Article

Zambia's Purported Tribalism: A Political Narrative That Divides Us – Time for Unity and Progress

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Abstract: Zambians celebrate its tangibility of cultural diversity and longstanding demoralization within Southern Africa, the epitome of an ethnically and politically harmonized nation. Although, in the recent past, political leadership in the country has come under pressure of demands that they address the issue of tribalism, political actors in the country have expanded its use as a function of political strategy to sway voters, inflame social animosity in the quest to gain political support. This article critiques the assertion by authors writing on politics and human rights issues in Zambia that tribalism is a significant and endemic vice, thereby arguing that the phenomenon is, to a considerable extent, an artefact of political engineering rather than an ailment of society. Using a historical analysis of ethnic relations in Zambia, the development of electoral processes, and techniques of employing political language, the article reveals that political actors fabricate tribalism as an institutional logic. Accordingly, tribalism ceases to be a representation of the fixed social cracks but a weapon in the hands of politicians to mobilize voters. This paper further refutes this politicized type of tribalism as confusing and damaging to the Zambian unity since it creates division, mistrust, and conflict within the multiple tribes. The article calls for a positive social mobilization that departs from ethnic politics and calls on citizens and policymakers to work towards fostering ethnic harmony and tolerance. As highlighted in the paper, it is necessary to mobilize a greater Zambian nationalism to counter sectarian politics that harm society's cohesiveness. Finally, this work argues that for Zambia to undergo political stability and socio-economic development in the long run, the country must dispel the tribalism barrier and establish a nation on the principles of unity and nationalism.

Keywords: Tribalism, Unity, Inclusivity, National Identity, & Politicians

1. Introduction

Lusaka, Zambia, is reputed to be one of the most politically stable nations in the Southern Africa sub-region. This area has always been a volcano for ethical and political instabilities. Perhaps due to being home to over 70 ethnic groups, Zambia has historically received credit for its capacity to accommodate varied ethnic organizations organizations under an individual state. This unity has been supported by a common pursuit of the aspiration for peace, the want of national development and the desire for group prosperity. However, in recent years, other discourse has cropped up in the political arena that seeks to understand tribalism as a natural and significant phenomenon within Zambian society. Ethnicity, or this so-called 'tribalism,' which has been mentioned in political campaigns or the media in recent years, has received much attention, and many people argue that ethnic divisions are leading to the erosion of the nation's social fabric and the threat to the unity of the country.

Peculiar to this discourse is the different assertion that tribalism is a natural social ailment in Zambia or if, in an actual sense, it is an invented phenomenon that has been cyclically overstated for political reasons. There is ethnic diversity, but the perception that

tribalism is the central cause of animosity and fragmentation in Zambia today is gradually being challenged. Some have claimed that the story of the emerging tribalism is simply a political strategy employed by a handful of politicians to mobilize mobilizemobilize supporters and maintain the climate of hostility with the view of grabbing power. Tribalism no longer depicts the actual social conflict; it has instead turned into a fashionable indoctrination, mainly used in elections and other political campaign periods to split the electorate along the ethnic domain.

This article aims to understand the importance of tribalism in Zambia with an argument that, unlike most people who have seen it, it is not the deep-rooted social malaise but a discourse that political players deploy to capture voters' trust. The article under review consequently seeks to upset the existing thinking when it addresses issues related to tribalism with the help of an analysis of Zambia's historical background, political development, and how political leaders have instrumentalized the ethnic parameter in the country. In addition, it will discuss the implications of ethnicity and the impact of the current government's tactic as basically counterproductive and destructive to the unity and social cohesiveness that has always characterized characterized the Zambian nation.

The politics of tribes are slowly but surely bringing down everything that took the country decades to build. Discourse on tribalism and the associated tribal politics ultimately undermine constructive political debate and effective responses to pivotal questions of governance, development, and social integration. It reinforces the false_ idea that ethnic _divisionis_ is a cause of conflict instead of using it as The central resource Acres for Zambian ethnic groups to embrace.

In this article, the author gets to his main point, that Zambia does not have tribal issues, but most of the time, such problems are fabricated to divide Zambians. Therefore, the article emphasises the change in discursive strategies on both the public and political levels, focusing on unity, openness, and vision for Zambia. It underlines the fact that the road to growth and, in the process, the stabilization of Zambian politics means not creating a division that portrays Zambian cultural diversity as a phenomenon that is a disadvantage for the country. This new attitude is not only for Zambians to maintain the country's long-standing peace but also for every Zambian, no matter which tribe, to wish for the best for their neighbour.

