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Rethinking the Effects of Identity Politics in a Multi-ethnic Society: A Comparative Case Analysis of Zambia and Kenya

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ABSTRACT

This paper is an investigation of identity politics and its relevance. It engages the 'instrumentalist model' in understanding the causal chains that can either stabilise or destabilise multi-ethnic societies. It employs a comparative case analysis of Zambia and Kenya. A substantial similarity in our cases is that identity politics has a hold in both nations and the extreme difference is ethnic identity cleavages appear divisive among Kenya's elites, thus spilling into communities, whereas Zambia shows positive ethnic cohesion trends due to responsible elite conduct. The central proposition of this paper is that politics founded on identity fosters societal stability as opposed to instability. Politicised identities appear to promote division in a multi-ethnic society only because of instrumentalist causes. Thus, with the aid of cases, we analytically illustrate how and why 'identity politics' is not necessarily bad and we demonstrate its relevance in enhancing governing capacity which then translates into social harmony.

Introduction

A wave of violence between rivals armed groups hit the Central African Republic (CAR). Seleka, an armed alliance, which severely affected the security of the country's infrastructure and intensified identity tensions, thus increasing the collective risk of human atrocities, led the insurgency. At the end of 2012, the CAR government faced an offensive take-off from *Seleka* and by March of 2013, the group had seized Bangui, the capital city. Identity clashes are at the helm of the trouble in remote places like Bambari, where *Seleka* Muslim insurgents and the anti-*Baleka* militia, mainly Christian, are in combat. People in CAR have little faith that the 'identity' fuelled conflict will ever stop.

As with most anthropological terms, throughout this paper, we use *identity politics* as an umbrella term of social forces that have tried to politicise cleavages once considered as non-political and subjective. Thus, identity politics is mainly used in an ethnic sense (Kenny 2004, 2–7). Politics of identity has through different dimensions (race, tribe, religion, social background and many more) shaped experiences of most societies. For purposes of this paper, ethnicity will generally refer to dialect distinctiveness or to a group with an objective commonality of language or tribe. Ethnic identity in our cases provides a practical concept for establishing the possible role that identity politics plays in forming a stable society. In Europe, Yugoslavia had a violent war due to competing ethnic groups' exclusive rights to their homeland. In Rwanda, many Tutsis and Hutus were killed and displaced due to identity clashes. The Middle East still remains engulfed in conflict as ethnic

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hatred between Palestinians and Jews continue to diminish hopes for peace (Esman 2004, 4; Posner 2005, 1–2).

Despite such negative cases, there are some multi-ethnic societies where peace in the presence of diversity has been and is still the norm. In Benin, ethnic support is intense in party politics since the country's 1990s democratic transition. However, this has not hindered peaceful electoral politics and alliance formation at the national level. Clan identification in Botswana accounts for about three-quarters of political behaviour, but it is the most stable democracy in Africa, making a strong case for the stabilising outcomes of identity politics (Hulterstrom 2004, 15; Posner 2005). The main argument of this paper is that identity politics is not necessarily bad. We comparatively examine identity politics in Zambia and Kenya, through lenses of the 'instrumentalist model' – that presupposes 'identity' as a tool used to promote group or class supremacy, mainly through manipulation. This article shows that it is political leaders who, through identity dimensions, stabilise or destabilise society. Various theoretical methods such as primordial, hegemonic and nationalist approaches have been used, either combined or separately, in the study of identity politics (Geertz 1963; Kaup 2000, 17; Fearon 2003, 197). However, this paper draws more on the instrumentalist model in exploring the extent to which identity politics can either stabilise or destabilise multi-ethnic societies. Zambia and Kenya are used as cases on grounds that ethnicity as a form of identity is relevant to politics in both countries. The countries are advantageous because of data availability for theoretical and empirical testing and for reconstructing previous negative notions of identity politics in multi-ethnic societies.

This research is a diagnosis of the shortcomings and failures of most broad non-comparative and explanatory case studies which have led many to believe and conclude without proper realistic foundations that identity politics is messy. The paper is set against mainstream works which epitomise politicisation of identities as harmful, and it warns against the ambiguous and generalised manner of understanding and resolving social conflicts without paying attention to 'instrumentalist' nuances. It shows the centrality of political leadership in either circumventing or solving violent conflict situations in multi-ethnic societies and highlights that in order for society to be stable, a well-informed populace that is above manipulation is essential.

The research is guided by the question: to what extent can identity politics foster stability in multi-ethnic societies? We examine this question in pursuit of three objectives. The first is to ascertain the extent to which politicised identity has a positive impact in a multicultural society. The second is to investigate the scope to which identity politics permeates Kenyan and Zambian societies, as evidenced through electoral outcomes. The third is to examine factors that exacerbate 'identity cleavages' in socio-political behaviour, whilst establishing the positive synergetic relationship between societal stability and identity politics. We treat concerns on 'identity politics' through descriptive and explanatory investigations so as to avoid assumptions of tagging it as an uncontested source of harm in societies. This is vital in understanding and appreciating the politicisation of identities.

Zambia and Kenya offer an illustrative analytical framework because the two countries constitute interesting but different cases of identity politics (Hulterstrom 2004, 24). Consequently, they are used as typical cases that expose new ideas and offer opportunities for strategy learning.

The paper is divided into four sections. Part one contains a discussion on the term 'identity politics', and examines the strengths and weaknesses of interpretations of identity politics by various scholars. Part two thematically explores why Kenya has a defective political system in the context of identity through ethnicity, arguing that identity politics is only problematic under 'instrumentalist' paradigms. Part three defines and teases out the stabilising effects of 'otherness' in Zambian politics. Part four offers a cross-case analysis by investigating why identity politics is useful in one case (Zambia) and disastrous in another (Kenya). The conclusion gives a summary of the issues raised, it outlines recommendations for resolving identity conflicts in politics and it sets the basis for further inquiry.

Identity politics, theoretical gaps and empirical challenges

Identity politics is a broad term that is variously used, but all of its usage explains processes of cohesion or a sense of nationhood. Identity politics, mostly called politics of identity in humanities and the social sciences, describes the classification of identity as a political instrument for framing assertions, endorsing ideologies, or inspiring both political and social action for affirming group particularity, belonging, the acquisition of power and recognition. The practice of identity politics is essentially anchored in difference or sameness. Thus, anthropological scholarship on identity politics encompasses the 'politics of difference' (Cruz 1998, 10; Clifford 2000; Parker 2005, 55) which gained prominence in the 1990s. By contextualising differences of tribe, ethnicity, nationality, language and religion, emphasis ought to be on the importance of distinctiveness to and among equals in society (Kenny 2004, 3–4; Young 2005, 1–2). Cruz (1998, 12) provides a useful explanation on identity politics through 'difference'. He argues that identity politics is based on the proposition that; before a group can join the mainstream society or build a nation, it must first close positions. Being different in politics facilitates the process of recognition and incorporation for excluded groups. Instead of exclusion; social groups based on differences in race, tribe, language, background and culture are given absolute meaning for inclusion through social and political action. Since politics includes making choices, comparisons and commitments to interests and values of groups and individuals, it is these pledges made in politics that an individual identify himself or herself with (Chandra 2004, 287; Parker 2005, 53).

