

Precolonial Foundations of One Zambia, One Nation: The Role of Ethnic Cousinship (*Ichimbuya*) in Forging National Unity in Independent Zambia

by

Mutale T. Mazimba¹ and Ackson M. Kanduza²

¹ International Studies Group, University of the Free State

² Zambian Open University

ABSTRACT

*Community cousinship refers to social engineering to promote social integration, political reconciliation, and tolerance. This diverse interaction emerged in pre-colonial into colonial and post-colonial Zambia. In the western part of the country, the Kaonde and the Lozi have a cousinship dating back to when the former survived a Lozi military onslaught using Kamusongolwa Hill near Kasempa. Similar experiences persist in the northeastern part of Zambia. The Ngoni and the complex amalgam known as the Bemba enjoy this relationship. This arose from a 20-year war between Zwangendaba and Chileshe Chepela with no outright winner. It was only during the reign of Chitapankwa that the Ngoni were finally driven out. This article argues that ethnic cousinships, *ichimbuya* in Bemba, exist in Zambia as a form of respect for ethnic sovereignty after pre-colonial stalemates in military encounters. These cousinships were utilised in colonial times as shared colonial oppression established and consolidated solidarity between the Ngoni and the Bemba. The colonial state in North-Western Rhodesia was built on a network of community cousinships between the Tonga-Lozi-Kaonde-Lunda group and the Tonga. In North-Eastern Rhodesia, the Ngoni, Nsenga, Chewa, and Tumbuka established cousin relations with societies where *Ichimbemba* was adopted and evolved from 1929 as the original language. Drawing from several diverse incidents, the article demonstrates that the great heritage of national unity, peace, and reconciliation expressed in the motto *One Zambia, One Nation* has historical foundations. Using cousinship as social joking, Zambian societies have succeeded in healing from past trauma, collaborated against a common enemy, and assisted one another in deprivation. The paper concludes with references to contemporary events that show how easy *ichimbuya* networks build courage and collaboration.*

Key Words: Bemba, Cousinships, *Ichimbuya*, National unity, *One Zambia One Nation*, Ngoni

Introduction

Zambian journalist Charles Chisala wrote an article that appeared in the *Zambia Daily Mail* on 3 September 2017. It was about a golf tournament between the Ngoni and Bemba teams. The following excerpt is derived from that newspaper article:

I have warned these Ngoni people to stop challenging the Bemba to golf contests, but they don't seem to listen. Once again, as the *Zambia Daily Mail* reported on Wednesday, August 30, 2017, the Bembas vanquished the hapless Easterners last Sunday. Again, the Bembas subdued their tribal cousins and erstwhile bitter enemies to win the 2017 annual golf tournament at Chainama Hills Golf Club in Lusaka. Such contests have become a permanent fixture on Zambia's golf calendar. The Bemba reaffirmed their demographic advantage by drawing team

members from Luapula, Muchinga, Northern, and Copperbelt provinces. There was even a rumour that at least two golfers were 'imported' from the Democratic Republic of Congo. The northerners beat the unrepentant rodent eaters 476-417 to retain the trophy during the 18-hole tournament. As expected, the Ngoni were not willing to admit that the Bemba were just too clever for them. They had to find a ridiculous scapegoat for their defeat. Their team leader, Welani Chilengwe, was reported to have shamelessly climbed the highest hill around screaming at the top of his voice that they were going to file a petition in the Constitutional Court. Chilengwe accused the innocent Bembas of employing monkey tricks to win the contest when the truth is that it was his team that had employed dirty rat tricks, which did not work. He should have blamed his weak 'warriors' who seemed not to know the difference between a steel golf club and a wooden *camutunga* (knobkerrie), which they used alternately to hit golf balls. I am reliably informed that the Easterners also sought the services of a human hyena who, however, refused to accept the huge reward they dangled in his face. The 'flying hyena' explained that his witchcraft only works during the night, and the golf tournament would be held in broad daylight.³

The journalist who wrote this article hails from the Northern Province of Zambia. Chisala, in explaining his berating of the losing Ngoni side, raised the golf tournament to an intellectual level with much spice. His article appeared in a widely circulated national newspaper, indicating that the writing style was acceptable to the editorial team and did not breach any ethical considerations. Chisala, one left behind or a farm portion in fallow, reported as a continuation of the golf game his brothers had won while the "rodent eaters" from the Eastern Province had lost.⁴ How such seemingly offensive statements can be written about one ethnic group in a national newspaper is the crux of this discussion. This work demonstrates that the value of historical knowledge is immeasurable. It further shows that historical knowledge helps create social and political environments for corporate capital to flourish and general development to advance. Chisala's story was about ethnic cousinship emanating from pre-colonial times and encounters. The story provides a means to connect our research to pre-colonial Zambian history and anthropological scholarship since the 1920s.⁵ Drawing from several diverse incidents, the paper demonstrates the great heritage of traditions for national unity, peace and reconciliation, which Zambia still utilises sixty years after its independence. The heritage is expressed in the motto,

³ *The Zambia Daily Mail*, 3 September 2017.

