

The Politics of the Corpse: President Levy Mwanawasa's Death, Funeral and Political Contestation in Post-Colonial Zambia

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Informed by recent scholarship that underscores the centrality of death, corpses and funerals in contemporary African politics, this article explores the ways in which political actors in the ruling Movement for Multiparty Democracy (MMD) and the opposition Patriotic Front (PF) in Zambia appropriated the corpse and legacy of President Levy Mwanawasa to mobilise political support in 2008. The article insists that in order to secure support indispensable to winning the presidential by-election necessitated by his death, leaders in the MMD and PF deployed the president's corpse in their conflicting bids to retain power and to construct an alternative political order, respectively. In placing Mwanawasa's death, corpse and funeral and resultant rival discourses at the centre of its analysis, this article distances itself from secularist and modernist scholarship that disconnects death and mortuary ceremonies from contemporary African politics.

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Introduction

On 25 August 2008, an altercation erupted at Chipata airport, in Zambia's Eastern province, between the widow of the recently deceased President Levy Mwanawasa and Michael Sata, who was then the opposition leader of the Patriotic Front (PF).¹ Visibly upset by the arrival of Sata at her late husband's funeral at the airport, Maureen Mwanawasa asked the opposition leader why he had travelled to Chipata when he had already viewed the president's corpse in Lusaka, the country's seat of power. Perhaps unaware of the strong exception the first lady took to his presence at the funeral, Michael Sata replied that he had chartered a plane to accompany Levy Mwanawasa's dead body to all provinces in the country. This, Sata elaborated, could compensate for his earlier inability to visit the ailing republican president after Mwanawasa had been admitted to a military hospital in Paris, France, in June 2008. Sata further accused officials in the government of the Movement for Multiparty Democracy (MMD) – the party on whose ticket Mwanawasa had ascended to power in 2001 – of having blocked the PF founder from travelling to France to visit him.

But Sata's justification for attending the funeral of Mwanawasa in Chipata hardly mollified the widow. Angrily, she warned him against using 'the president's death to push [the PF leader's own] political agenda' and ordered the controversial politician to leave the airport immediately.² When Sata seemed reluctant to do so, Maureen Mwanawasa implored the MMD chairperson

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Introduction

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1 *The Post*, Lusaka, 26 August 2008, pp. 1, 4; *The Post*, 27 August 2008, p. 2.

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for Eastern province and the provincial minister to summon the police to physically eject Sata from the airport.³ Although the first lady held no official position in the MMD government, both officials complied and ordered the police to evict the Sata from the funeral.⁴ The police obliged. In full glare of hundreds of mourners, traditional rulers, cabinet ministers, and Members of Parliament who had gathered to pay their final respects to the president, policemen gave the PF leader 'marching orders'.

Though publicly humiliated, Michael Sata was not yet finished. As he boarded his chartered plane, the infuriated Sata turned Maureen Mwanawasa's accusation against him on its head, declaring that it was the widow herself and her cronies in the MMD government who had in fact politicised the president's corpse by deciding to take it around the country. He vowed that neither the first lady nor her supporters who backed her call for his ejection from the funeral could stop him from escorting the dead body of President Mwanawasa around the country, or indeed, from grieving for him.⁵ Scarcely a week after he was 'chased' from the funeral and prevented from accompanying the president's corpse on its nearly week-long county-wide tour, the unrepentant Sata escalated the tussle between him, the widow and the MMD government. He accused her of engaging more in national politics than mourning her dead husband and 'the MMD government of turning Mwanawasa's body into a political arena'.⁶

The import of Maureen Mwanawasa's allegation that Sata tried to transform the death of the president into political capital, and of his reaction to that allegation, has been largely lost on observers of recent Zambian politics. Thus, despite burgeoning scholarship on how death and funerals animate political contests in many African countries since their return to democratic rule in the 1990s,⁷ the interface between mortality and power struggles in Zambia remains too little explored.⁸ This is despite the fact that the wind of democratisation, with its consequent struggles for power, also blew across the country recently.⁹ But in Zambia, where the politics of death predates and has outlasted colonialism,¹⁰ the dead and their corpses cannot be legitimately abstracted from the politics of the living. For, as one scholar astutely observes, in times of political contestation, dead bodies become useful symbolic resources that politicians mobilise to fashion political reality and meaning, to secure their followers' allegiance and, lastly, to legitimate their competing claims to power.¹¹

The significance of the dead body to the living and to the survival of political regimes should not be underestimated. Concrete and protean, sacred and profane, the corpse is a complex, ambiguous and enigmatic object. It is thus a source of no small amount of ambivalence that

3 *Ibid.*

4 *Ibid.*

5 *Ibid.*

6 *National Mirror*, Lusaka, 3–6 September 2008, p. 4.

7 See Peter Geschiere, 'Funerals and Belonging: Different Patterns in South Cameroon', *African Studies Review* 48, 2 (2005), pp. 45–64.

8 But see Walima T. Kalusa, 'The Killing of Lilian Margaret Burton and Black and White Nationalisms in Northern Rhodesia (Zambia) in the 1960s', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 37, 1 (2011), pp. 63–77; 'Death, Christianity, and African Miners: Contesting Indirect Rule in the Zambian Copperbelt', *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 44, 1 (2011), pp. 89–112.

9 Miles Larmer and Alastair Fraser, 'Of Cabbages and King Cobra: Populist Politics and Zambia's 2006 Election', *African Affairs*, 106, 425 (2007), pp. 611–37; Miles Larmer, *Rethinking African Politics: History of Opposition in Zambia* (Farnham, Ashgate, 2011); Nic Cheeseman and Marja Hinfelaar, 'Parties, Platforms, and Political Mobilization: The Zambian Presidential Election of 2008', *African Affairs*, 109, 434 (2009), pp. 51–76.

10 Kalusa, 'The Killing of Lilian Margaret Burton'; Kalusa, 'Death, Christianity and African Miners'.

11 Katherine Verdery, *The Political Lives of Dead Bodies: Reburials and Post-Socialist Change* (New York, Columbia University Press, 2008). See also A. Ben-Amos, *Funerals, Politics, and Memory in Modern France, 1789–1996* (New York, Oxford University Press, 2000); 'The Sacred Centre of Power: Paris And Republican Funerals', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 22, 1 (1991), pp. 27–48; 'The Other World of Memory: State Funerals of the French Third Republic as Rites of Commemoration', *History and Memory*, 1, 1 (1989), pp. 85–108; Matthew D. Esposito, 'The Politics of Death: State Funerals as Rites of Reconciliation in Porfirian Mexico, 1876–1889', *Americas*, 62, 1 (2005), pp. 65–94.

energises human and political imagination,¹² evoking multi-vocal meaning and inspiring diverse, if conflicting, political visions and uses among political rulers and their subjects.¹³ Unsurprisingly, therefore, political actors often creatively harness corpses and funerals to endless political projects to secure power and/or to challenge those who wield it.¹⁴ In this context, dead bodies become significant to (de)legitimizing power, redefining political identity and power relations, and constructing alternative political order. Thus corpses, especially those of rulers, possess political life long after they have been interred. In the apt terms of an eminent Nigerian scholar, this enables deceased leaders to continue influencing the politics of the living from the grave.¹⁵

In tandem with scholarship that investigates the centrality of death, mortuary rituals, religious/civic festivals and symbolic objects to the (de)construction of power,¹⁶ many academics working on historically diverse societies have recently investigated the many ways in which political actors deploy the dead in political projects.¹⁷ Sajal Nag, for example, illuminates how authorities in post-1945 south Asia mobilised corpses in nation-building processes and in the consequent creation of distinct national and political identities. Nag maintains that it was to this end that the totalitarian regime in Bangladesh appropriated the corpse and legacy of a leading Indian poet. Determined to put the dead poet to political work, the regime, Nag argues, declared him a national monument and hastily buried his body within Bangladesh against the wishes of his grieving family and the dictates of international law, which required that the poet be interred in his native homeland, India. Nag concludes that, in burying the corpse of the poet in Bangladesh, the authorities hoped to confer upon their country a political identity distinct from that of India itself and of the neighbouring Pakistan.¹⁸

Sajal Nag's insightful views resonate with those of Avner Ben-Amos. For the latter alerts us to the multiple ways in which the unpopular republican regime in 19th-century France paraded corpses of 'great men' to overcome political opposition and to legitimate the regime's claim to power.¹⁹ Beset with relentless opposition from the Catholic Church and other quarters, the republicans, Ben-Amos argues, organised magnificent state funerals for fallen heroes to gain political support from indifferent citizens, unify the country and thus tighten their grip on the political reins.