Firm in the idea that 'identity' is a historically devised set of norms and practices that are not constant but dynamic due to the consequences of 'changes' in a socio-political arena, in politics it is capable of inducing another sense of nationality in multi-ethnic societies called 'ethnic citizenship', similar to that of Zambia's Lozi people of Barotseland. The notion of 'identity citizenship' relies on two intermediate phenomena: the change from ethnic awareness to power consciousness and from specific interests to group eminence (Berman, Eyoh, and Kymlick 2004). Ethnic awareness is reliant on the construction of self-image in relation to the environment, making it both a process and an outcome of deeply felt personal and historical meaning of belonging (Nakata 2013, 128). Yet power awareness is a sense of how political actors are favoured by the polity. This establishes a cause and effect relationship among different ethnic groups in society. When ethnic awareness through interest becomes power consciousness it sets the grounds for political manifestation through identity. Thus, identity politics is the sum of power awareness and interest group association (Cruz 2005, 10–14).

The overarching point we can make from the above is that different social forces shape the extent to which cleavages are politicised. In the United States, the notion of politics of identity is pertinent to long-standing tensions between the state and religious groups, the moral and political fights with the pro-autonomy desires of groups like the Amish, and the reaction to race and ethnicity prominence in the political sphere. In Western Europe and Britain, politics instituted on identity is widely considered as an outcome of political conflicts related to clashes among the majority's cultural practises and several immigrant and religious subgroups (Kymlicka and Norman 2000; Kenny 2004, 3). Therefore, politics of identity connotes the desire for interest group creation as opposed to fragmented individual benefits (Gordon 2013, 64). Politics of identity is parallel to the flow of issues, setting of agendas and (re)distribution of available resources in a socio-political milieu. It is more than just an attitude but a surge like process that is continuous in resonance with circumstances that define political action.

Political leaders and intellectuals have consistently criticised identity (ethnic or tribal) politics as shameful and regressive, an undesirable interlude of the search for social bliss. Hence, two academic and differing positions have emerged in identity politics. The first is the view that ethnicity as a form of identity has negative effects on democracy and development, and that those political parties that mobilise support based on ethnicity cause societal break-up (Horowitz 1985; Kalipeni 1997; Posner 2005). The second group of scholars refute the preceding assertion and argue that identity politics in Africa and elsewhere is a pillar on which multi-ethnic societies become stable (discussed in detail later). Studies that defend identity politics argue that violent ethnic conflicts are primarily due to leaders who seek to mobilise electoral support based on ethnicity and then use it as a conduit of violence in an election defeat (Bratton and Van de Walle 1997; Larmer and Alastair 2007; Lindberg, Minion, and Morrison 2008; Cheeseman and Hinfelaar 2009). It is the latter position that has made some scholars equate identity politics with violent conflict, rather than with societal cohesiveness expressed through political behaviour. This has led to scholars like Esman (2004, 50) to claim that 'ethnic pluralism, the presence of two or more peoples within the same political space, is a necessary condition for ethnic conflict'.

African ethnic politics literature tends to brand identity politics as a hindrance to the establishment of strong democratic institutions (Bratton and Van de Walle 1997; Berman, Eyoh, and Kymlick 2004, 3). The overall tendency by most scholars is to focus on the dark side of identity politics. According to Esman (1994, 5–6), the post-Cold War period has seen a rapid emergence of ethnic conflict. This implies that ethnicity distorts the political process by undermining policies that should focus on general interests. In deviating from universalistic values, policies that focus on framing claims through identity exacerbate conflict and promise only disharmony (Berman 1998; Esman 2004, 9; Hulterstrom 2004; Cheeseman 2011). In this view, a politicised identity is nothing but an axis of domination and resistance. This is problematic in the context of nation building and it imposes enormous social and human costs. The main flaw of the above view is that it ignores how nations are born; through diverse identities collaborating to find common grounds of harmony. Identity in politics can control thought patterns and speech content, which can create societal unanimity and conformity among different ethnic political ambitions, like in Tanzania. The most negative views of identity politics suffer from myopia as they fail to convincingly pinpoint the source of social instability without accounting for 'instrumentalist dynamics' (Cruz 1998, 13; Parker 2005, 57).

A discourse towards revitalisation of identity politics

Though there is extensive literature dedicated to the negative side of identity politics, particularly through ethnicity, there are also some studies in defence of the politics of identity. Identity politics can facilitate stability in society even though; much has been said and written against it. Most studies (such as Esman 2004) that link politicised identities to societal instability do not cover the conditions and processes by which ethnic identities and solidarities become activated and converted to political conflict. The instrumentalist perspective, relevant to our study, claims that identity develops as individuals utilise 'differences' to achieve persuasive goals (Esman 1994, 10; Throup and Hornsby 1998; Kaup 2000; Lynch 2006). A survey of literature reveals three significant ways through which identity politics fosters societal stability, these being; recognition, integration and participation (jointly discussed below).

Cruz's (1998) book on *Identity and Power* uses the example of the Puerto Ricans in Hartford to argue that identity politics allows for social unanimity through recognition of the need, or lack thereof, for inclusion of those groups or individuals who are out of the social mainstream (37). This implies that groups and individuals, through identity are provided with a political means for accessing and competing for resources. However, the hegemonic factor of political cleavages among the Yoruba in Nigeria also helps us develop a credible explanation of the way in which primordial identities become politically forged and how, once built, these identities become real by common sense (Laitin 1985, 308; Peel 1989, 209). Identity politics is a tool for placing demands from the bottom-up for promotion and protection of common interests, forming a socioeconomic system of opportunities towards a stable social equilibrium. The role of constructing identities through ethnicities in Africa and the significance attached to these images of individual or group consciousness (like Kenya's *athomi – Kikuyuness*) in social or political terms allows for acknowledgment that is extremely similar to the European ethnic nationalism developed by petty-bourgeois intellectuals (Lonsdale 1996; Berman 1998, 372).

Calhoun (1994) in *Social Theory and the Politics of Identity* contends that identity politics among and by the excluded is a new thing that is heavily challenged. This suggests that social theory has tended to repress identity centred politics in the public sphere. But identity should be seen as preceding political participation in the context of interactive national and transnational social life. Hence, in Habermas' theory (1991), on the public sphere, it is argued that identity formation prepares one for entrance (integration) into the public arena and political agora (Kymlicka 2010, 379–80). Further, contemporary politics studies by Kaup (2000) and Miller (2000) maintain that politics erected on identities infers a past, and repeats conditions by tangible endeavour, like the support and desire conveyed to continue in a shared life trajectory. When people stop perceiving themselves based on identity, nations will then cease to exist, defying the realisation of human aspirations which cannot be attained in isolation, but through sustained human relationships.