Literature Review

On the topic of tribalism in Zambia has been quite a decade due to its influence on political leadership of the country. Although the nation enjoys relatively low rates of political crises and conflicts, comparatively to other countries in the region the concept of tribalism became more active in political life in recent years. This paper seeks to discuss the academic and political literature on the question of tribalism in Zambia, the historical background and the political impact of the subject. It is concerned with the prevalent way which tribalism has been discussed, the antecedents of the perceived significance, and entities including politicians and media as key influencers.

Historical Context and the Politics of Unity in Zambia

Since the conception of Zambia's nationalism, everybody in this country has been sold on the concept that we are one and many. When Zambia gained its independence in 1964, the country's first president, Dr Kenneth Kaunda, embraced the policy of one Zambia, one nation. This was determined by the need for Zambia to be united. It should also be noted that under Kaunda, the Zambian leadership put forward a vision that ethnic differences should be the best asset for Zambia, not a weakness. Digesting the reminiscence of Zambia's pre-independence transition and the first decade of the country's independence, the government policy towards ethnicity and political and economic integration has been explored in literature.

In the interpretation of the early years of Zambia, scholars have pointed out that while ethnic diversity posed a significant threat, political stability brought about by the one-party system eliminated the problem. The government aimed to assimilate all ethnic groups to exclude competition known to be disruptive to new establishments. However, as multiparty democracy practice was inaugurated in the 1990s, scholars have observed that ethnic identity started playing the role of a political instrument. Politicians, realizing that competition for power was stiff, began to mobilize voters along ethnic lines and thereby manipulate the voters to have ethnic allegiance rather than national pride.

The Rise of Tribalism as a Political Narrative

More on the politicization of ethnicity in Zambia can be understood from the year 1991 when the Zambian party democracy shifted to the multiparty democracy. To secure support, political officials began to appeal to ethnic prejudices, and here, a vote would be for the 'us' and here for the 'them.' This transformation of political performance is well described in the literature, and it is revealed that in the 1990s and 2000s, political parties were widely expected to be associated with specific ethnic groups or regions.

Ethnic Identity in Zambian Politics examines how these elites take power in the context of ethnicity. Ethnicity is now valuable in campaigns; leaders prefer to appeal to ethnic identities to garner support. Due to this contribution, it has been established that tribalism is a a issue in society today. The. reality insists differences have not been a source of conflict in other eras.

During this cycle, particularly during elections, political elites go into ethnic mobilization. Nevertheless, ethnic mobilization tends to operate more frequently than during elections. Political leaders may even overemphasize ethnicity or dwell on how one group can oppress another, which creates a severed ethnicity where there is none. In this case, the discourse of tribalism is considered a method of vote hunting rather than a segmentation of society.

The Role of Media in Amplifying Tribalism

This paper aimed to examine the role of media in the construction of tribalism in Zambia; therefore, the analysis focused on forms of media, both print and electronic, as well as social media. With the development of social networks, such hyperintensification of political discourse has become the norm; the Internet is also a continuation of ethnic discourse, disinformation, and political manipulation.

Banda (2015) employed a qualitative approach with two Zambian dailies to understand how, during election campaigns, the media escalates ethnic confrontation, with ethnic conflict or alleged ethnic prejudice of the government being the main topic of concern. Such issues make the media likely to develop a wrong perception of the different groups, hence continued division of the populace along ethnicities. Media is failing to be a forum for social debate and, at times, actively participating in creating favourable rifts to a specific group/political party.

Similarly, one can propagate radical messages much faster now due to social networks. Using the examples of Twitter and Facebook posts and messages via WhatsApp reveals how such platforms heighten ethnic tensions by inflating alleged ethnophobia incidents and the promotion of online mob justice. Sichone (2017), for instance, has noted that in most primary elections, Social media platform is most often used to spread falsehoods or even incite ethnic groups in Zambia.

Tribalism or Political Strategy?

On a different note, there is increasing scholarship debunking the dominance of tribalism in Zambia and the ubiquity of tribal stories. Some authors claim that bearing ethnicity in mind, the ethno-political culture is not the primary source of the splits as it is presented by media outlets. These authors argue that since Zambia has been peaceful and

the ethnic groups have been known to intermarry, the issue of tribalism as a social vice in politics is a fallacy.

