the entire post-independence period, the EPR Core Dataset codes all ethnic groups as included in an ethnic power-sharing agreement. Given their larger demographic size, the *Bemba speakers*, *Nyanja speakers (Easterners)* and *Tonga-Ila-Lenje (Southerners)* are coded as senior partners, while all four remaining groups are coded as junior partners (for more information, see the EPR Atlas, Girardin et al 2015; Vogt et al. 2015).

While no major change relating to ethnic groups' access to political power is recorded for the period under consideration, the situation is somewhat different when it comes to regional autonomy. The *Barotse (Lozi)* people were governed under a separate arrangement by the British colonial authorities, which protected the continuous preeminence of the Barotse royal establishment in return for mineral rights in the Western province (Hall 1967, 239).<sup>8</sup> At independence, the new Western province was thus promised wide-ranging powers related to local policy-making and land rights. This regional autonomy arrangement was, however, de facto scrapped the year after by the new post-independence government. Thus, the EPR dataset codes the Lozi as regionally autonomous only for the period 1964-1965. Nevertheless, Lozi organizations in favor of autonomy or secession continue to enjoy support to this day, and have become more vocal and militant during the last decade. Table 1 hereunder provides a short overview of the EPR coding decisions for Zambia.

ETHNIC GROUP	POLITICAL STATUS	REGIONAL AUTONOMY	SIZE
Bemba speakers	<i>Senior partner</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>0.43</i>
Nyanja speakers (Easterners)	<i>Senior partner</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>0.18</i>
Tonga-Ila-Lenje (Southerners)	<i>Senior partner</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>0.19</i>
Lozi (Barotse)	<i>Junior partner</i>	<i>Yes (1964-1965) / No (1966-2014)</i>	<i>0.08</i>
Lunda	<i>Junior partner</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>0.05</i>
Luvale	<i>Junior partner</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>0.04</i>

Table 1: Politically relevant ethnic groups in Zambia (EPR Core Dataset)

<sup>8</sup>It is important to note here that the old Western Province was renamed Copperbelt after independence, while the Barotse Province became the new Western Province.

## CRITICAL PERSPECTIVE

While generally accurately describing the relevance of ethnicity, the current coding of the EPR dataset, in focusing explicitly on ethno-linguistic groups, fails to account for the nuanced and dynamic salience of ethnic identities at the national level. In the following, we provide a critical discussion of two specific aspects: the relevance of 'tribal' identities for national level politics and the difference between rural and urban areas in terms of the importance of ethnic identities for politics.

In general, the decision to focus on the primary relevance of ethno-linguistic identities at the national level is an apt one in light of previous research (Posner 2005; Lindemann 2011). Yet, a more nuanced account of the political relevance of ethnicity points out that, while ethno-linguistic identities have generally been dominant at the national level, 'tribal' claims have been occasionally heard at the national level too, and appear to be increasing, at least among the major tribes. Traditional representatives of the Bemba tribe (e.g. *Bemba Paramount Chief, Ilamfya Council*)<sup>9</sup> have often complained of being under-represented within the Zambian government (See Posner 2005, 122). This distinction between language and 'tribe' is demonstrated by the continued importance of traditional institutions (chiefdoms). Thus, members of the Bemba 'tribe' are the subjects of *Paramount Chief Chitimukulu* and must be differentiated from the Bemba speaking Lunda subjects of *Paramount Chief Mwata Kazembe* of Luapula province.<sup>10</sup> The importance of 'tribal' identities for politics are most sharply displayed at traditional ceremonies that take place all over Zambia and provide an opportunity for urban elites to renew their ethnic credentials by offering presents to their respective rulers.<sup>11</sup>

Specifically, Bemba claims of underrepresentation in the national executive have primarily centered around the lack of any Zambian President from Bemba 'tribal' background, despite the tribe being the largest tribal group.<sup>12</sup> In fact, in proportional terms, the Bemba 'tribe' is nearly of equal size (21 %) to the *Nyanja speakers* group (23.3 %), the next largest ethno-linguistic group after *the Bemba speakers* (Zambia Central Statistical Office 2012). It is worth noting that the complaints' focus on the presidency is also not ubiquitous, given the breadth of policy-making power vested in the presidency in Zambia (Scarritt 2006, 239). Furthermore, as Posner reports (2005, 126-7), the 'tribal' Bemba were consistently under-represented in government during the later presidency of Kenneth Kaunda, who tended to reserve the deputy president positions for *Tonga, Lozi* and *Nyanja* speakers.