More directly pertinent to the framing of this article is anthropological and historical scholarship located at the nexus of modern African politics, death, corpses and mortuary rites. Building on much older anthropological studies that once illuminated the interface of final

12 See Mark Lamont, 'Decomposing Pollution? Corpses, Burials, and Affliction among the Meru of Central Kenya', in Michael Jindra and Joël Noret (eds), *Funerals in Africa: Explorations of a Social Phenomenon* (New York and Oxford, Berghahn, 2011), p. 88.

13 See Florence Bernault, 'Body, Power and Sacrifice in Equatorial Africa', *Journal of African History*, 47, 2 (2006), pp. 207–39; Chang-hui Chi, 'The Death of a Virgin: The Cult of Wang Yulan and Nationalism in Jinmen, Taiwan', *Anthropological Quarterly*, 82, 3 (2009), pp. 669–89.

14 See Tom Trice, 'Rites of Protest: Populist Funerals in Imperial St. Petersburg, 1876–1878', *Slavic Review*, 60, 1 (2001), pp. 50–74; Ben-Amos, 'Sacred Center of Power'; Walima T. Kalusa and Megan Vaughan, *Death, Belief and Politics in Central Africa* (Lusaka, Lembani Trust, 2013).

15 This point is inspired by Wale Adebaniwi, 'The Cult of Awo: The Political Life of a Dead Leader', *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 46, 3 (2008), pp. 335–60.

16 Mona Ozouf, *Festival and the French Revolution*, translated by Alan Sheridan (Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1988); David I. Kertzer, *Ritual, Politics and Power* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1988); Maurice Agulhon, 'Politics, Images, and Symbols in Post-Revolutionary France', in Sean Wilentz (ed.), *Rites of Power: Symbols, Ritual and Politics since the Middle Ages* (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988), pp. 177–205.

17 Michael C. Kearl and Ansel Rinaldi, 'The Political Uses of the Dead as Symbols in Contemporary Civil Religions', *Social Forces*, 61, 3 (1983), pp. 693–708.

18 Sajal Nag, 'Two Nations and a Dead Body: Mortuary Rites and the Post-Colonial Modes of Nation-Making in South Asia', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 14, 50 (2006), pp. 5183–90.

19 Ben-Amos, *Funeral, Politics, and Memory*; Ben-Amos, 'The Other World of Memory'; Ben-Amos, 'The Sacred Centre of Power'.

rites of passage and grassroots politics in the continent,²⁰ anthropologists have recently been exploring the ways in which power struggles triggered by political democratisation in Africa since the 1990s draw on local knowledge of death, with its related practices. Working in this mode, Peter Geschiere, for example, has demonstrated how people in Cameroon have innovatively turned funerals into an important test of political belonging and identity. As Geschiere convincingly argues, this has had vital implications with regard to how politicians in that country lay claim to political power and whom they mobilise to attain it.²¹

Writing on an earlier period, historian Megan Vaughan asserts that mortuary rituals performed for deceased Bemba chiefs in colonial north-eastern Zambia were symbolically intertwined with local conceptions of power. She insists that these rites were central to the exercise of chiefly authority, not least because Bemba chiefs lacked an institutionalised bureaucracy through which they could enforce their political influence over their subjects, but also because colonialism itself grossly eroded their power, their authority and their prestige.²² In another related study, Vaughan demonstrates that, faced with rapidly waning political fortune in 2010 due to deepening poverty and corruption, President Bingu wa Mutharika of Malawi reburied the remains of the late dictator President Hastings Kamuzu Banda in a costly mausoleum. As the historian rightly points out, this was a well-calculated strategy by which wa Mutharika hoped to bolster his political influence and following, especially in areas of the country where the dictator had enjoyed much support before his death.²³

In sum, this scholarship collectively attests to the significance of death, corpses and funerals to modern politics in Africa and beyond. This perspective confounds modernist and secularist academic discourses that postulate that modern societies, unlike 'traditional' ones, are insulated from the influence of the dead.²⁴ To the contrary, the literature under probe confirms the truism that death, corpses and funerals are inextricably embedded in contemporary politics. At the risk of repetition, leaders who wield power deploy dead bodies and orchestrate funerals no less to mobilise political support than to legitimate their claims to power and to reinforce their hold on it. Conversely, their detractors deploy corpses and rituals of death to contest the power of incumbent regimes and/or to forge alternative political order, relations and identity.²⁵

Based on personal observations, interviews and abundant media accounts of the state funeral that the MMD government orchestrated for President Levy Mwanawasa after his death in 2008, this article draws on some of these insights to map the ways in which MMD officials and Michael Sata transformed the corpse and legacy of the president into a contested terrain. The article maintains that while MMD functionaries harnessed the deceased leader's dead body to their efforts to retain power, Sata unsuccessfully tried to deploy it to dislodge the MMD government from political office. The article is divided into four main sections. The first section discusses the constitutional crisis and the resultant power struggle that rocked the MMD government in the aftermath of the death of Levy Mwanawasa. Against the background of the power struggle, the second section both documents the country-wide state funeral that the MMD government organised for the deceased president and delineates the funeral's political implications. The third section explores the seemingly uniform but competing funeral discourses that the political ruling class and their followers constructed to make sense of Mwanawasa's death, mourning and

20 See Edward E. Evans-Pritchard, 'Burials and Mortuary Rites of the Nuer', *African Affairs*, 48, 190 (1949), pp. 56–63; Audrey Richards, 'Keeping the King Divine', *Proceedings of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland 1968* (1968), pp. 23–35.

21 Geschiere, 'Funerals and Belonging'.

22 Megan Vaughan, "'Divine Kings': Sex, Death and Anthropology in Inter-War East/Central Africa", *Journal of African History*, 49, 3 (2008), pp. 383–401; Rebekah Lee and Megan Vaughan, 'Death and Dying in the History of Africa since 1800', *Journal of African History*, 49, 3 (2008), pp. 341–59.

23 Kalusa and Vaughan, *Death, Belief and Politics*, Chapter 9.

24 For a critique of such notions, see Kears and Rinaldi, 'The Political Uses of the Dead'.

25 This insight is derived from Trice, 'Rites of Protest'; see also Kertzer, *Ritual, Politics and Power*, p. 1.

legacy. The section shows that the funeral discourse of the political elites projected the mass mourning that attended the funeral as a demonstration of popular endorsement of not only the socio-economic and political agenda that President Mwanawasa had pursued in life but also of his leadership and legacy. Thus the elites' mortuary discourse placed a premium upon his achievements, his values and his ideals. Coupled with the magnificent funeral that the MMD government organised for the president, this discourse endowed him with values and virtues, turning him into an exemplar of such values and thus an important political symbol. It also invited the citizens to mourn him, to emulate his values and, most importantly, to rally behind the MMD's presidential candidate in the name of the same values.²⁶ But it is most unlikely that the ordinary men and women who grieved for the dead leader *en masse* did so at the behest of the political ruling class. For, as the third section further postulates, ordinary Zambians themselves crafted their own funeral discourse that fed off popular culture of death and beliefs as much as it illuminated their social, economic and political concerns.

The fourth and final section of this article grapples with how Michael Sata sought to graft the discourses of both the elites and of the rank and file on to his crusade to win the popular support required to unseat the MMD government. Taking a cue from the altercation that flared up between him and Maureen Mwanawasa in Chipata, the section suggests that the PF leader perceived in her husband's dead body a chance to construct a mass political following among people who mourned the president so as to defeat the MMD government at the polls. To this end, he challenged the efforts of both the widow and the government to monopolise the corpse and legacy of the fallen leader. In death, then, President Levy Mwanawasa became a hotly contested symbol deployed by Zambian politicians in conflicting political projects.

Levy Mwanawasa's Death, Constitutional Crisis and Succession Wrangle

President Mwanawasa suffered a debilitating stroke on 28 June 2008 while attending a summit of the African Union in Cairo, Egypt. He was evacuated to Percy military hospital in Paris, France, where he received medical treatment for close to two months before he passed away on 19 August 2008. As some analysts of contemporary politics in Zambia have lately observed, the unexpected death of the president engendered a constitutional crisis, casting a dark cloud of political uncertainty over the country.²⁷ This crisis was fuelled by the fact that the Zambian constitution provides for no presidential succession within the governing party. To the contrary, it requires the holding of a presidential by-election within 90 days of the demise of the sitting executive.²⁸ For the MMD, this crisis was compounded by the fact Levy Mwanawasa did not name his political heir, although he had been a victim of a major accident in 1991, suffered a stroke in 2006 and enjoyed poor health for a long time.