Ethnic mobilization is an effective strategy resulting from democratic breakthroughs in Zambia as politicians seek to find new means to stand out in a multi-party political system. She says that this is an appeal to ethnic self-interest in an organized manner that is likely to resonate with a population that is highly sensitized to ethnicity, given the country's current demographic composition. In this context, tribalism is not part of the Zambian fabric but a phenomenon that politicians bring out during elections.

Moreover, some scholars agree that Zambia is a diverse ethnic context that has rarely been a problem since cooperation between those ethnic groups is standard in rural and urban settings. They argue, however, that questions of power, resources, and politico-patrimonialism and not ethnicity as such turn out to be the primary source of conflict. Indeed, in addition, ethnic conflict may not be a particularly Zambian phenomenon, it is evident that rivalry associated with presidentship and control of state resources is the principal cause of conflict framing in ethical terms in Zambian politics.

Towards Unity and Progress

Analyzing the existing literature on Zambia, which blames tribalism as a cause of the failure of democracy, this study found a significant gap in how ethnicity and politics play out in Zambian democracy. The politicization of tribalism has led people to dwell more on unproductive aspects of the community, such as political affiliation, opposition or support of rivals, than accurate and more relevant issues related to governance, wealth creation, and equity necessary for the nation's growth. It is essential to fight these vices rather than to support tribal politics; hence, this calls for the fight of the vices as opposed to ethnicity.

However, literature analysis shows that Zambia's future development is only possible if it leaves behind political rivalry and concentrates on nation-building. The need to call for a reformative political culture in Zambia that can accommodate all tribes and not a tribe-dominated polity. Given globalization and integration in the region, promoting cohesion among the people of Zambia will be a significant determinant of a stable political system and the nation's economic growth.

Therefore, in summing up this discourse on tribalism as the significant threat to the Zambian social fabric, the authors of the papers presented here have argued persuasively that what can often be seen as a significant threat to the social fabric of Zambia is – in many instances – political manipulation of the Zambian population via the use of the politics of division. As the country moves towards the future, Zambia must reclaim its values of oneness, togetherness, and Zambianess against the tribal discriminatory politics of divide and rule.

2. Materials and Methods

The researcher employed a mixed-methods approach, which integrates both qualitative and quantitative research techniques, to provide a thorough and nuanced understanding of the political manipulation of ethnicity in Zambia and its broader implications for national unity. This approach is particularly suited for examining a complex and multifaceted issue like tribalism, which intersects with political, social, and cultural dynamics. By combining different methods of data collection and analysis, the research seeks to provide a comprehensive exploration of the role tribalism plays within Zambia's political landscape, how it is politically manipulated for electoral advantage, and what its long-term effects are on national cohesion and development.

Comprehensive Understanding of Tribalism's Political Manipulation

The primary aim of this mixed-methods approach is to gain a holistic view of tribalism as a political tool—not just as a societal reality or inherent issue within Zambia, but as a constructed political narrative that is utilized for political leverage. Tribalism has

often been highlighted as a divisive factor in Zambia's electoral politics, but its use as a political narrative to sway voter behavior and influence political outcomes has received less critical attention. The mixed-methods approach provides an opportunity to examine how tribalism is framed and deployed by political elites, how it is consumed by the electorate, and how these dynamics affect political participation and party affiliation.

By examining the political manipulation of ethnicity, the research seeks to shed light on the ways politicians strategically exploit ethnic identities to consolidate power and win votes. In Zambia, political leaders often utilize ethnic rhetoric during election campaigns, framing political issues in terms of ethnic allegiance or regional affiliation. The study explores whether this political manipulation is a deliberate tactic employed to divide the electorate and reduce political alternatives to ethnic choices. It further aims to evaluate the role of tribalism in shaping political behavior and to analyze how the idea of "us versus them" in the context of ethnic identity has become a prevalent narrative in Zambian politics.

3. Results

The story of tribalism in Zambia has always been considered sensitive and is frequently raised, especially during election campaigns and other discursive classes. Others justify the outright banning traditional tribal drums because they have been a football-encouraging disunity, which has slowed down the nation's development. Nation society is composed of cultural diversities since it comprises more than seventy tribes, and even though this is an advantage, politicians have played with this aspect by polarizing Zambian society based on ethnic dividing lines.