The most erroneous criticism of identity politics is that it feeds divisions. This is flawed because according to Parker (2005), 'variance' is an ingredient in self assertion and meaning and 'objection' is a recipe for promoting the exercise of political self determination. Parker's imperative idea finds support from other sources (such as Hulterstrom 2004; Cruz 2005; Posner 2005) which consider 'essentialism' in politics as a necessary medium of restraining conflict in the broader political arena, as members of groups share similar

opinions. Cheeseman and Hinfelaar (2009) states that ethnic identity breeds a political culture of communal responsibility, inclusiveness, accountability and a source of unification and a powerful critique of neo-patrimonial politics' advent. However, identity politics has recently gained a significant role in countries like Ethiopia; where ethnic groups have actually been encouraged to form their own political parties (Ndegwa 1997; Salih 2003, 353).

Identity in politics stabilises society by providing a criterion for socio-political participation and it sharpens the focus of public policy, making the state to better serve a heterogeneous population enriched by liberal philosophies for a democratic polity (Cruz 1998). Patronage-democracies, like in India, are a means of preserving social stability as people use identity for political hybridisation, acknowledgement or inclusion in national structures. Similarly, identifying groups as a 'minority' is an enterprise useful in the widespread political struggle through participation; as it tends to hasten the sclerosis of independent social commitment through political communication and learning (Lipsitz 1998; Parker 2005, 56; Cheeseman and Hinfelaar 2009). Literature suggests that identity politics encourages individuals to overcome passivity, a first step past victimisation and marginalisation. Thus, it is a leeway of potent political struggle and emancipation. The Inkatha Movement's progressive transformation from a cultural association to a political organisation in South Africa is a good example (Cruz 2005, 12; Krutz 2013).

Most studies, such as Chandra (2004); Posner (2005); Berman, Eyoh, and Kymlick (2004), tend to focus more on explanations for ethnic voting construed around electoral behaviour and neglect the effects of identity politics in stabilising multi-ethnic societies through such means as identity solidarity. Thus they are narrowly rooted in social identity theory. An array of literature reviewed above affirms the positive view of 'identity politics' by capturing its stabilising aspects. Generally, this research builds on the above surveyed literature that defends 'identity politics' as it empirically shows that politicising identities is not necessarily a bad thing. It is in fact, a reservoir of increased governing capacity for societal stability, an argument heavily overlooked by most scholars. This paper documents ethnic politics' organising, improving and integrative force in society.

Kenya's shifting political terrain – historical perspective

This section traces the volatile political paradigms of Kenya. Here, we contend that local and political leaders, for instrumentalist motives through ethnic identity, engineer the violent conflicts that have in the recent past destabilised communities in Kenya.

Explorations of how identity through culture influences people's perceptions of conflict in Kenya are deeply rooted in tribal differences. Kenya has approximately 40 ethnic groups. According to the 2009 census report, the country is home to more than 42 different dialects, classified into two broad groups: Nilotes and Bantu speaking peoples. The country has five major communities namely: Luhya (14%), Kamba (11%), Kalenjin (12%), Kikuyu (22%), Luo (13%) and others (28%). Each of these groups constitutes not less than 10% of the national population. These groups are geographically dispersed, thus being prominent in one particular county or more (Roberts 2009; Republic of Kenya 2011, 6). The diverse composition of various geographically isolated groups in Kenya has enmeshed politics in typical tribalism. Some Kenyans now believe that it is only when a tribes-mate takes over the reins of state power that a particular society can benefit (Mutua 2008, 22). The effects of this perception are historically engrained with prejudice across societies, and partiality within ethnic clusters.

Politicised ethnicity: of allies and adversaries

After gaining independence from Britain, Kenya embraced multiparty politics. This brought about electoral competition which has been alleged to have fomented violent ethnic conflicts. The Kenya National African Union (KANU) appeared to have united all ethnic societies under one political umbrella after it won the founding national elections. A rift based on ideology emerged between the then President, Jomo Kenyatta, and his deputy, Oginga Odinga. Whereas Odinga was for a socialist agenda, Kenyatta and allies were not. The conflict spread from the two leaders to parts of their ethnic communities, the Kikuyus and the Luos. As a reaction to the deepening ethnic divide, Kenyatta banned the opposition party led by Odinga, the Kenya People's Union (KPU), in 1969. This was the prelude to the dawn of divisive ethnically charged politics in Kenya. The country then became a *de facto* one party state, which Kenyatta justified as conducive for national unity as opposed to multiparty politics, which he perceived to breed 'tribalism' (Throup and Hornsby 1998). We can dismiss his argument because it was under Kenyatta, when Kikuyu loyalists were rewarded with land and business deals. Government spending was disproportionately concentrated on central Kenya, with land reforms in the Rift Valley benefiting, and cabinet positions being given to, the Kikuyus more than any other groups (Nugent 2012, 166). We can argue here that political leaders are responsible for disparities or bias in resource distribution for welfare, a catalyst for conflict.

The re-introduction of multiparty politics by President Moi in 1992 saw political parties mobilise heavily around ethnicity. This explains why the 1992 elections were preceded by violent 'ethnic clashes' which left between 800 and 1500 people dead and about 200 000 homeless (Ngunyi 1996, 206; Barkan and Ng'ethe 1998, 33). This gave societies in political competition a more ethnic sense. Thus, the *Mungiki* movement, just like the *Mau Mau* insurgency against Britain in the 1950s, has grown extensively amongst the Kikuyu. The movement's ideological and religious roots have been a tool of informal repression seen in the 1990s ethnic cleansing. The state's quasi-legitimisation of the movement has transformed it from a social movement into a political association seeking tribal (Kikuyusim) hegemony through violence (Kagwanja 2003, 29).

In the aftermath of the 2007 general elections, Kenya experienced the most horrific bloodbath. The extent of the violence and its effects perplexed both the international community and Kenyans (Maupeu 2008; Roberts 2009). However, the violence that occurred could have been predicted and thus prevented by paying attention to campaign messages from the candidates. Supporters loyal to each 'ethnic' leader took to the streets, and this situation intensified into general violence hastened by years of economic dissatisfaction and political discontentment (Chenge 2008, 136).

Figure 1 shows voting patterns for the infamous elections that left multi-ethnic societies fractured in Kenya. It captures results for three provinces and top three candidates with most votes in percentage.