The relevance of 'tribal' identities for national level politics has also not been limited to the Bemba 'tribe'. In fact, a few other large 'tribal' identities have occasionally gained relevance in national level politics.

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<sup>9</sup> As opposed to the Bemba-speaking linguistic group.

<sup>10</sup> In fact, the Bemba-speaking Lunda regard themselves as part of the Lunda Empire that once straddled Angola, Zambia and Congo.

<sup>11</sup> For instance, The *Bemba Paramount Chief* holds the annual *Kusefya pa ngwena*, a celebration of the power of the ruling Crocodile clan. *Chief Mwata Kazembe* of the Lunda in Luapula hosts the *Mtomboko* festival marking the triumphant expansion of the Lunda empire by his ancestors.

<sup>12</sup> None of the Bemba-speaking presidents (Kenneth Kaunda, Frederick Chiluba, Michael Sata and Edgar Lungu) was (is) from the Bemba 'tribe'. In particular, President Chiluba, who was a Bemba speaker from Luapula Province, is by implication excluded from this definition of "Bembaness" centered around *Chief Chitimukulu*. The only major opportunity was Simon Kapwepwe as leader of the United Progressive Party in 1971-2. His party was, however, swiftly dismantled by Kenneth Kaunda, who then proceeded to introduce a one-party state in 1973 (Scarritt 2012, 10).

This is in particular the case of the Tumbuka, who are usually included in the Eastern Nyanja speaking group, and the Mambwe people of Northern Zambia, included in the Bemba-speakers. Both groups' respective elites have at times expressed specific political claims. Indeed, the 1996 elections saw Dean Mungumba, an ethnic Mambwe, mounting a serious challenge to incumbent President Chiluba, drawing on support from Mambwe-linked trade unions.

Compounding these considerations, the 'tribal' label (referring thus to kinship ties) attached to sub-linguistic identities also contributes to the misrepresentation of the nature of ties involved. Although maybe an apt designation for some of the smallest 'tribal' groups, these identities are more accurately defined as ethnic and not as tribal. Indeed, the 'ethnic' label is appropriate here given that affiliation to these groups is based on "the belief in common ancestry" or on "shared culture", in line with the EPR Core Dataset definition (Cederman et al. 2010, 98). In fact, both Tumbuka and Chewa groups, comprising the Nyanja speaking Easterners in Zambia, are distinct ethnic groups and bitter political rivals in neighboring Malawi, and are coded as such in the EPR data (See EPR Atlas, Girardin et al 2015; Vogt et al. 2014; Posner 2004).<sup>13</sup> A more careful appraisal of the relevant ethnic identities that takes into account the nuanced ways in which so-called 'tribal' identities play a role alongside ethno-linguistic identities would thus contribute to providing a stronger picture of the politically relevant ethnic landscape in Zambia. This account would also support a constructivist approach to ethnicity as being constituted of learned identities, as opposed to innate ones. In fact, because of successive population movements in southern Africa, there is no neat distinction between ancestry and language or ethnic identity. Therefore, building on the previous discussion, we would suggest splitting the Bemba-speakers group in the EPR Core Dataset into a 'Proper Bembas' group and an 'Other Bemba-speakers' group.