⁴ *The Zambia Daily Mail*, 3 September 2017.

⁵ Hrri Eglund, 'Zambja at 50: The Rediscovery of Liberalism', *Africa*, 83, 4 (2013), pp. 670-689; A. R. Radcliffe-Brown, 'The Mother's Brother in South Africa', *South African Journal of Science*, XXI (1924), pp. 542-555; A. I. Richards, 'Reciprocal clan relationships among the Bemba of North Eastern Rhodesia', *Man*, XXXVII (1937); T. V. Scrivenor, 'Some Notes on Utani or the Vituperative Alliances Existing between clans in the Masai District', *Tanganyika Notes and Records*, IV (1937), pp. 72-74; and E. Colson, 'Clans and the Joking Relationships among the Plateau Tonga of Northern Rhodesia', *Kroeber Anthropological Society*, 8-9 (1953), pp. 45-58.

One Zambia, One Nation. The motto came into use in 1964 to instil national unity. It was an attempt by the founding fathers and mothers to unify 73 ethnicities into a single functional nation.

There is a long tradition of cousinship practices in Zambia's literature. C. J. Mitchel wrote about the Kalela dance on the Copperbelt and was surprised at the use of seemingly offensive language, which the audience received with laughter and joy. Mitchel cited a song about some male who identified with Chibemba as his first language, proposing to have an intimate relationship with a Nsenga woman. She rejected the initiative. The Bemba man responded in anger. He told the woman that she had made a good decision because he could not marry a woman with an intimate relationship with a dog, as did all Nsenga people. All Nsenga mine workers from the Eastern Province in attendance merely laughed and responded in a verbal war without any hostility.⁶ This example illustrates that collective cousinage creates "wars in friendship" because no harm is intended. The aim is to promote cordial interaction.

These historical foundations of ethnic cousinship are firmly embedded in Zambian cultural diversity. Using cousinage, or *ichimbuya*, that is, social joking relationships, African societies have succeeded in healing from military conflict and trauma, collaborated against common enemies and assisted one another in times of deprivatation, deprivation and stress. Joking relations in Zambia, as in other parts of the world, facilitates confidence in foreign areas and meeting unfamiliar people. This discussion shows, with references to contemporary events, that *ichimbuya* networks build courage and hope and inspire collaboration in and between Zambian societies.

Deconstructing *Ichimbuya* in an African Context

UNESCO (2014) describes joking relationships as 'a social practice performed among separate ethnolinguistic communities, groups and individuals to promote fraternity, solidarity and conviviality.'⁷ Chidongo Phiri and Chileshe Selestino Kandondo defined the *Ichimbuya* phenomenon as a way of life for the actors involved. Phiri and Kandondo explained that "the continuous reciprocal interaction" between personal, behavioural, and environmental determinants is affected by those engaged in the practice.⁸ *Ichimbuya* relationships involve playful taunting practised in public spaces as part of everyday social interactions. For example, people of the crocodile clan may belittle the size of someone from the fish clan. The reverse teasing is to say how enormous the crocodile is because it is eating a lot of members of the fish clan who are

⁶ C. J. Mitchell, 'The Kalela Dance', *Rhodes-Livingstone Papers*, 27 (1956).

⁷ UNESCO, Intangible Cultural Heritage, 'Practices and expressions of joking relationships in Niger', 2014 (Available at <https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL>, accessed on 28 April 2024).

⁸ Chidongo Phiri and Chileshe Selestino Kandondo, 'Exploring and Deconstructing the Chimbuya Phenomenon at the University of Zambia in the School of Education: Lecturer's and Learner's Perspective', *International Journal of Humanities, Social Sciences and Education*, 8, 11 (2021), p. 40.

not allowed to grow big. In some cases, this relationship can also involve apparent insults and bullying.