Tribalism, as depicted as a thorn in Zambia's politics, is viewed as a strategy used by some to fan suspicions and distrust from specific demography for votes. However, when studying the political history of the given country, it is necessary to state that while many politicians indeed used the concept of tribalism, the same concept was actively employed in social aspects of people's lives where people feel closer to their ethnic groups and thus can contribute to the exclusion or marginalization of other people.

However, despite these challenges, Zambia has gone a long way in fostering National unity. As mentioned before, multi-ethnic Zambia has embraced unity as One Zambia, One Nation saying Nation, its citizens aspire to a single nation. Besides, the government, civil society, and many other stakeholders in Zambia remain committed to finding ways and means to close the ethnic gulf to ensure that all citizens from all over the province feel at home in Zambia.

For Zambia to rise, there has been a growing push or a call for a change of political tone from tribalism and opportunism to policy and leadership that accommodates every Zambian. In this way, Zambia can eliminate tribalism narratives, which have long worked towards polarizing the unity of the people, in need of the country to appreciate unity and work towards a common goal. There has never been a more critical need for a strong, unifying vision identity foundation is so essential for the nation as a nation for future success.

Distribution of Tribes in Zambia
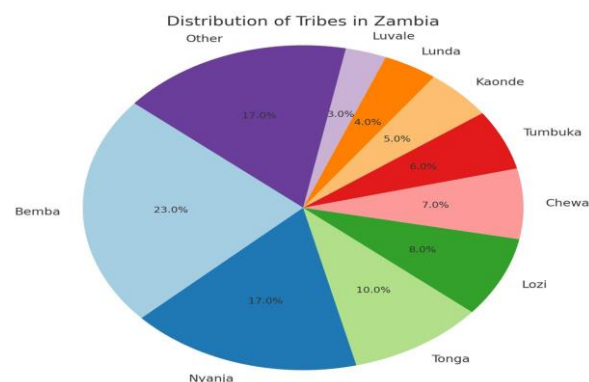
This pie chart shows the ethnic groups of Zambia, where the majority are Bemba 23%, Nyanja 17%, Tonga 10%, and others. The distribution pattern also indicates that even though the Bemba form the largest of the tribes, there is no single tribe that forms the majority of the population; this, in one way, should act as a natural check and balance required for the country to become a united nation. This diversity could have been used to improve the situation collectively instead of fractioning it, the distribution pattern revealed here is also reasonably even across principal groups, thereby refuting the narrative of tribal polarization, which has been part of the paper's contention that tribalism is primarily a political invention rather than a genuine social fault line. The data format corroborates the ethnic diverseness has been more substantial than a weakness in Zambia.

4. Discussion

Tribe division has become a contentious debate in Zambia's political arena, as politicians have relied on it to garner power over the years. This discussion will intend to critique the findings of this study and infer the consequences of political ethnicity manipulation on Zambia's national unity and social solidarity. Qualitative and quantitative study findings contribute to understanding the nature of tribalism, the political instrumentalization of this phenomenon, and possible ways of building a united nation.

1. Political Manipulation of Tribalism: The Role of Political Elites

In light of these considerations, this study shows how the politicians and their allies strengthen the notion of political-cultural tribalism as a significant issue in Zambia. Ethnicity is a significant factor in political communication; mainly during election periods, political leaders craft their ethnic stories appealing to some ethnic group or region. This is not to say that ethnic rhetoric is just used to respond to real social issues. However, it is usually used to swing the population by forming an escalation between one ethnic group and another. To that effect, political actors often depict their political rivals as representing the interests of a particular ethnic or regional group, which tends to mobilise voters by appealing to the power of ethnicity.

Based on a content analysis of political speeches, media articles, and campaign materials, it is evident that tribalism is sedimented in political communication. Instead of depicting the ethnic cleavage within a Zambian society, it may be the opposite, a political strategy aimed at producing a specific behavioural response from the electorate. This practice worsens ethnic loyalty as a critical factor in voting, supplanting substantive issues such as policy, governance or development agendas. By manipulating ethnicity in this manner, the ability of the electorate to choose something beyond ethnic assignment is denied. It fosters the erosion of cohesive political associations needed for effective political coalitions and negates the thrust of development on the national canvas.