The 2007 electoral violence has been branded the worst since Kenya gained her sovereignty from Britain in 1963. As aforementioned, hundreds of thousands of people left their homes in search for safety, with some subsequently acquiring the title of 'refuge seekers' in their native land (Human Rights Watch 2008). A power-sharing deal in 2008 reduced and ended violence on the ground. Koffi Annan, the mediator, is reported to have said

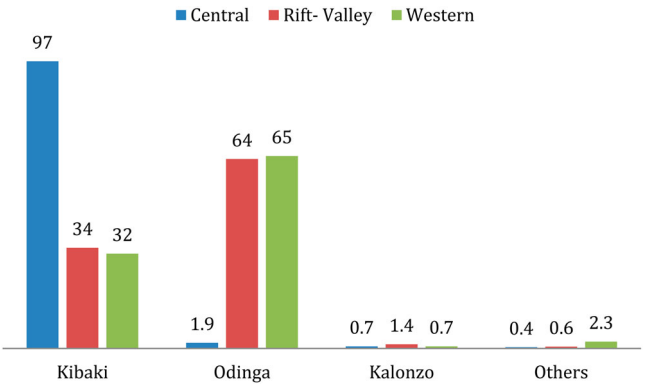

Figure 1. 2007 presidential election results (%) (Sources: Republic of Kenya 2007; Electoral Commission of Kenya 2008).

'compromise between any of the two (leaders) was the only option left to save Kenya from a deeper looming catastrophe' (Human Rights Watch 2011, 62).

Kenyan politics: context, issues and actors

Scholars on Kenyan politics argue that the country's geographical divisions mean that people will always be 'loyal to their ethnic leaders' or representatives, and thus communities are ethnically fragmented. From colonial times, the creation of politically stable societies is the responsibility of the national leadership. However, tribal leaders and politicians in Kenya have been deeply involved in previous violent conflicts (notably in 1997, 2002, 2007) by inciting, paying or hiring their own fellow tribesmen to cause tension in local communities (Calas 2008). Leaders have exploited sensitive issues like the land problem and the perceived marginalisation of specific ethnic groups evidenced by the '*sabasaba*' event of registering demands. It is the lack of political consensus on resources, like land, particularly among elites representing different tribes that have enhanced the hostile social divide (Chenge 2008, 125; Nugent 2012, 158). This explains the role leaders have had in sustaining inequality since independence and the deadly violent electoral episodes in Kenya.

The failures of the leaders to deliver to all ethnic societies are based on governing in the interest of kinship ties. This makes Kenyans feel as though they owe obedience to the leaders who then gain considerable latitude of influence (Lonsdale 1994, 2004; Cheeseman 2011, 101). Additionally, the capitalist path that Kenya took under Jomo Kenyatta, led the poorest ethnically distinguished sections of society to be more excluded from the fruits of capitalism, pursued with gusto by KANU (Klopp 2002). Kenya's leadership code through such programmes as 'local self-help' or *harambee,* simply means that the entire political system is lubricated by resource struggle (Nugent 2012, 160). Consequently, chains of clientism, from the remotest localities to epicentres of power, have created ties of personal reliance and political kinship, promulgating faction leadership (Lindberg 2003).

Figure 2 below illustrates the voting outcomes of Kenya's 2002 general elections, in percentages for three major presidential candidates (Kibaki, Kenyatta and Nyachae) in Central Kenya, dominated by Kikuyu; the Rift Valley, home to Kalenjin, and Western part, known as a Luo region.

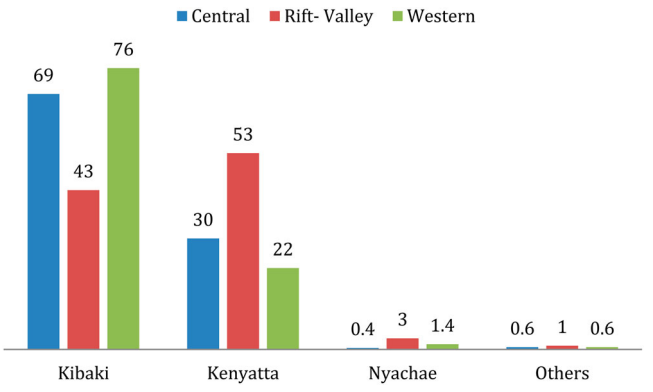

Figure 2. Presidential election results 2002 (%) (*Source:* Electoral Commission of Kenya 2013).

In 2002, cooperation of ethnic leaders and communities was the only strategy for opposition politicians to emerge victorious. Yet the politicians themselves were reluctant to collaborate for fear of losing their ethnicised electoral support bases. In 2013, fears were let loose, in that cross-ethnic identity alliances were possible and successful. The above figure shows how the Luo, from West, supported Kibaki a Kikuyu candidate under the National Alliance of Rainbow Coalition (NARC) who won that election (Chenge 2008, 125). But the Kikuyu vote from central Kenya was heavily split between the Kikuyu candidates: Kibaki and Kenyatta (Roberts 2009). Power-sharing agreements for desired political outcomes, like that of 2008, do alter the behaviour of politicians and, consequently, the actions of followers in favour of social harmony in a multi-ethnic set-up.

Figure 3 depicts the 2013 voting results in percentages of three provinces that are home to different ethnic groups. It shows the extent to which leaders enjoy massive support from their regions and tribes-mates.

The Jubilee Alliance of 2013 brought together two leaders from the main tribes (Kalenjin and Kikuyu), which attacked each other during the 2007 post-election violence. The peace that characterised the 2013 elections demonstrates that when leaders cooperate,

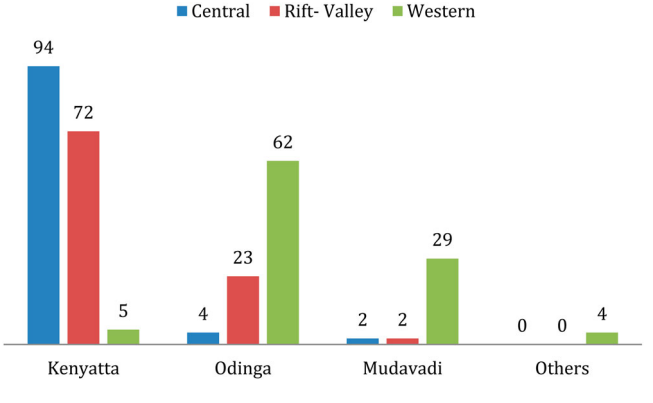

Figure 3. Presidential outcomes 2013 (%) (*Sources*: Republic of Kenya 2011; Electoral Commission of Kenya 2013).

their followers also do the same and thus peace emanates from the leaders. However, the graph above shows that Odinga had more support from his home (western) region since he is a Luo, the group perceived as a 'minority'. This suggests that the issues and the scope of problems in Kenyan politics are not identity politics, but the actors and the leaders (Posner 2005, 11; Cheeseman, Lynch, and Willis 2014). This tells us that identity politics is not conflict ridden, but a resource for integration through unification of ethnic identities towards a political objective.