It is in the context of the constitutional limbo that the MMD government had to choose the successor of President Mwanawasa and candidate in the by-election, manage the politics of succession, and simultaneously orchestrate a state funeral for the dead leader. As the analysts cited above remark, the lack in the ruling party of an obvious heir to Levy Mwanawasa, coupled with the limited time the government had to prepare for the election scheduled for October 2008, sparked an unprecedented struggle for power that threatened to tear the MMD government apart.²⁹ Barely a few days after the announcement of the death of the republican president, no less than fifteen top leaders in the MMD government declared their intention to

26 See Ben-Amos, 'The Sacred Centre of Power'.

27 Much of the data on the constitutional crisis and the consequent intense struggle for power in the MMD derives from Cheeseman and Hinfelaar, 'Parties, Platforms, and Political Mobilization'.

28 *Ibid.*

29 *Ibid.*

succeed him, igniting an intense power struggle. Prominent among the contenders were the Acting President Rupiah Banda, Finance Minister Ng'andu Magande, two former vice-presidents, Nevers Mumba and Enock Kavindele, former Works and Supply Minister Ludwig Sondashi, and Willa Mungómba, former chairman of a widely acclaimed constitution review commission. Other contenders included the Minister of Home Affairs and relative of the president, Ronnie Shikapwasha, Lusaka-based businessman Sebastian Kopulande and, reportedly, Maureen Mwanawasa herself, who initially kept her presidential ambitions from public inspection.³⁰

Each of these contestants enjoyed some following in the ruling party and its government. This situation inflamed tensions in the government, dividing its allegiances into several mutually hostile camps. Besides aggravating older fissures, this situation threw the MMD government into political disarray, thereby polarising it and ultimately emasculating its internal unity.³¹ Matters came to a head at the end of August, when senior members in the MMD's National Executive Committee (NEC) in the North-Western province, who had endorsed the candidature of Rupiah Banda, violently clashed with junior officials in the party, whose preferred candidate was Ng'andu Magande.³² Sparking the conflict was the claim by senior NEC officials that they alone possessed the authority to adopt a presidential candidate of the party without subjecting his/her candidature to a convention, as the MMD constitution required. This claim infuriated many officials in the lower ranks of the party, who accused pro-Banda elements of flouting the party's constitution, imposing the acting president on unwilling party members and shielding him from losing an election in the event of the convention being held.³³

NEC's intervention in the politics of succession therefore deepened, rather than resolved, the wrangle for power in the government. Indeed, this intervention drew an acute combat line between those who supported Rupiah Banda and those who backed his rival Ng'andu Magande, the two leaders turning out to be the most formidable contenders for the presidential dais.³⁴ The narrowing of the political contest to them thus gave the power struggle a new twist as it aggravated the battle for power between two leaders, for those who dropped out of the presidential race rallied behind either the acting president or the finance minister. Two days before the president's burial on 3 September, Maureen Mwanawasa, for one, publicly declared her support for Ng'andu Magande, claiming that the president had anointed him as his successor.³⁵ Others who endorsed this controversial claim and switched their allegiance to Magande included Ronnie Shikapwasha, Sylvia Masebo, the Minister of Local Government and Sara Sayifwanda, another MMD minister. Together, they formed the 'Elect Magande' team, through which they relentlessly campaigned for the finance minister.

From its inception, the campaign team eulogised Magande as the most suitable successor to Levy Mwanawasa because the former allegedly shared the latter's values and principles: commitment to combating poverty, championing social and economic development and antipathy towards corruption and poverty. This discourse was perhaps best articulated by Dipak Patel, a Zambian of Indian origin, who had earlier served as commerce and trade minister in the MMD government. An ardent supporter of Magande, Patel argued that the finance minister was not only highly qualified but also possessed the capacity to develop the country's economy, which, if elected president, he would do. This would, in turn, enable him to provide social services and thus tackle poverty successfully.³⁶ Patel's views were echoed by another

30 Interview with Dr Katele Kalumba, 22 August 2015. All interviews for this article were conducted by the author.

Dr Kalumba was the MMD's National Secretary at the time of Levy Mwanawasa's death.

31 *The Post*, 22 August 2008; 25 August 2008.

32 *The Post*, 29 August 2008; but see also *Times of Zambia*, Lusaka, 29 August 2008, p. 1.

33 *The Post*, 29 August 2008.

34 Cheeseman and Hinfelaar, 'Parties, Platforms, and Political Mobilization'.

35 *The Post*, 1 September 2008, p. 1.

36 *The Post*, 29 August 2008.

former cabinet minister, who eulogised Magande as a morally upright leader who, besides honouring Mwanawasa's legacy and anti-corruption crusade, would unify the country and end tribalism.³⁷ Both former ministers therefore implored the MMD to support the finance minister and popularised his claim that he was the most 'eminently qualified [candidate] to represent the MMD for adoption as a Presidential candidate.'³⁸

MMD officials who supported Magande's candidature also launched a vitriolic campaign against Acting President Rupiah Banda and his camp. Apart from dismissing Banda as 'far from what President Levy Mwanawasa had in mind for a successor', they caricatured him as an old, incompetent politician who lacked Magande's and Mwanawasa's economic vision and intolerance to corruption and tribalism. To his critics, Rupiah Banda was thus incapable of inheriting the mantle of the president, let alone his aversion to the suffering of the poor.³⁹ Since the acting president was closely associated with the United National Independence Party (UNIP), which the MMD booted out of office in 1991, and since he had joined the ruling party much later, his opponents further denounced him as little more than an interloper, who merely 'wanted to reap where he did not sow'.⁴⁰ Lastly, they castigated Rupiah Banda and his supporters as the 'real enemies' of Levy Mwanawasa⁴¹ and as 'prophets of doom who would never be builders of [the Zambian] republic'.⁴²

But Ng'andu Magande's claim to power was challenged by Rupiah Banda. Besides denouncing the finance minister as a political novice without any real national appeal,⁴³ the acting president cast himself as Levy Mwanawasa's natural heir. Banda insisted that, as republican vice-president under the president, he had been his closest adviser on many national issues. Banda further claimed that, from this vantage point, he had played a more central role than Magande in shaping Mwanawasa's socio-economic vision and policies and, by extension, those of the country as a whole. He therefore declared himself to be a far better qualified candidate than his rival.⁴⁴

The acting president received support from several leading figures in and outside the MMD government. Among them were politically influential members of the party, such as the former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Vernon Mwaanga, who had lost influence under Mwanawasa and linked their political comeback to Rupiah Banda's ascent to political power.⁴⁵ Other leading figures supporting Banda were Ben Tetamashimba and Mike Mulongoti, the party's and government's spokesmen, respectively. As one MMD functionary later admitted, these and other officials backed Banda because, as acting president, he enjoyed advantages of incumbency, including control of the public purse, the police and the media. Thus their candidate 'would be in a position to access state resources for the [presidential election] campaign', and so more likely to secure the presidency for the ruling party.⁴⁶ But perhaps aware that Banda was too unpopular to command enough following in the party, his supporters, as earlier noted, called for expunging from the MMD constitution the clause that required the party's candidate for the presidency to be adopted at a convention. They similarly called for changes to the national Constitution

37 *Ibid.*

38 *The Post*, 26 August 2008. See also *Saturday Post*, 30 August 2008.

39 *The Post*, 22 August 2008.

40 *The Post*, 28 August 2008, p. 1; 27 August 2008; 2 September 2008; *Times of Zambia*, 28 August 2008.

41 *The Post*, 2 September 2008, pp. 1–2.

42 *Ibid.*, pp. 1, 4; *The Post*, 5 September 2008; 29 August 2008; 28 August 2008, p. 1; 27 August 2008; *Sunday Post*, 31 August 2008; *Times of Zambia*, 28 August 2008, p. 1.

43 *The Post*, 29 August 2008.

44 Interview with Katele Kalumba.

45 Cheeseman and Hinfelaar, 'Parties, Platforms, and Political Mobilization', p. 60.

46 Neo Simutanyi, 'The 2008 Presidential Election in Zambia: Incumbency, Political Contestation and Failure of Political Opposition', paper presented to the CMIA/ISE conference, 'Election Processes, Liberation Movements and Democratic Change in Africa', Maputo, 8–11 April 2010, pp. 2–3.

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37 *Ibid.*

38 *The Post*, 26 August 2008. See also *Saturday Post*, 30 August 2008.

39 *The Post*, 22 August 2008.

40 *The Post*, 28 August 2008, p. 1; 27 August 2008; 2 September 2008; *Times of Zambia*, 28 August 2008.

41 *The Post*, 2 September 2008, pp. 1–2.

42 *Ibid.*, pp. 1, 4; *The Post*, 5 September 2008; 29 August 2008; 28 August 2008, p. 1; 27 August 2008; *Sunday Post*, 31 August 2008; *Times of Zambia*, 28 August 2008, p. 1.

43 *The Post*, 29 August 2008.