Second, recent evidence suggests that the salience of ethnic identities within urban areas has lost preponderance for national level politics. Historically, non-ethnic cleavages, in particular those pertaining to classes and the rural-urban divide, have had only limited sway on national-level political attitudes in Zambia (Posner 2005; see also Larmer and Fraser 2007).<sup>14</sup> For rural-urban identities, in particular, the continuous maintenance of family linkages and rural 'tribal' affiliation (encouraged by Government identity forms that require citizens to indicate their chief and village of origin) have historically hindered the formation of urban identities among migrant workers in the Copperbelt cities, as well as in the capital, Lusaka (Posner 2005, 85). This dynamic has taken place despite the fact that second and third generation children of migrants do not see themselves as subjects of a chief and often do not even speak their mother tongue fluently. However, the economic recession induced by the structural adjustment program of the 1990's disproportionately affected the urban centers (Larmer and Fraser 2007), resulting in widespread dissatisfaction in the Copperbelt mining cities and Lusaka, which has in turn weakened the relevance of ethnic identities for national level politics. Capitalizing on this discontent and popular anger at Chinese companies operating in Zambia, the Patriotic Front (PF) party was able to mount an effective opposition to the ruling Movement for Multi-Party Democracy (MMD) party by resorting to a populist and nationalist agenda (Larmer and Fraser 2007, 618, 623; see also Cheeseman and Hinfelaar 2010, 65). This strategy, which was an unusual break from traditional Zambian

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<sup>13</sup> This distinction becomes even more complicated once one considers that among the Tumbuka and Chewa, some members have Zulu names and claim Ngoni ancestry.

<sup>14</sup> The only exception to this trend was the emergence of class identities in the mining cities of the Copperbelt due to the inevitable distinctions induced by labor relations in a resource extraction area (Posner 2005, 87).

ethnic politics, allowed Michael Sata to raise a strong challenge to President Levy Mwanawasa's re-election in 2006, and again to Rupiah Banda in the 2008 elections after the death of Mwanawasa. Michael Sata was finally elected to the presidency in 2011 (Larmer and Fraser 2007, 612; Cheeseman and Larmer 2015; Scarritt 2012).<sup>15</sup>

Notwithstanding the decreased influence of ethnic affiliation within urban areas from the 2006 presidential and parliamentary elections onwards, ethnic identities have remained salient in rural areas. In fact, as many observers and political opponents alike have noted, urban centers were only one of the two key constituencies of Michael Sata, as he was also able to draw on extensive support from the Northern and Luapula provinces, where Bemba-speakers are concentrated (Cheeseman and Hinfelaar 2010). In this regard, it should be recalled that although Sata was based in Lusaka for most of his political career where he built a reputation as a man of action, while campaigning for the presidency in Luapula and the Northern Provinces he resorted to the use of Bemba proverbs and idioms. In short, Michael Sata made campaign statements reflecting each constituency's (urban or rural) specific concerns and preferences. This type of political mobilization has been labelled "ethnopolitism" by Cheeseman and Hinfelaar (2015). In closing, this seemingly contradictory assessment of the relevance of ethnic identities in both rural and urban areas thus underscores how different degrees of exposure to structural adjustment programs, as well as foreign investments, in particular within the mining sectors, has reshaped political cleavages in Zambia. It also provides a nuanced account of the relevance of ethnic identities for national politics in Zambia by highlighting the presence of strong spatial patterns.

## CONCLUSION

To conclude, the previous discussion has shed light on the limitations of the EPR Core Dataset's current coding for Zambia, highlighting how the salience of ethnic identities is affected by the continuing relevance of distinct 'tribal' identities for national politics (in particular, as it relates to the Bemba tribe). Indeed, the EPR Core Dataset is currently not able to account for the existence of a repertoire of multiple ethnic identities, which most Zambians have on account of their heterogeneous ancestry, as, for example, the Lunda who speak Bemba in Luapula and the Ngoni who speak Chewa or Tumbuka in Eastern Zambia. Likewise, the presence of spatial differences between rural and urban areas in the relevance of ethnic identities also suggests important variation in the overall salience of ethnic identities in the country. Therefore, in addition to suggesting ways of improving the current coding of the EPR Core Dataset, this critical discussion of Zambia's recent history stresses the need for disaggregating ethnic groups and focusing on the role of ethnic organizations, and in particular their strategies, in shaping mobilization. In this regard, it is worth noting that the EPR-Organizations Dataset, which is currently being developed, provides an attractive avenue to offer a more nuanced account of the relevance of ethnic identities in Zambia by focusing specifically on the role of ethnic organizations.

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<sup>15</sup> In fact, the evidence suggests that Michael Sata's reliance on non-ethnic claims is not as unheard of as it seems. Indeed, both the independence struggle and the overthrow of the Kaunda regime in 1991 articulated nationalist claims.

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