The events of Kenyan politics pilot us to conclude that politics founded on ethnic identity is both situational and instrumental. Identity politics in Kenya has proved to be divisive and dangerous only when mobilisation of party politics is done by unscrupulous exploitative leaders. Therefore, overcoming this negative politicisation of ethnic identities requires a creation of strong democratic institutions that will alter conflictual historical legacies and inculcate responsible elite conduct in politics. The unhealthy political dynamics will only stop haunting Kenya with a well-informed populace that can detest the divisive aptness in leadership because leaders ought to lead whilst the people govern.

Ethnicised Zambian politics

This section explores how Zambian politics, post-independence in 1964, is construed around ethnic identity. I argue herein that party politics is dominated by ethnicity as revealed through voting patterns. The consequences of politicised identity traceable from the formative years of the Zambian nation expose stabilising effects in communities as opposed to disruptive outcomes.

One Zambia, several identities

Literature on Zambian politics reveals that it is highly influenced by ethnic identity, with over 70 linguistic groups. There are, however, three major ethnic communities, the Nyanja, Tonga and Bemba, with each representing more than 10% of the total national population. Each of the above three groups dominates a particular geographical area or province. The structure and nature of Zambian societies in pre- and colonial times was based on chiefdoms of village clusters, lineage and clan loyalties which served as bases for political and social organisation. Tribal communities transitioned from fluid groups with varying degrees of internal cohesion into fixed entities in pre-modern Zambian societies (Hulterstrom 2004, 25; Posner 2005, 19–30).

Macola (2008, 44) argue that the post-independence period in Zambia's electoral competition shows glaring ethnic identity patterns. For example, in the early 1960s, the African National Congress (ANC) had great support from Tongas in Southern and Central province. Kenneth Kaunda, the then Zambian president, is alleged to have secretly resigned for a night in protest to ethnic tension in UNIP and the nation at large. Pressure worsened in 1971 when Simon Kapwepwe formed the United Progressive Party (UPP) and publicly claimed that marginalisation and victimisation of his ethnic group (Bemba) in the country and UNIP was extensive. As an attempt to curb what was perceived to be a growing ethnic divide, President Kaunda declared Zambia a *de jure* one party state in 1972. Multiparty politics were only reinstated in 1991. Empirical evidence suggests that multiparty politics in Zambia is highly structured along ethnic lines. For example, under Chiluba's reign as

president from 1991 to 2002, allegations of Bemba preference in appointments policy grew, especially after the 1996 elections. Chiluba's regime marked the beginning of concealed 'ethnic sentiment' of Zambian politics (Posner 2005, 113; Miles 2011).

Trends in party and leadership support

Most politicians and voters give politics meaning through identity connotations. Almost all political parties show some sort of attachment to a particular ethnic group in Zambia. While Zambians perceive parties as non-regional, the United Party for National Development (UPND) is exceptional. The party is perceived to be for Tongas. From 1998, the phrase 'tribal party politics' became prominent in Zambia, with attention directed at the UPND. However, leaders in the UPND reject the notion of the party mobilising on ethnic or tribal lines. Evidence shows that perceptions of it being an ethnic party are solely based on having predominately Tonga leaders and politicians who enjoy massive regional support of Tongas. Individuals with the cooperation of tribe-mates form most parties in Zambia, and this has made politics more personalised and regionalised (Hulterstrom 2004, 191).

Though this is not a study on electoral politics, we can use election outcomes to show and determine the extent to which Zambia's politics is ethinicised. Let us draw some empirical statistics from four rounds of elections (between 2001 and 2011), for three major parties – the Movement for Multiparty Democracy (MMD), the Patriotic Front (PF) and the UPND. The following figures show the election results of the nine provinces. Let us begin with MMD.

Figure 4 illustrates MMD presidential results. One observable implication we have in the graph above is that the MMD's presidential candidate in 2008 and 2011 was Rupiah Banda, an easterner, who received 73% of votes from Eastern Province. Levy Patrick Mwanawasa, his party predecessor, only managed to secure 28% and 39% in 2001 and 2006 from the same province, partly because he is not an eastern by ethnicity.

Figure 5 gives systemic evidence of the PF's vote share in Copperbelt, Luapuala and Northern provinces (Bemba regions) where its candidate received more votes in comparison to other regions in 2011. Going by objective factors, Bembas who constitute the majority nationwide seem to have a sense of identity connection with PF's deceased founder, Michael Sata, since he hailed from the Bemba community.

Figure 6 highlights the undeniable support base of the UPND in Southern Province – party's leader home region. In a space of 10 years, with 4 election rounds, what we see is strong back-to-back support from Tongaland for the party in every election. The ANC (and its precursor the UPND) seem to have created a traditional power base in southern province, as depicted in Figure 6. The graphs below only verify how all political parties are deeply ethinicised in Zambia.

Social order and the salience of collective political behaviour

The nature of Zambia's identity cleavage through language, divides the nation into large regional groups whereas tribes, divide it into several small local groups. However, when Zambians think of who they are, they always think in terms of language and tribe (Posner 2005, 18–22). Politics in Zambia is thought as being anchored around ethnically

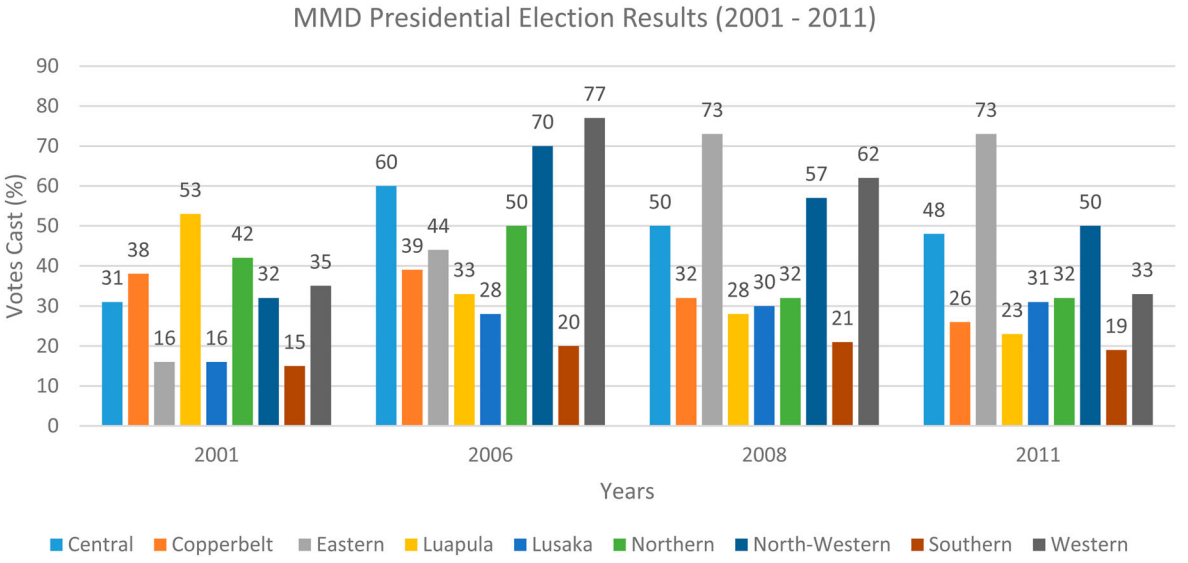

Figure 4. MMD presidential election results (2001–2011) (Statistics Courtesy: Government Republic of Zambia; Chanda 2014).