44 Interview with Katele Kalumba.

45 Cheeseman and Hinfelaar, 'Parties, Platforms, and Political Mobilization', p. 60.

46 Neo Simutanyi, 'The 2008 Presidential Election in Zambia: Incumbency, Political Contestation and Failure of Political Opposition', paper presented to the CMIA/ISE conference, 'Election Processes, Liberation Movements and Democratic Change in Africa', Maputo, 8–11 April 2010, pp. 2–3.

to enable the acting president to succeed to the presidency without holding an election.⁴⁷ Both calls were met with clenched fists from those who opposed Rupiah, prolonging the intra-party power struggle. And although the contest for power between Banda and Magande officially ended on 5 September 2008, when senior leaders on the National Executive Committee (NEC) elected Banda as the party's presidential candidate, the contest left the MMD deeply divided.

It is clear, then, that the succession dispute sparked by Mwanawasa's demise split the MMD government into two mutually hostile factions. Crucially, each faction sought to appropriate the dead president's values and legacy as its own in an effort to legitimate its claim to power. Inevitably, the tussle between Rupiah Banda and Ng'andu Magande emasculated unity in the MMD government, posing a major threat to its continuation in office. This tussle heightened the fear in the MMD of losing the presidential election to the opposition, generating calls among some concerned functionaries to resolve the divisive succession dispute and restore party unity to avoid losing the election.⁴⁸

The debilitating power struggle in the ruling party raised the spectre of electoral defeat, particularly at the hands of Michael Chilufya Sata, who had split from the MMD and formed the PF in 2001 in protest against being sidelined by Levy Mwanawasa's predecessor, President Frederick Chiluba. To be sure, in 2001 Sata secured a mere 3 per cent of the vote in the presidential and general elections, in which his rival, Mwanawasa, triumphed and the United Party for National Development (UPND) emerged as the largest opposition party. Five years later, however, the PF strongman won 29 per cent in the presidential polls, with this party's MPs scooping all urban seats in the politically significant Copperbelt and in Lusaka. By the time Levy Mwanawasa passed away in 2008, Sata's party not only controlled the bulk of urban municipal councils in the country but had also dislodged the UPND as the largest opposition party.⁴⁹

By 2008, then, Michael Sata had clearly risen from political obscurity to prominence. His party commanded a large following, especially in the industrial heartland of the Copperbelt, where he had captured the support of workers en masse by exploiting their economic grievances that had arisen from the liberalisation of Zambia's economy since the early 1990s. Sata further enjoyed growing popularity in the hinterlands of Luapula and Northern provinces, where he commanded the support of his fellow Bemba speakers.⁵⁰ With such growing grassroots support, the PF leader with his party posed a real threat of unseating the politically divided MMD government. This threat grew when, barely two months before the presidential election, the PF and the UPND began to discuss the possibility of merging to form a more formidable coalition against the MMD.⁵¹

President Mwanawasa's Corpse and State Funeral

The politically enervating factionalism in the MMD, coupled with the risk of electoral defeat at the hands of Michael Sata, provided the backdrop against which the MMD government organised a magnificent state funeral for President Levy Patrick Mwanawasa. As shown later, the funeral was designed to curtail the power struggle between rival factions in the MMD, to restore unity in the governing party, and possibly to secure the votes of those who would mourn the president. To these ends, and no less to mourn Mwanawasa 'with dignity,' the warring factions in the beleaguered government met on 21 August and tacitly placed a moratorium on the divisive contest for power, at least temporarily. More importantly, they set up a funeral/

47 *The Post*, 22 August 2008.

48 See *The Post*, 25 August 2008.

49 Sishuwa Sishuwa, 'The Making of an African Populist: Explaining the Rise of Michael Sata, 2001–2006' (MSc dissertation, Oxford University, 2011); see also Larmer and Fraser, 'Of Cabbages and King Cobra', p. 612.

50 *Ibid.*

51 *The Post*, 25 August 2008, p. 1.

burial planning committee.⁵² Presided over by Acting President Rupiah Banda, the committee consisted of a few cabinet ministers, Ronnie Shikapwasha, who represented the Mwanawasa family, and clergy drawn from all the major religious bodies in the country: the Council of Churches in Zambia, the Zambia Episcopal Conference, the Islamic Council of Zambia, and independent churches.

The funeral committee's main functions were twofold. First, it was tasked to plan a nationwide state funeral so that as many Zambians as possible could mourn the president. Under this arrangement, Mwanawasa's corpse was to be flown to all nine provinces of Zambia after its return from France. To raise funds to pay for such a mammoth funeral, the committee opened a bank account into which the government urged admirers and well-wishers of the president to deposit money generously. Second, and equally important, the committee sought to restore unity and harmony between rival forces in the MMD government, for it feared that the disruptive succession dispute in the governing party was a recipe for political destabilisation in the country as a whole. From its inception, therefore, the committee repeatedly implored the factions in the government to bury the hatchet and to live up to the dead president's 'message of peace and reconciliation'.⁵³

Since Levy Mwanawasa was the first Zambian president to die in office, the MMD-dominated funeral/burial committee lacked a funeral guideline. Yet this did not prevent the committee from devising an elaborate state funeral unprecedented in its pomp and splendour, its reach, its outpouring of grief and, at an estimated (and disputed) cost of ZMK2 billion (roughly US\$200 million), its extravagance.⁵⁴ According to the committee's funeral plan, later implemented by the MMD government, the state funeral would last for three weeks.⁵⁵ The president's corpse would be flown from Paris to Lusaka, where it was to lie in state at the Mulungushi International Conference Centre (MICC) between 23 and 25 August. From the latter date, the body was to be taken by air to all the nine provinces in the country, thus enabling as many citizens as possible to mourn their fallen leader.

The remains of President Levy Mwanawasa were accordingly returned to Lusaka, arriving at its international airport in the morning on 23 August on a military airbus provided by French President Nicholas Sarkozy.⁵⁶ Encased in a sparkling gold casket draped with the Zambian national flag, the dead president received a hero's welcome from hundreds of thousands of mourners, who converged at the airport. Mourners included those who had earlier flocked to the airport in vehicles provided by the MMD government, evidently eager to foster collective and mass mourning of President Mwanawasa in an effort to demonstrate the government's popularity and to unite the bereaved nation. Most conspicuous among the mourners were the Acting President Rupiah Banda himself, several cabinet ministers, Zambian and foreign ambassadors and nearly all other MMD presidential aspirants. As the aircraft bearing the president's corpse touched down, Rupiah Banda and many other government officials burst into tears, as did hundreds of ordinary people, many of whom wept uncontrollably.⁵⁷

But mourning the president seems to have not been the only thing on the minds of MMD functionaries who received his body. For most of them evidently transformed the return of the president's corpse into an occasion for putting an end to the divisive politics of succession in the party and its government. Nevers Mumba, for one, urged authorities in 'the ruling party to remain united ... during and after the mourning period by burying their difference'.⁵⁸ His

52 *The Post*, 22 August 2008.

53 *Ibid*; see also Kenneth Kaunda, 'Levy is Under God's Care', *The Post*, 23 August 2008.

54 The cost of the funeral was discussed in a clandestinely authored document that circulated widely in Lusaka after the funeral. Personal observation.

55 See *The Post*, 22 and 25 August 2008.

56 *Sunday Post*, 24 August 2008; *The Post*, 26 August 2008, p. 7.

57 *Sunday Post*, 24 August 2008; *Sunday Times of Zambia*, 24 August 2008, p. 1.