2. Perceptions of Tribalism Among the General Population

The survey results further indicate that tribalism is recognized as a factor pervading Zambian politics and social fabric regardless of varying degrees of confidence, and the issue is rated as sustainable in the country and among the ethnic and regional groups. Curiously, many respondents do not consider tribalism as one of the primary issues affecting society. At the same time, the majority of them think that it is one of the principal political strategies employed by leaders. This indicates that ethnic affiliations and associations are as central to Zambian society as any other. However, citizens have adjusted their understanding that the political use of tribalism is often an exercise in rhetoric.

However, the public's focus on tribalism is anchored to the phenomenon's impact on political conduct and social integration. Some of the responses from the respondents suggested that the ethnic identity of the candidates, as well as the association of the political parties with the ethnic or regional origin, influenced their choice of whom to vote for in the upcoming elections. This speaks volumes of politicized ethnic identity and

fosters a polarized political system that hinders the formation of a vitally essential multiple-voter- cleavage that is cross-cutting and instead fosters a compartmentalized political cleavage. The study also shows that though ethnic loyalty is still a factor in elections, there is a newfound appreciation that such divisions do not serve the nation's best interest and that the unity of Zambia will spur its growth, not division.

3. The Impact of Media in Shaping Perceptions of Tribalism

The most influential source through which the public gets information regarding tribalism is the media, both print and electronic media. A content analysis of newspapers suggests that while some papers actively denationalize ethnic differences, others approach the problem responsibly, arguing for unity and deploying presence. Nonetheless, the role of partisan media cannot be overemphasized; certain media are owned and operated with the specific purpose of promoting specific political programs and agendas in ethnic rivalry and stereotyping ways. Such a narrative only fuels ethno political conflict and contributes to the production and reproduction of ethnic antagonism, which produces paranoia in each ethnic group.

In particular, political affiliation or ownership of media houses tends to favour the ruling political parties, which cannot benefit the public interest and worsens the political manipulation of tribalism. Taking into consideration that it is a more decentralized form of media, it has exacerbated the situation by becoming a fertile ground for the spread of tribal speeches and fake news that results in ethnic division. It is crucial to note that the youth are the most affected since they are vulnerable to radicalized political stories which portray Zambian issues in ethnic demographics.

4. National Unity: Potential Pathways for Progress

Although the study shows that Zambian politics is highly polarized along tribal lines, there is still solid public support for unity in the country. The identified issues that the the people of Zambia wanted to move away from based on ethnic differences are summarised below: economic development, health, education, and and social welfare, among others. Some of the participants complained of politicians' tendency to play ethnic politics, while some urged politicians to be above tribalism in their politics.

One of the salient issues discussed in the interviews/focus groups involved education and politics in a tone of bridging the ethnic cleavages. Some of the things that participants feel could be achieved is that by enhancing political knowledge and interethnic political rivalry, Zambians would be better positioned to make more informed decisions based on policies rather than ethnic influences. The implication is the need to embark on public education campaigns and community-level interventions that aim to deny the political script of tribalism.

In addition, this research revealed that better representatives' cooperation within the party and cross-ethnical cooperation can become effective levers for shaping the unity of the nation. Zambia's overall political structure gives way to such gradual change, where ethnic factors will not necessarily define the voters' decisions, but rather, certain policies will speak for themselves. This calls for political will, together with public endorsement, besides continuous efforts to shift the political dialogue away from ethnicity into support for national values.

5. The Way Forward: Rejecting the Politics of Tribalism

Considering all these factors, the study finds that although tribalism remains prominent in Zambian politics, it is probably not as rampant as some people may want the public to believe and as such, politicians like to use it for their selfish interest of gaining the people's votes. This is not a naturally prevalent societal issue but a politically created story that threatens the unity of Zambia and slows down its development. The way forward for Zambia is to dismiss this culture of sequencing one's politics along tribal lines and instead adopt a concept of one identity means that everybody in Zambia, regardless of their ethnic identity, can sit down and work for the common cause of the nation.

Thus, political leaders of the country should ensure that ethnicity remains a minor issue, encourage reconciliation between ethnic groups, and aim to creating a society with equal identity. Moreover, it wants the media to remain equally responsible in ordaining the discourse of peace building and not perpetuating the construction of ethnic animosities. People need to be more informed and more sophisticated in their voting; hence they should stop being used by politicians to incite them based on tribalism, instead, they should support politics that focuses on issues.