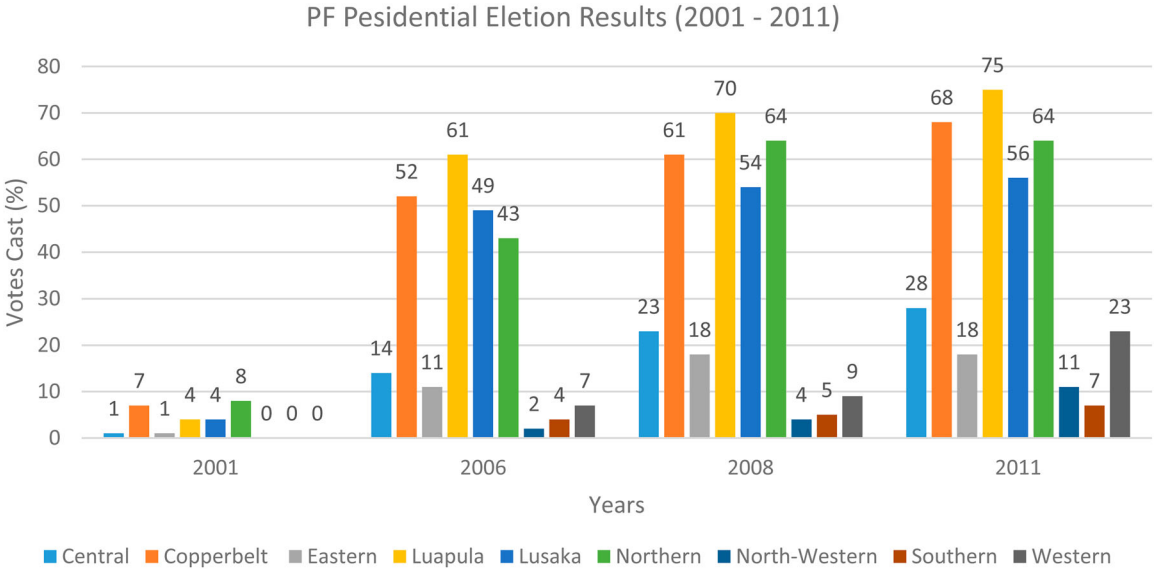

Figure 5. PF presidential election results (2001–2011) (Statistics Courtesy: Government Republic of Zambia 2013; Chanda 2014).

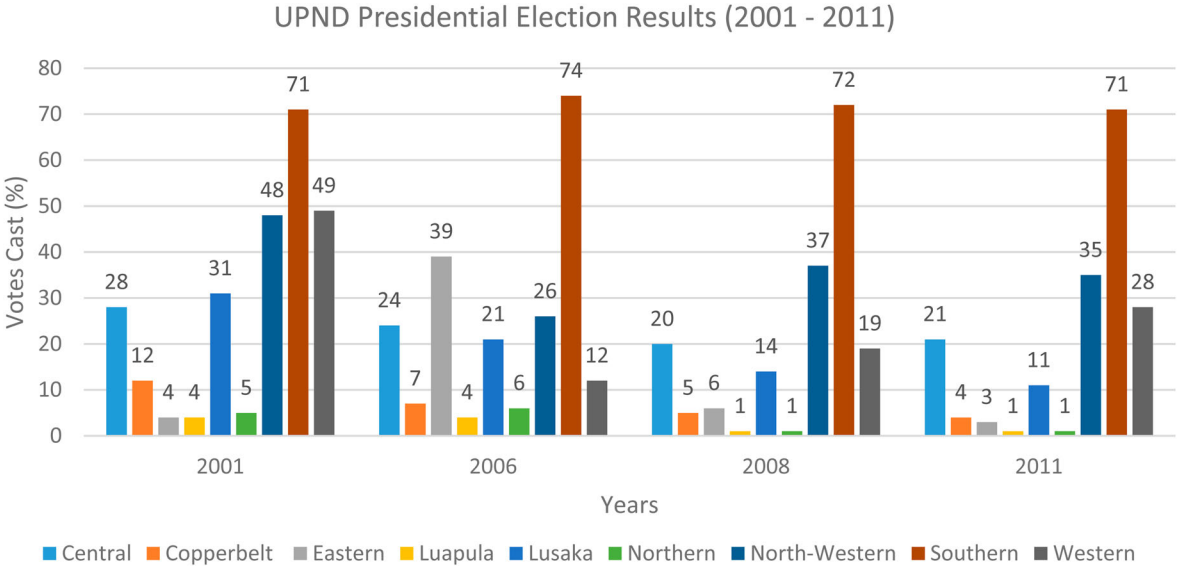

Figure 6. UPND presidential election results (2001–2011) (Statistics Courtesy: Government Republic of Zambia, 2013; Chanda 2014).

loyal followers and highly personalised political associations (Hulterstrom 2004, 190–92). This makes Zambia's identity politics positive because followers and leaders consider themselves to be mutual partners in their association.

Let us take a closer look at Southern Zambia and its Tonga people who have a longer ancestral history than other tribes in the country. Tongas are conventionally, politically non-militant, with the local and political leadership limited to villages or clans. In early 1960s, political survival for parties and individuals depended much on regionalisation of building a support base. For example, the ANC of Northern Rhodesia (present day Zambia), under Nkumbula signifies tribal chauvinism that prevails in most African countries today (Rakner 2003). ANC officials at the provincial level portrayed UNIP founders and supporters as poor thieves whose political objective of positioning Bembas in power was to colonise the Tongaland. Additionally, at the start of 1964, the ANC leadership warned southern province electorates that they would only 'be secure' if ANC emerged victorious. The ANC's tribal propaganda in politics was a Tonga expression of hostility for the Bemba speaking people (Macola 2008, 37).

The fragility of President Kaunda's leadership in UNIP and the country as a whole, was seen as resentment of and by 'true' UNIP Bemba leaders. The Bemba hegemony pretentions were exacerbated by the perceived tension between Kapwepwe and Kaunda. Thus a new political organisation was born through the *Congress Circular*, which purported in the 1964 elections, to appeal to the Bemba to back Kapwepwe as the initial move to the of attainment unquestionable Bemba ethnic supremacy (Macola 2008). Nevertheless, given the extensiveness of nationalist deliberations, the anti-Bemba publicity by ANC had little effect on the national stage compared to the prominence it had in central and Southern provinces. The nationwide rendition of nativism was confrontational in the 1960s as it blatantly shielded rights of indigenous peoples of 'Northern Rhodesia' (Zambia) against the invasion of non-nationals and not necessarily local ethnic clashes; this resulted in a positive practise of identity politics in the country to date (O'Brien et al. 2007, 64; Munkombwe 2013).