58 *Sunday Times of Zambia*, 24 August 2008, p. 1.

views were echoed by another prominent party member, who reminded other officials that, unless they ironed out the succession dispute amicably, the MMD risked losing the presidential by-election to the opposition.⁵⁹ Katele Kalumba, the party's national secretary, later added his own voice to the chorus to end the contest for power. He 'cautioned presidential by-election aspirants to scale down on their campaigns as the nation was still mourning and President Mwanawasa ha[d] not even been buried yet.'⁶⁰ Collectively, therefore, MMD officials saw in the return of President Levy Mwanawasa's dead body an opportunity to end the succession wrangle, to heal their party of its disunity and to forge political consensus and cohesion. In the apt terminology of a leading scholar of the relationship between death and politics, the MMD leadership transformed the death of Levy Mwanawasa with his state funeral into an important site of political reconciliation.⁶¹

A journalist who witnessed the funeral in Lusaka on 23 August later described the pomp and splendour that punctuated it.⁶² According to his minute-by-minute account of the funeral rituals, President Mwanawasa's coffin was, on arrival, ceremoniously handed over to colourfully dressed security personnel drawn from all the four wings of the armed forces: the Zambia Army (ZA), Zambia Air Force (ZAF), Zambia National Service (ZNS) and Zambia Police Service (ZPS).⁶³ With military precision, the officers rolled the coffin on a red carpet that stretched from the base of the aircraft to the presidential dais earlier constructed by the defence forces. With the coffin resting on the dais, the defence personnel enacted several other equally colourful rites usually performed for live presidents in Africa. Not least of them were presidential 21-gun salute, the fly-past by ZAF fighter planes over the sombre gathering and the playing of the national anthem by the ZA brass band. As the planes flew over the ceremony, the top brass in all four defence wings stood to attention, thereby re-affirming their allegiance and loyalty to the MMD government. Lower-ranking officers afterwards removed the casket from the dais, and, aided by chaplains from all the defence forces, placed it on a gun carriage, where three armed officers stood on alert. The colourfully decorated gun carriage was itself harnessed to a large military vehicle, on which were more soldiers. Mounted on the vehicle, too, were an eagle plate in front, the presidential flag on the right and the national flag on the left. Both flags, like all other flags across the bereaved country, flew at half-mast.⁶⁴

The funeral procession that followed the obsequies at the airport was no less spectacular. Escorted by several armoured military vehicles on a route along which soldiers were trotting, the procession meandered its way from the airport, turning on to the Great East Road until it reached the Mulungushi International Conference Centre, where the body lay in state. The entire processional route of about fifteen kilometres was lined with flags and hundreds of other mourners eager to take a glimpse at the splendid motorcade and coffin.⁶⁵ At MICC, where president Mwanawasa had announced many path-breaking decisions affecting the nation, Colonel James Phiri of the Zambia Army conducted an emotional funeral mass, comparing the president to King David of ancient biblical times. The chaplain remarked that President Mwanawasa had, like King David, left his country more prosperous, more united and hence more politically stable than it was when he assumed office in 2001.⁶⁶

After the mass, Levy Mwanawasa's body was handed over to Arthur Banda, one of the few Zambian professional embalmers trained in Europe. The highly qualified thanatologist, as

59 *The Post*, 25 August 2008.

60 *Sunday Times of Zambia*, 31 August 2008.

61 My insight here derives from Esposito, 'The Politics of Death', p. 60.

62 *Sunday Post*, 24 August 2008.

63 *Ibid.*; *Sunday Times of Zambia*, 24 August 2008, p. 1.

64 *Sunday Post*, 24 August 2008.

65 *Business Post*, 26 August 2008.

66 *Sunday Times of Zambia*, 24 August 2008, p. 1.

Banda called his profession, had been contracted earlier by the ministry of health to preserve the president's corpse for a week, during which it was to be viewed by mourners in Lusaka and in outlying provinces. But the embalmer went beyond the call of duty. He is reported to have injected the cadaver with very expensive chemicals, resulting in what the embalmer described as the 'permanent preservation of the body'. In that state, Arthur Banda noted, Levy Mwanawasa would, for the next 50 years, 'look the way he used to look when he was alive'.⁶⁷

The state funeral around the body began in earnest on 24 August 2008. That day, from 5 a.m. to 8 p.m., the capital city came almost to a standstill, as hundreds of thousands of mourners clogged the city's streets on their way to MICC, transforming it into an altar of patriotic worship. Mourners from virtually all socio-economic and political classes of Zambian society converged at MICC, some arriving in vehicles made available by the MMD government eager to foster collective mourning. Among the mourners were marketeers, taxi and minibus drivers, students, and even homeless street children.⁶⁸ Other mourners represented various organisations, ranging from sports bodies and the National Arts Council of Zambia to the Zambia Association of Musicians. But the most conspicuous at the funeral were the acting president, Rupiah Banda, the Chief Justice, the Speaker of the National Assembly, cabinet ministers and members of the Mwanawasa family, who all viewed the corpse in the morning. The mourners braved the hot August sun as they stood in long queues to view the body. One of their queues reportedly stretched from MICC itself past the parliament building and Olympia residential area to Katima Mulilo Road, a distance of 3–4 kilometres.⁶⁹ In scenes that would unfold everywhere the corpse was later flown, hundreds of mourners filed past the president's open casket, some of them bowing or making the sign of the cross as they reached the coffin. Shocked at the passing away of their leader, some mourners, including Rupiah Banda and cabinet ministers, wept openly. Indeed, some, overcome with emotion, collapsed or fainted at the sight of the fallen president, requiring medical attention from health personnel purposely stationed nearby by the government and the Red Cross Society.⁷⁰

On 25 August, security officers took over custody of the president's corpse once again. ZAF began to fly the body to outlying provinces, an act that appeared to stamp them with the authority and power that Levy Mwanawasa and his government had exercised when he was alive.⁷¹ The corpse was first flown to Chipata in Eastern province, where the first lady, it will be recalled, clashed with Michael Sata. For nearly the next week thereafter, Mwanawasa's remains were similarly transported to other provincial headquarters. Its arrival at each provincial centre was, as earlier in Lusaka, greeted by grief-stricken mourners, massive outpouring of sorrow, speeches by local MMD party and government officials and a large number of prayers by clergymen. In Kasama, Solwezi and Mansa, the headquarters in Northern, North-Western and Luapula provinces, respectively, mammoth crowds nearly rioted as the mourners jostled to view the corpse, with many of them also fainting with emotion.⁷² Like their counterparts in Lusaka, local party and government officials publicly wept alongside ordinary mourners. They similarly called for restoration of party and national unity while the clergy prayed for the soul of the president. His corpse was finally returned to Lusaka on 29 August. It was laid to rest on 3 September 2008 at the pristine Embassy Park in Lusaka after a colourful requiem mass at the National Assembly on 31 August and an equally magnificent valedictory ceremony at the Supreme Court on 1 September. The latter ceremony celebrated Levy Mwanawasa's successful

67 *Sunday Post*, 12 September 2008, p. 2.

68 *The Post*, 25 August 2008.

69 *Sunday Post*, 31 August 2008, p. 8.

70 *The Post*, 25 August 2008; see also *Sunday Post*, 31 August, p. 8.

71 This insight is derived from Barry Schwartz, 'Mourning and the Making of a Sacred Symbol: Durkheim and the Lincoln Assassination', *Social Forces*, 7, 2 (1991), pp. 343–64.

72 *The Post*, 26 August 2008; 28 August 2008; 27 August 2008; *Times of Zambia*, 29 August 2008.

career as a lawyer before the allure of power propelled him into national politics. Unprecedented in splendour and grandeur, the burial was exclusively witnessed by the cream of the Zambian elite and heads of state from nearly every corner of the continent.⁷³

Orchestrating a state funeral for a dead politician, taking his corpse to all parts of the country for public viewing, and tasking defence forces to attain both goals may seem irrelevant to a political movement divided by a fierce struggle for power. Worldwide, however, authorities who wield power or influence have historically organised mortuary rites for dead rulers to raise the authorities' own self-image, to secure votes, and to consolidate power. For, as Megan Vaughan astutely observes, '[t]he dead body of the politician is a site of symbolic capital', and, through organising a grandiose state funeral around President Mwanawasa's corpse, MMD rulers hoped to derive maxim 'political profit' from his death.⁷⁴ Just as monarchies in 19th- and 20th-century Europe mobilised state pageants to retain their subjects' loyalty and to cement their grip on the political reins,⁷⁵ so officials in the MMD government performed rites of passage for Mwanawasa to appeal to people across the country in order to secure their support for the government.

Moreover, by inviting people in all parts of Zambia to grieve collectively for the president and to contribute financially towards the cost of his funeral, the MMD government succeeded in creating across the country what Jay Winter aptly describes as 'communities in mourning'.⁷⁶ Within such communities, government leaders in the MMD turned millions of people who had never met Levy Mwanawasa in his life into co-patriots, who shared their grief over his demise. In so doing, MMD authorities made claims on mourners' time, resources and loyalty. Lastly, by weeping alongside ordinary mourners, the authorities connected themselves emotionally to the rank and file in a creative move designed to garner the latter's political allegiance and eventually their votes for the MMD presidential candidate.