Finally, this study suggests the need to foster political integration and develop an ethic or political culture that would foster mutual tolerance and acceptance among Zambia's ethnic groups. The path forward is clear: Failure to drop tribalism as a tool to sell politics in Zambia has been an impediment to the country's realizing its ambition to be a prosperous, peaceful, and united country.

5. Conclusion

Lastly, it is worth a recap of the mitigation that in the Zambian case, the naturally appealing narrative of tribalism has morphed into a politically sensitive obstacle to national cohesion and has become the opposite of the social capital Zambia needs to advance. Few may argue that regional and ethnic affiliations are critical in determining the political nature of the nation. These ethnic and regional identities are helpful, excellent, and in their own right. They should not be allowed to become barriers to unity and integration, never tools of exclusion and division.

In truth, Zambia's strength lies in this deep diversity; if well capitalized, Sources can lead to innovation, cooperation and general welfare amongst citizens. However, the continuation of this tribalism poses the danger of negating all these possibilities and promoting a culture of distrust, division and anarchy. To move beyond the confines of tribalism, there is a need to establish a culture of oneness, togetherness and tolerance. The future of Zambia does not lie in infamous clichés such as Kwateni A Nzelu or the continued promotion of ethnic stereotyping and outright hatred against the Lozi-speaking people of Zambia, but in the construction of a united Zambian nation where every Zambian, regardless of his/her ethnic origin is a valued member of society and is accorded any opportunity he/she deserves on merit and contribution to society.

Moreover, the direction for change can only and must be associated with the refusal and rejection of tribal extremisms. Instead, it must foster the structural and cultural structures that support national unity, equity, and development. It is not just a political problem but a moral and social one that calls for total support from society, government, civil society organizations, business entities, and every citizen.

That is the basis for cooperation, understanding, and a joint future for Zambia, and only in this way can Zambia leave behind the divisions that hampered its progress so much. Thus, only by focusing on such values will people be provided with productive facts for driving society forward, valuing diversity as the strength and embracing justice and merits as the key to career success and unification in visions of the future. The right time for going together, coming to terms and moving forward is here. Should Zambia realize its potential as a model African country characterized by steady, sustainable development and bolstered by unity, the people must sever the tribalism influence currently holding them back

Recommendations

To this end, a conscious process toward social integration and forging national unity needs to be realized. Here are a few critical recommendations for moving beyond tribalism and promoting unity and progress in Zambia:

1. Promote National Identity Over Ethnic Identities: This should be tied with issues of nationalism or what unites the country's people with defining values, history, and goals. The selected elements of cultural identity, including national symbols, holidays

and educational curricula, can be utilized to enhance a positive cultural identity for every Zambian, no matter the tribe.

2. Inclusive Leadership: This paper cut the argument short and urged that the political parties and leaders must exemplify the reform they seek on the issue of gender equality. This involves recruiting boards of diverse origins for various organizations, equal representation from all regions and ethnic groups and ensuring that every citizen has confidence that he belongs to the nation of the future.

3. Civic Education on Unity: There should be an active national advocacy program to raise awareness of the ills of tribalism while promoting the gains of togetherness. Schools, community organizations, and the media play a big role in conveying the message of togetherness and showing the power of diversity.

4. Strengthening the Rule of Law and Accountability: Politicians should be held accountable for any speech, action, or policy that fosters division. Increasing the capacity of the judiciary must be accompanied by establishing enforceable anti-hate speech and discrimination policies to minimize the political exploitation of tribalism.

5. Economic and Social Development for All Regions: To eradicate any feeling of marginalization, positive, proactive measures that call for equitable distribution of developmental projects or resources across the country. This way, all regions, no matter their political or ethnic belonging, should feel the positive effects of national development. The above will also limit the creation of opportunities for Alatas1993 Alatas, Sutan. 1993. 'Indonesia's Ethnic Politics: A Historical and Comparative Perspective'. Journal of Asian and African Studies 28, no. 1/2: 75–89. the ethnic narratives to grow.

6. Foster Inter-Ethnic Dialogue: Interethnic platforms for discussions, where citizens can voice their concerns and indicate similar interests, and achieve harmonization of ethnic relations, should be promoted. Disclosing forums where these ideologies can be vented can work for social cohesion, given that tribalism stories erect barriers.

7. Encourage Role Models and Unity Ambassadors: Heads of state and religion, human rights activists, and business people should be encouraged to champion the cause of unity. These role models can encourage others to drop their racially informed animosities and coalesce into a unified Zambian nation.

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