It is possible to conclude that the Zambian elite or political actors believe that political behaviour depended on the individual. Even though ethnic identity does play a role in politics, it is the individual's personal unbridled conviction that is often at play than the party when it came to voting (Hulterstrom 2004, 169; Macola 2008). Ethnic groups in Zambia are inspired by 'collective identity' actions that are guided by social stabilising effects due to peaceful elite or leadership conduct. The Zambian case typifies historical legacies of peace that continue to positively direct contemporary national politics. Positive manifestations of ethnic politics in Zambia stems from a citizenry that understands the value of sustaining a sense of connection to their communities through politics, and thus creating ethnic identity cohesion and solidarity in national party politics turned regional. This is coupled with the presence of responsible politicians and local leadership that condemns the negative use of ethnicity in its strongest terms possible.

Positioning identity politics towards societal stability

The stability of a nation depends on social structures that thrive on pluralism through civil and political identities. Almond and Verba (1963, 13) define political culture as the configuration of different orientations and attitudes toward political matters between and

Table 1. Percentages of ethnic groups by population in Kenya and Zambia.

Kenya			Zambia		
Region	Ethnic group	%	Province	Ethnic groups	%
Nairobi	Kikuyu	48.4	Lusaka	Nyanja	55.1
Coast	Kikuyu	10.7	Southern	Tonga	76.0
Rift Valley	Kalenjin	46.4	Central	Bemba	45.1
Central	Kikuyu	96.2	Western	Lozi	56.5
Nyanza	Luo	57.9	North-western	Lunda/Luvale	50.4
Western	Luhya	86.2	Northern/Muchinga	Bemba	70.6
North-eastern	Degodia, Gurreh & Ogaden	79.6	Eastern	Nyanja	74.1
Eastern	Kikuyu	88.9	Copperbelt	Bemba	45.1
			Luapula	Bemba	98.3

Sources: Hulterstrom (2004); CSO – Government Republic of Zambia (2012); CBS – Kenya (2007, 2011).

among members of a political ensemble. Therefore, the subjective and descriptive side of identity politics in Zambia and Kenya gives socio-political actions some importance.

Region ethnic composition presented in Table 1 verifies that societies in both countries are camouflaged with various ethnic identities, although others remain dominated by one ethnic identity. For example, the Kikuyus alone in central Kenya constitute 96.2% and the Bembas of Zambia make up 98.3% of the population in Luapula. Therefore, most societies are geographically delineated and defined by linguistic or tribal homogeneity. When two candidates from the same region compete in an election, different localism for candidates emerges, such as identifying themselves on a sub-tribal level, like that of Kenya's 2002 elections were both candidates were Kikuyus (see figure 2). Our findings reveal that alliance support in electoral competition is extensive, but not cohesive and consistent for Kenya. In Zambia, there is a constant regional ethnic representation of voting. Both countries' party systems can be described largely in ethnic identity terms.

Based on our results, ethnic identity is strengthened further by being exposed to political competition. This supports theories of social identification under specific circumstances. Identities matter in African politics for instrumental purposes, as they are extremely useful in the struggle for political control. However, in Zambia, politicians and local leaders did not or still do not capitalise on identity to pursue goals by creating serious social disorder (Macola 2008, 37). The events that characterised the 2007 post-election periods make it obvious that Kenya is a highly tribal country with 'ethno-populist' leaders. Thus, the harmonisation of a society with many identities, as seen in the Zambian case, depends on a tolerant political culture and dignified political players among other interest groups in society.

Table 2 summarises the extent to which identity politics (for two rounds of elections) in Kenya and Zambia is prevalent. The table depicts the level and form of synergy between

Table 2. Kenya's leadership support trends and Zambia's regional voting patterns.

Kenya			Zambia		
	Candidate support tendencies			Province ethnic consistence	
Leaders	2002	2013	Party	2001	2011
Kibaki	Luo – Western	Kikuyu – Central	MMD	Luapula	Eastern
Odinga	Luo – Western *2007 Elections*	Luo – Western	PF	Northern	Luapula
Kenyatta	Kalenjin – Rift Valley	Kikuyu – Central	UPND	Southern	Southern

ethnic groups and leaders which is fluid (case of Kenya); regional party support consistency (for Zambia). One can see, for example, that Kibaki, a Kikuyu by ethnicity, received great support from the Luo region in 2002 because he was supported by Odinga, a Luo, through a coalition (NARC). However, Kibaki's support in the same (Luo) region declined in 2013 as he was not backed by any Luo leader, although his support remained constant in his homeland (Kikuyu region). In Zambia, both the MMD and PF managed to win substantial backing from more than one ethno region representative of the candidates' ethnicity. The case is different for the UPND which maintained great dominance in Southern Province in all rounds of elections. Judging from the above, politics is full of ethnic identity actors in these countries.

In multi-ethnic communities, leaders are often chosen under rules of plurality. Thus, manoeuvres of 'one party state' for both countries failed due to pressure from below which was a reaction of the curtailed expression of identity through multiparty politics. This is a function of the primordial significance of 'identities' in politics that cannot be obliterated. The NARC and Jubilee Alliance phenomenon in Kenya helps us understand that identity politics can serve as a source of success in electoral competition. It suggests that bloc voting, if well managed, can lead to the stable and undisputed democratic selection of political leaders by social cleavages (Cheeseman 2011). Despite 'ethnic politics' being publicly perceived as retrogressive and incompatible with national development, it undergirds prospects about how others will behave, colours understandings about where social conflicts originate and it shapes perceptions about who stands to gain and to lose from a prevailing distribution of political power (Posner 2005, 94). Thus, most explanations on ethnic political and social tensions in Africa are ambiguous and obscured. In the next section we consider the participatory role of leadership in identity politics.

Leadership and societal resilience: a participatory dimension of identity politics

The return of multiparty politics in the 1990s has shaped different leadership experiences and changed notions of politics in competition for political power as seen in communities and amongst politicians in our cases. Evidence on Kenya reveals that leaders have in the past influenced violent conflict through instrumentalist motives by issuing alarming statements, as a means of de-campaigning opponents and rendering their supporters worthless (Kirchner 2013, 58). However, some political leaders have appealed to 'identities' in politics as a disguise of manipulation and predation to serve their own comforts. Identity based politics is a social unifying factor, but it is the tendency to categorise and address other identities in society as a minority that can lead to tension, especially when such 'minorities' stand for political positions and feel robbed of taking control over power, as highlighted on Luos in Kenya, who are called a minority group. In Zambia, UPND politicians seem to be seeking to increase their access to power and public resources by asserting their identity and portraying themselves as being different from other provinces without any sense of hostility (Szeftel 2000). However, Zambia's political parties are all ethnically constructed. This has created social cohesion, solidarity and stability.