The fact that the MMD government obliged security institutions to play pivotal roles in the state funeral in question was equally a political act. In Africa, where presidents wield enormous social and political power and influence, their demise is a recipe for political disorder and instability. Thus, in effectively deploying officers from all defence forces through which the Zambian president exercises and reinforces authority and power, the government assured the citizenry that it was in control of the instruments of power in spite of Mwanawasa's death. In this manner, MMD functionaries re-affirmed their capacity to maintain political stability and unity in the nation, thereby dramatising their right to rule. This was despite the debilitating political discord that rocked the government following the president's untimely death.⁷⁷

It may be obvious, therefore, that this collective mourning was intended to enhance their own chance to retain power and to restore unity in both the party and the nation. But funerals worldwide generate their own conflicts, and Mwanawasa's was not an exception.⁷⁸ As earlier noted, the funeral ignited a bitter quarrel between Maureen Mwanawasa and Michael Sata on 25 August, a quarrel that continued to be played out in the media long after the president was buried on 3 September 2008. But the conflict was not confined to the widow and the opposition leader. Within the MMD government, accusations and counter-accusations arose concerning

73 See *The Post*, 5 September 2008, p. 1; 7 September 2008.

74 Megan Vaughan, 'Big Houses for the Dead: Burying Presidents Banda and Bingu wa Mutarika of Malawi', in Kalusa and Vaughan, *Death, Belief and Politics*, p. 329.

75 See David Cannadine, 'Splendor Out of Court: Royal Spectacles and Pageantry in Modern Britain, c. 1977', in *Rites of Power: Symbolism, Ritual and Politics since the Middle Ages* (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985), pp. 206–43.

76 Jay Winter, *Sites of Mourning, Sites of Memory: The Great War in European Cultural History* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1995), Chapter 2.

77 This insight is derived from Esposito, 'The Politics of Death'.

78 See Michelle Gilbert, 'The Sudden Death of a Millionaire: Conversion and Consensus in a Ghanaian Kingdom', *Africa*, 58, 3 (1988), pp. 291–314; Thomas Kselman, 'Funeral Conflicts in Nineteenth-Century France', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 30, 2 (1988), pp. 312–32;

how the huge amount of money raised for the funeral was spent. Some aggrieved parties accused the Mwanawasa family of corruptly obtaining and using the money.⁷⁹ Those who supported Rupiah Banda also deplored the fact Maureen Mwanawasa and Ng'andu Magande escorted Levy Mwanawasa's corpse to nearly all provincial centres, when resources to fly the body was made available by the acting president. Disgusted that the widow had instigated the ejection of Michael Sata from the funeral in Chipata, but took the corpse with Magande to nearly all provincial centres, the first lady's detractors accused her of seeking what an incensed columnist branded a 'sympathetic vote' for the finance minister over Mwanawasa's dead body. Describing this situation as un-African, the columnist denounced 'Maureen's love for power', adding that the widow would 'do anything to retain it',⁸⁰ an accusation that she and Magande denied vehemently.⁸¹

Elite and Popular Funeral Discourses on Mwanawasa's Death, Mourning and Legacy

It is tempting to assume that the mass outpouring of grief for Levy Mwanawasa by both the ruling elite and ordinary citizens was the consequence of the elegance and pageantry that marked the state funeral. Indeed, some observers in the government believed that the hundreds of thousands of people who grieved for Mwanawasa were attracted to his funeral by its pomp and splendour.⁸² But to the people who physically participated in the funeral ceremonies in the capital city and provincial capitals must be added millions of other mourners who grieved no less for the president without attending his funeral. Indeed, Zambians living in countries as far away as China, Britain, Australia, the USA and Liberia at the time of the funeral also mourned and prayed for the president.⁸³

A significant model in which this paradox may be unravelled derives from scholarship that investigates how rulers and ruled in the African post-colony draw on local religious cosmologies and related discourses to mobilise political power and to make sense of that power.⁸⁴ As David Gordon convincingly argues for Zambia particularly, and Steven Ellis and Gerrie ter Haar for Africa generally, the belief that the supernatural realm is the ultimate source of all political power permeates local political thought and praxis more than secularist and modernist scholars of politics in Africa acknowledge.⁸⁵ In Zambia, such beliefs are as widely held as they guide political practices. The country's ruling elite evidently drew on these beliefs after Mwanawasa's death to forge a funeral discourse that transformed him into a source of political support and to explain why his funeral turned into mass mourning. Through this discourse, the ruling class projected his life, beliefs, achievements and leadership as having been divinely-inspired, and invited the citizenry and whoever would succeed the president to emulate his legacy. Thus, although Mwanawasa had been excommunicated from the Watchtower movement (Jehovah's Witnesses) after he joined active politics in the early 1990s, Kenneth Kaunda, Zambia's first

79 Personal observation.

80 *National Mirror*, 3–9 September 2008, p. 8.

81 Interview with Katele Kalumba.

82 *Sunday Post*, 24 August 2008.

83 *The Post*, 25 August 2008, p. 1.

84 See David M. Gordon, *Invisible Agents: Spirits in Central African History* (Athens, Ohio University Press, 2012); Peter Geschiere, *The Modernity of Witchcraft: Politics and the Occult in Postcolonial Africa* (Charlottesville, University of Virginia Press, 1997); Steven Ellis and Gerrie ter Haar, *Worlds of Power: Religious Thought and Political Practice in Africa* (New York, Oxford University Press, 2004); 'Religion and Politics in Sub-Saharan Africa', *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 36, 2 (1998), pp. 175–201; Steven Ellis, 'The Okija Shrine: Death and Life in Nigerian Politics', *Journal of African History*, 49, 3 (2008), pp. 445–66; Adebani, 'Cult of Awo'. See also, Camilla Strandsbjerg, 'Kérékou, God and the Ancestors: Religion and the Conception of Political Power in Benin', *African Affairs*, 99, 396 (2000), pp. 395–414.

85 Gordon, *Invisible Agents*, Chapter 1; Ellis and Ter Haar, *Worlds of Power*.

president, eulogised him as a kind, honest, Christian leader who had used his authority from God to improve the socio-economic welfare of all Zambians. Kaunda, whose views were shared by many Christian officials in the MMD government, insisted that, even in death, Mwanawasa would continue to 'ask God to take care of Zambia'.⁸⁶ Edwin Sinyinza, the District Commissioner (DC) in Nakonde, a border town close to Tanzania, similarly eulogised the president as a great statesman. Delivering a funeral oration to Zambian and Tanzanian mourners who had gathered at the town's civic centre to mourn Levy Mwanawasa on 23 August, the DC described Mwanawasa's death as a great misfortune that had robbed the country of a visionary Christian leader who had combated all forms of social, economic and political vice, especially corruption and injustice that 'tended to impact negatively on the wellbeing of the poor'.⁸⁷

Sentiments extolling President Mwanawasa's beliefs, achievements, virtues and values found echoes in numerous writings, speeches and TV and radio programmes featuring prominent MMD officials and clergymen. For example, two days before Edwin Sinyinza's speech in Nakonde, Akashambatwa Mbikusita-Lewanika, one of the founders of the MMD, similarly praised President Mwanawasa as a morally upright leader who had stood firmly against corruption, even at the risk of losing his own life. Mbikusita-Lewanika argued that the dead president had been a true patriot and nationalist who had devoted his entire adult life to public and national service.⁸⁸ This was despite the fact that Levy Mwanawasa had ruled Zambia for merely seven years, having been a successful lawyer for much longer before joining politics.

The notion that Levy Patrick Mwanawasa dedicated his entire adult life to public service was reinforced by many other people, including the clergy and his two former vice-presidents, Lupando Mwape and Enock Kavindele. In endless prayers that sought to consecrate the dead president, some clergymen likened his death to that of selfless saints who sacrifice their lives for the sake of Christ.⁸⁹ On the other hand, publicly weeping at Lusaka airport after the arrival of the president's body, Lupando Mwape lamented that the death of Mwanawasa had robbed Zambia of a politician who had stood for 'rejuvenation of the economy and restoration of integrity in leadership'.⁹⁰ A newspaper correspondent agreed with the former vice-president. He credited Mwanawasa with prudent economic and management policies, attributing to them the reduction of Zambia's foreign debt from US\$7 billion in 1991 to US\$500 million in 2008, and increased copper and food production.⁹¹ Similarly, Enock Kavindele described Levy Mwanawasa as a diligent leader who had worked himself to death trying to improve the country's economy.⁹²

The argument that the death of Mwanawasa was political sacrifice was popularised by other architects of the elite funeral discourse. They blamed his demise on the serious accident he had suffered in 1991 while on duty as vice-president, his struggle against prostate cancer after he rose to the presidency in 2001 and his first stroke in 2002. Others still saw Mwanawasa's death as the consequence of an exacting trip he undertook to the Milanzi constituency, Eastern province, where he addressed seven public meetings in three days between 23 and 25 June to campaign for an MMD parliamentary candidate. Those who subscribed to this view maintained that the trip, taking place just few days before the head of state attended the African Union (AU) summit in Egypt, left him too exhausted. In their opinion, this accounted for the second stroke, which Mwanawasa had in Egypt on 29 June 2008, which subsequently claimed his life in France.⁹³

86 *The Post*, 23 August 2008.

87 *Sunday Post*, 24 August 2008.

88 *The Post*, 22 August 2008.