In the politics realm, issues of group membership are often associated with self-interest. This is because ethnic identities convey information about the likelihood that a person in a position of power will channel resources to those he or she identifies with (Krutz 2013).

However, the success of support from below for identity alliances in Kenya seemed to be possible because citizens have very limited means of reprimanding thorny behaviour among their leaders. The despicable acts of Kenya's 2007 general elections reveal the significance of unbalanced institutional landscape. A violence retort to vote count irregularities by the losing candidates, such as Kenyatta, destabilised societies by creating a deep 'Kenyan Crisis'. Similarly, the refusal of ODM leaders to call off mass protests, take up their seats in parliament, and pursue their grievances through the courts is symbolic of how vital leaders can set a precedent of compromise or intolerance for followers (Cheeseman and Hinfelaar 2009).

In Zambia, the 2011 election results adequately express 'ancient political logics' ingrained in communities at both community and elite level, especially in Southern Province. In contrast, institutional reforms aimed at accommodating politicised identities in Kenya's multi-ethnic societies are undermined by the everyday acts of manipulation of the public by political and local leaders through informal patron-client relations. For example, the formation of such movements as the *harambee* patronage scheme continue to enjoy public legitimacy while the local instrumentalist understandings of the very patron-client relations have greatly undermined the creation of stable multi-ethnic societies in Kenya (Cheeseman 2011, 110).

However, despite of the structural factors (poverty, unemployment, marginalisation and so on) present in both countries, the Zambian case teach us that low-level of socioeconomic status does not fully explain the root cause of social violence neither does it deter political action devoid of social upheavals. If identity politics is that bad as alleged in Kenya, it is by no means *ceteris paribus*, going to show a high degree of peaceful manifestation in Zambia. This entails that political behaviour of ordinary people (good or bad) in society is a manuscript inscribed from above, from leadership.

Lessons learned

The growing tendency of 'political correctness' in multi-ethnic nations has ignited several trends and events that point to the significance of identity politics. Politics of difference through identity is a recipe for contestation of a group's uniqueness and a more conservative approach of cementing communal values and traditions. Thus, labelling identity politics as harmful is intrinsically likely to block rather than advance, social pluralism stability. Based on the above discussion, political entrepreneurs have a propensity of identifying an already made identity group (Brass 1991). Accordingly, ethnic identity divisions, in empirical democratic theory and ordinary considerations of politics, impends the establishment and consolidation of stable free multi-ethnic societies through what Chandra (2005, 235) calls the 'outbidding effect', a mechanism that links the politicisation of identity with the destabilisation of society. Contrary, we can counter intuitively argue that identity based politics enhances and sustains stability in society through institutional systems that are democratic: the outbidding effects of identity politics can be replaced by the multidimensional models of bidding.

However, policies and institutions that recognise and nurture multiple manifestations of 'identity based politics' can positively sustain it by forming a stable society in which all identities live in harmony (Kymlicka and Norman 2000, 6). Taylor (1992, 45) argues that the idea of difference in politics is parallel to recognition. Thus, identity politics

determines who ends up with what and sets up conditions on which the basic social settlement is framed. Identities in politics, just like 'human rights', connote presentation of interests, needs or preferences as both interpersonally and socially not negotiable, making their suppression difficult if not impossible. Therefore, accommodating and respecting different identities can develop a national identity whilst maintaining other sub-identities. Leaders should be viewed as the primary agents who define the boundaries and encouraging mass allegiance to their group (Kaup 2000, 18–19). We can claim that identity politics created the elite groups for Zambia and elites created ethnic identity politics in Kenya through such movements as *Harambee* and *Mugunki*. Hence disparities in outcomes of identity structured politics noticed in the two countries: detrimental for Kenya and stabilising in Zambia.

The leadership quality in a community is reflected by prevailing political behaviour about how the led (people) engage with each other, especially on divisive issues. The tone, response and actions of leaders can set a stage for a mature discussion of contentious matters and help to maintain the 'fragile consensus' on which a liberal democratic multi-ethnic society depends. Efforts must be for integration and not against identities in the political process. Respect and recognition for diversity is an important step in forming a cohesive political society because in pluralism, rights are respected through the promotion of political harmony founded on consent that fosters a robust notion of the common good.

Conclusion

This paper's central argument departs from the standard accounts that deem identity politics as something negative because it has demonstrated the usefulness of identity politics and its different dimensions of manifestation. The research has conceptualised identity politics as a process by which individuals or groups seek to express, themselves, whilst defending their image in the socio-political sphere. Through our cases, it appears that forming political associations based on ethnic identity is undesirable but legitimate. That is why political actors do establish actions of 'damage control' through party-alliance formations. Kenya avoided a repeat of history or political unrest in 2013 principally due to institutional reforms and political realignment which brought (leaders) former rivals together.

The implications of our findings on leadership are that leaders greatly influence behaviour or action by setting a precedent for the rest of the public's manner of engaging on vexing social issues. Elites have the responsibility and opportunity to raise the level of debate on personally held opposing views, to explain and promote them and to peacefully strive for their implementation in the processes of governance through the spirit of dialogue. Identities have nothing to do with competing interest and hostility. Instead, societal instability is precipitated by scheming politicians and carried out by gangs of thugs who appropriate ethnic symbols to legitimatise their actions. This is so because people, especially in highly illiterate societies, can be so deceived through sentiments of group identity and solidarity to which manipulative leaders appeal (Esman 2004, 33). Additionally, we note that for heterogeneous societies to be stable, they require unforbidden manifestations of identities. Because identity in politics is a significant boundless energy of a multi-ethnic community that makes it run, it gives it life.

By bringing together different views of what necessitates or justifies identity politics, this paper recommends that analytical attention on the subject should be on processes rather than outcomes of diversity because identities are a resource for political hybridity in a multi-ethnic society. This can foster the inclusion of marginalised identities into the social mainstream, thus constructing a society that provides for and is tolerant to distinctiveness. The focus should be on intergroup relations, state-society relations and notions of ethnic citizenship and national rights. Consequently, future investigations should encompass how we can come to terms with identities that are instrumentalist vulnerable and illusionary in nature and try to explore the ethical, social and political repercussions of doing so.

Scholars of identity politics should channel their energies in defining unconventional political cultures that can yield accountable and transparent set of ethical leaders and responsive institutions in societies with multiple socio-political cleavages. Our comparative interpretative approach does not only advance the narrative of identity politics, but may also act as a basis for future explanatory undertakings on the topic. Generally, further empirical research, theoretical improvement on the subject and establishment of institutional strategies for creating more stable multi-ethnic societies, needs commitment.

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