89 *The Post*, 2 September 2008, p. 18.

90 *Sunday Post*, 24 August 2008.

91 *The Post*, 25 August 2008.

92 *Sunday Post*, 24 August 2008.

93 *The Post*, 22 August 2008.

But perhaps the most eloquent tributes to President Mwanawasa appeared in newspapers, both private and public. This was typified by the editorials of the *Post* newspaper on 22, 23 and 26 August 2008.⁹⁴ Although the independent tabloid had had a frosty relationship with the president when he ascended the political podium in the early 2000s, the newspaper's editorials celebrated his crusade against social injustice and poverty, depicting him as a selfless, honest leader. To the authors of these editorials, Levy Mwanasawasa had 'brought a sense of integrity "back to government"', after a decade when people had lost confidence in it owing to corruption under his predecessor's reign. The newspaper further painted the deceased politician as having been a true democrat who, in his effort to deepen liberal democracy in Zambia, had championed the freedoms of political expression, movement and assembly, upheld the principles of equality, liberty and fraternity, and even permitted opposition parties to campaign freely during the 2006 presidential and parliamentary elections – when doing so could have cost him his power.

From the perspective of the funeral discourse of the ruling class, it is easy to comprehend why MMD rulers regarded the mass mourning that accompanied the death of Mwanawasa as a confirmation of the citizens' appreciation of his values and legacy. This point was perhaps most eloquently articulated by the minister for Southern province, Daniel Munkombwe, in his funeral oration in Livingstone on 26 August. Describing Mwanawasa's death as a dark cloud over Zambia, the minister observed that the outpouring of grief and sorrow for the dead leader demonstrated the unrivalled esteem in which Zambians held the president and cherished his leadership, values and legacy. Munkombwe thus urged MMD leaders and their followers alike not to depart from that legacy. Lastly, he advised his audience that the best way to mourn Mwanawasa was by voting into office a successor who would emulate the vision, policies, and integrity of the president.⁹⁵

The funeral discourse of the MMD officials, with its interpretation of the popular mourning that characterised the state funeral, seems convincing at face value. Yet it is doubtful whether the homeless children, drivers and other ordinary men and women who mourned Mwanawasa did so because of the values that the elites infused into his corpse. Numerous poems, letters, and other accounts penned in newspapers by the general populace in the aftermath of his death suggest strongly that how most Zambians comprehended his legacy, together with how they expressed their grief, was fundamentally informed by their own culture of death and their socio-economic concerns, rather than those of the ruling class.⁹⁶ To be sure, many ordinary people welcomed the elites' perception of Levy Mwanawasa as an exemplar of high principles, values and leadership. But while MMD authorities stressed the virtues of the deceased president in order to woo political support for the MMD government, and probably the confidence of foreign investors in their leadership, ordinary people crafted their own funeral discourse, which was apparently at variance with that of their political rulers.

The funeral discourse of the rank and file imagined President Mwanawasa as their protector against the unbridled corruption of the elites, who plundered resources for self-aggrandisement. In a moving poem dedicated to him and published just before his burial, a poet painted the president as a great leader who had tirelessly fought corruption among his own ministers in the interest of the weak.⁹⁷ Another observer portrayed Mwanawasa as a fearless leader who fired corrupt ministers to end the plunder of public resources needed to improve the welfare of the underprivileged.⁹⁸ Such views were endorsed by other ordinary Zambians, including the lame, the blind and the orphaned. Loudly mourning at MICC on 24 August, orphaned street children, for example, remembered Levy Mwanawasa as a kind 'father' who had provided them

94 *Ibid.*; *Saturday Post*, 23 August 2008; *The Post*, 26 August 2008.

95 *The Post*, 29 August 2008, p. 1; *Times of Zambia*, 29 August 2008.

96 This insight is derived from Adebani, 'Cult of Awo'.

97 *The Post*, 1 September 2008.

98 *The Post*, 30 August 2008.

with shelter in many parts of the country, adding that his 'death [had] robbed them of a caring leader'.⁹⁹ Indeed, such people expressed doubt whether his successor would care for them as much as the president did before his death.¹⁰⁰ In retrospect, it is not far-fetched to conclude that the death and funeral of President Mwanawasa carved out a space for the voiceless to question the misdeeds of the powerful.

If the meanings that ordinary Zambians attached to the death and legacy of the late president diverged from those of their rulers, it is equally true that their interpretation of his source of political power conflicted with that of political authorities. To be sure, both the elites and their subjects located the roots of Mwanawasa's power in the supernatural realm. But whereas MMD functionaries envisaged the hand of the Christian God in the president's political ascendancy, as earlier remarked, their followers were more inclined to attribute his political fortune to the metaphysical sphere dominated by ancestors, a widespread belief in sub-Saharan Africa.¹⁰¹ 'The power under which Patrick Mwanawasa ruled this country', asserted an informant who mourned him in Kasama in 2008, 'could only have come from ancestors'. 'That is why', the informant continued, 'Mwanawasa was so compassionate and wise.'¹⁰² Another respondent agreed, emphasising that the bold leadership that the president displayed, together with his '[w]isdom [could] not [have been] inherited; it came from the above' – that is, from ancestors.¹⁰³

Plainly, then, many Zambians had their own reasons for mourning Mwanawasa. They therefore independently developed a funeral discourse that eulogised him as a passionate defender of the weak and located the roots of his political authority and influence in the sphere of the invisible. This popular discourse hardly meshed with that of the political elites in the MMD, or their perception of the nationwide outpouring of grief for the president. Indeed, in contrast to the elites, ordinary mourners saw his death as a transition from the world of the living to that of those 'who ha[d] gone before him'.¹⁰⁴ Accordingly, they held that, although Mwanawasa had 'passed beyond the vision of the human eye', he would 'continue to do what he did while he lived'; that is to say, 'breathing into the living the liberating spirit of freedom' from corruption, injustice and other vices.¹⁰⁵ This discourse immortalised the president, insisting that even though Mwanawasa had fallen, 'he ha[d] not died' and would continue to 'give new life to the millions [of people] who are proud to call themselves Zambian'.¹⁰⁶ The popular funeral discourse that elevated Levy Mwanawasa to the pantheon drew on local epistemologies of death and sacralised the dead leader. This transformed him into what an eminent scholar describes as a 'recent ancestor'.¹⁰⁷ Through this discourse, the dead president became a potent political symbol.

The perception that Levy Mwanawasa became an ancestor was paradoxically reinforced by the dead president himself. Two days after he was put to rest in Lusaka, Mwanawasa addressed the surprised nation through a video message that he had recorded in the presence of two of his private secretaries in Lusaka three years before his demise.¹⁰⁸ In this message, widely televised by the Zambia National Broadcasting Corporation, he thanked all those who had joined his family in mourning him during the funeral. He urged the country neither to abandon his development projects nor to give up his struggle against corruption. Apologising to people whom his policies may have offended, he argued that the policies had been intended to alleviate poverty in the country. Seen from the perspective of Mwanawasa's posthumous

99 *The Post*, 25 August 2008; 30 August 2008.

100 *The Post*, 25 August 2008.

101 See Ellis and Ter Haar, *Worlds of Power*.

102 Interview with David Mutale, Kasama, 30 August 2014.

103 Interview with Florence Mwamba, Kasama, 30 August 2014.

104 *The Post*, 21 August 2008, p. 4.

105 *Ibid.*

106 *Ibid.*

107 Adebanwi, 'Cult of Awo'.

108 *The Post*, 5 September 2008, p. 1.

message and the public outpouring of sorrow, the mass mourning that followed his death may be thought of as a celebration through which most Zambians paid homage to a new ancestor held to have ruled the nation in their interests before his death. In this popular discourse, Levy Mwanawasa would continue to perform this function from the grave.

'If You Loved Levy Vote for Me' – Sata

If President Mwanawasa became a recent ancestor, Michael Chilufya Sata was perhaps his first devotee. Unsurprisingly, Sata tried to appropriate the legacy and graft the corpse of the dead politician to the PF political agenda aimed, ironically, at wresting power from the MMD government over which Mwanawasa had presided. But Sata's engagement with the politics of death did not begin with the death of the president, a fact that has been lost on most students of his populist politics. Some scholars, perplexed by Michael Sata's meteoric rise into the political limelight between 2001 and 2008, attribute his ascendancy to what they perceive as his effectiveness in articulating the grievances of the urban poor.¹⁰⁹ Others acknowledge the validity of this argument, but they equally insist that the growing popularity Sata enjoyed after 2001 reflects his ability to lure the support of his fellow Bemba-speakers in Northern, Luapula and Copperbelt provinces.¹¹⁰ These arguments are certainly tenable, but they neglect the extent to which Sata transformed death and mortuary rites into a significant terrain of political contestation and mobilisation.

Michael Sata began engaging with mortuary politics almost immediately after he broke away from the MMD and formed the PF in 2001. From that date onwards, the charismatic leader regularly attended funerary ceremonies organised for deceased nationalists who had fought for Zambia's independence in the 1950s and 1960s.¹¹¹ At such funerals, Sata unfailingly eulogised the fallen nationalists as 'great heroes who liberated the country from the slavery of British rule'.¹¹² He also always served as a pallbearer, though Sata himself played no meaningful role in the struggle for independence.¹¹³ The importance of his involvement in the mortuary rituals of dead nationalists for his quest for power should not be underrated. In participating actively in the mourning and burials of deceased freedom fighters, the maverick politician identified himself with the political liberators of Zambia. More crucially, he equated his own bid for power with their successful campaign that freed the country from colonial misrule in 1964.¹¹⁴ This was but a short step to conferring upon himself and the PF a national stature.

An astute politician widely renowned for exploiting public sentiments for his own political advantage, Michael Sata further deployed mortuary-related rituals to disparage Mwanawasa's regime before the president's death. When 51 Zambian workers were killed in a massive explosion in a Chinese-owned factory on the Copperbelt in May 2005, for example, Sata blamed the tragedy on what he described as the MMD government's inability to enforce safety measures in expatriate companies in Zambia.¹¹⁵ The PF leader argued that the government could have prevented the accident by enforcing safety regulations. He further challenged President Mwanawasa to institute a commission of inquiry into the accident. Playing to the gallery during the burials of the accident victims, Sata threatened that, once elected into office, he would deal with Chinese 'infestors' who flouted the country's labour laws, a threat that earned him a standing ovation from mourners and anger from Mwanawasa and other top MMD officials.

109 Larmer and Fraser, 'Of Cabbages and King Cobra'.

110 See Cheeseman and Hinfelaar, 'Parties, Platforms, and Political Mobilization'.

111 According to leading nationalist leaders, including Kenneth Kaunda, Michael Sata was in prison during this time for stealing public funds. See Sishuwa, 'The Making of an African Populist', p. 26.

112 Interview with Jackson Mwamba, Lusaka, 20 January 2015, and personal observation.

113 Sishuwa, 'The Making of an African Populist', p. 26.

114 This point is inspired by Esposito, 'The Politics of Death', p. 60.

115 *Zambia Daily Mail*, 4 May 2005, p. 2; *The Post*, 21 August 2005, pp. 1, 4.

Given his long engagement with mortuary politics, it is no surprise that Sata quickly recognised the opportunity that the death of Mwanawasa presented to PF's drive to unseat the MMD government. Thus, even though the relations between Sata and President Mwanawasa had been far from cordial, until the two leaders reconciled two months before Mwanawasa's death, Sata sought to graft to his own agenda the corpse of the president after its return from Paris.¹¹⁶ It is to this end that he attended the state funeral in Lusaka and tried – unsuccessfully – to accompany the corpse to provincial centres. On many occasions, too, Sata declared that, during their reconciliation talks, Levy Mwanawasa bequeathed to him his vision of ruling and developing the country, a claim that Maureen Mwanawasa and the MMD government contemptuously dismissed as a blatant lie.¹¹⁷

Prevented from accompanying Levy Mwanawasa's remains to provincial capitals, the opposition leader reiterated the funeral discourses examined earlier. Despite often accusing MMD officials of politicising Mwanawasa's corpse and state funeral, Sata repeatedly echoed their funeral discourse. Like the ruling elites, he lauded Levy Mwanawasa's leadership and democratic credentials. Sata further eulogised the anti-corruption stand of the president, declaring that Mwanawasa had devoted his life to fighting the vice, improving the economy and strengthening democratic governance.¹¹⁸

In a bid to claim the legacy of Mwanawasa, Michael Sata further imagined himself as the only true inheritor of the president's mantle. 'Now that my brother is gone', he declared, barely a month before the election, 'I can fill the vacancy. I remain reconciled with him even in his death'. Sata thus justified his 'turn to rule Zambia' in the name of the departed president in ways that clearly drew on the elites' funeral discourse.¹¹⁹ But determined to attract to himself the political support of the ordinary men and women, he also appropriated their funeral discourse. At public rallies and through radio programmes, Sata absolved Levy Mwanawasa of corruption but, to the chagrin of the MMD government, accused cabinet ministers as the perpetrators of this social cancer.¹²⁰ Moreover, Sata declared Mwanawasa as a nemesis of poverty, who had championed the crusade to raise the standard of living of the poor.¹²¹ In making such pronouncements, the PF politician bought into the popular funeral discourse and cast himself as an ardent co-sharer of the values and virtues that many Zambians attributed to the president.

Sata was not unaware that the qualities that the two funeral discourses ascribed to the dead republican president endeared Mwanawasa to mourners, turning him into a potent political symbol. Evidently, too, Sata saw the multitudes of people who cherished such qualities and grieved for Mwanawasa as potential voters, whose support in the election would propel the opposition leader to the most powerful office in the land. 'If you loved Levy', Sata urged his audiences a few weeks prior to the election, 'vote for me'.¹²² Needless to say, 'King Cobra', as Sata was fondly called, was keen to ascend to power on the legacy of a man he had earlier routinely vilified as 'Cabbage', in reference to President Mwanawasa's poor health.¹²³

On 30 October 2008, however, Michael Sata was defeated by Rupiah Banda in a controversial presidential poll. A keen analyst of Zambian politics attributes Banda's victory to the advantages of incumbency that the acting president enjoyed over Sata.¹²⁴ True as this observation may be, it places too little value on the fact the majority of the votes that enabled Rupiah Banda to triumph emanated from three main constituencies that had overwhelmingly voted for Mwanawasa

116 On reconciliation between Sata and Mwanawasa, see *National Mirror*, 3–9 September 2008, p. 3.

117 *The Post*, 22 August 2008, p. 2; *National Mirror*, 3–9 September 2008.

118 Interview with Katele Kalumba.

119 *National Mirror*, 3–9 September 2008, pp. 1, 3.

120 Personal observation.

121 *Ibid.*

122 *The Post*, 18 September 2008, p. 1. *National Mirror*, 3–9 September 2008, pp. 1, 4.

123 Larmer and Fraser, 'Of Cabbages and King Cobra', p. 630.

124 Simutanyi, 'The 2008 Presidential Election in Zambia', p. 7.

in earlier presidential and general elections, a point the analyst concedes.¹²⁵ The election of Banda may, therefore, be more correctly read as a demonstration of the voters' appreciation of Mwanawasa's legacy as well as sympathy for the MMD government.

Rupiah Banda's victory was short-lived. Scarcely three years after his election, Michael Sata defeated him by a huge margin in presidential and general elections, which international observers declared free and fair. But Sata did not rule Zambia for long either. In October 2014, the new Zambian president died of an undisclosed illness in a London hospital. His death, like Levy Mwanawasa's, inaugurated yet another round of intense inter- and intra-party political struggle in Zambia.¹²⁶ More vicious than the political contest that had earlier polarised the MMD government, the power struggle in the PF government pitted the party's Secretary General, Edgar Lungu, against Guy Scott, a white Zambian who had been Sata's vice-president and was widely believed to support the dead president's widow as his successor. Like MMD functionaries before them, PF government officials were not slow to put the recently deceased ruler to political work. To this end, they organised for Michael Sata a state funeral that resembled Mwanawasa's funeral in virtually all respects, ranging from its extravagance, splendour and mass outpouring of grief to competing funeral discourses, with their attendant political implications. But Sata's funeral awaits its own historian.

Conclusion

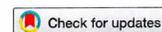
The death of President Mwanawasa in 2008 spawned a major constitutional crisis in Zambia, igniting a debilitating succession wrangle in and polarising the government of the MMD. To secure political support for the leader who would succeed Mwanawasa, each of the two rival factions that emerged in the MMD government appropriated his corpse and legacy. They also organised a grand funeral, through which they invited the citizenry to rally behind the ruling party in the name of values that rival factions in the MMD infused into the corpse of the president. But Mwanawasa's remains were too precious to be monopolised by MMD officials alone. Aware that the president posthumously became a popular political symbol, thanks to the funeral discourses of the governing elites and their subjects, Michael Sata, too, attempted to employ the body and legacy of the dead president to campaign for him and the PF. To this end, the opposition leader appropriated the competing discourses through which the elites and ordinary men and women interpreted the death, the leadership and the achievements of Levy Mwanawasa. Ultimately, then, MMD and PF leaders struggled for power over his death and corpse.

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¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

¹²⁶ *The Post*, 7 November 2014, p. 3; 10 November 2014, p. 8.