In a way, this joking relationship confers the members of interacting groups a right to harmless rudeness as the disposition is not offensive. The interactive expressions create heaven on earth. This is particularly pronounced within or between peer groups. Juniors often feel constrained in making jokes with community cousins who are older than them. These relationships are transmitted and maintained from generation to generation, thereby transmitting historical continuity and change. Joking relationships are used to express status relations between ethnic groups and define the boundaries of ethnic communities.⁹ It becomes an ideology to describe something or to relax a relationship.

Daniel Posner pointed out that ethnic groups in Zambia are historical constructions, and their structures should be viewed as a continuous interaction and sustained evolution. In broad terms, internal and external dynamics generate and shape the evolutions, which are revolutions at other times. Posner also explained how financial limitations in the late 1920s led to adopting indigenous languages for official communication.¹⁰ Kaonde, Lunda and Luvala were adopted for the North-Western Province. Silozi was adopted in Buluzi- a congregation of languages spoken by 30 diverse ethnic groups. Mirriam Nsonge discussed the wars fought between the Lozi and the Kaonde over natural resources around Kasempa. The Kaonde kept the Lozi at bay or defeated the Lozi by using the Kamusongolwa range of hills and mountains near the Kasempa District Administration. The Kaonde took a strategic decision to camp on Kamusongolwa Hill, from where they rolled big stones that killed and maimed many Lozi fighters.¹¹ Conflict was an interlude; peace was permanent and often sought within and between societies. Cross-pollination was a universal human value because it strengthened while inbreeding weakened. Family and clan memes generated tools for external crafts or foreign relations. Therefore, socialisations that created ethnic groups also generated interactions with other groups, resulting in cousinship as a post-war *modus operandi*.

A. Gini explored ethnic jokes and asked what made tasteless, crude, rude, and seemingly harmful ethnic jokes funny, tolerable and accepted. Such jokes were often viewed within the

⁹ E. Schildkrout, 'Ethnicity, Kinship and joking among Urban immigrants in Ghana', in B. Du Toit & H. Safa (eds.), *Migration and Urbanization: Models and Adaptive Strategies* (Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton, 2011), pp. 245-264.

¹⁰ D. N. Posner, 'The Colonial origins of Ethnic Cleavages: the case of Linguistic divisions in Zambia', *Comparative Politics*, 35, 2 (2003), pp. 127-146.

¹¹ Mirriam Nsonge, 'Kamusongolwa, Kaonde and the Lozi since 1895', Unpublished and exploratory research, Zambian Open University, March 2019.

proper context and told to the right audiences.¹² Therefore, ethnic cousinship uses jokes not as a normative act but as an epistemic one. Gini further explained that a joke depended on who was telling it and to whom the joke was told. In the right environment, crude jokes became delicious, humanising and delightful. Cousinage usually enlivened and provided moments of progressive reflection.¹³ Group beer drinking among miners on the Copperbelt, especially when miners were paid, usually and easily used cousinship as a foundation. The payment was made fortnightly during the late colonial and post-colonial period. This was also combined with work teams such as miners in one shift often socialising together. Urbanisation built common communities on the Zambian Copperbelt and other urban centres from various interactions.

Leon Rapport argued that humour and ridicule were ways in which people adapted to their diverse interaction environments, broke their isolation, and coped with trauma. It was also a way for people to define and assert themselves while seemingly derogating others.¹⁴ This was particularly true for the Kaonde-Lozi cousinship or Ngoni-Bemba relationship, which arose from hostile proximities from the late 1840s to the late 1860s. Many on either side claim that there was no outright winner. However, some historians, such as Keith J. Rennie, categorically believe that the Ngoni were defeated, as evidenced by the fact that they did not permanently settle among the Bemba.¹⁵ It may be extended logically that the Ngoni lost because of the grave of their leaders, such as Zwangendaba, in the Namwanga country under Chieftainess Waitwika at Nakonde¹⁶. This reasoning also points to a Lozi defeat at Kamusongolwa Mountain because the Kaonde still owns the area.

According to some informants, a Simfukwe family, a variant of Chileshe among the Bemba, has been responsible for caring for Zwangendaba's grave from the late 1890s till today. As joking tendencies developed, the Bemba and the Ngoni sustained their ichimbuya relationships after the war. According to some oral sources, the Ngoni did not go away empty-handed.¹⁷ They remained a factor of influence in the Bemba royal family because the Ngoni captured and took with them a Bemba princess, a niece of Chief Nkula. The present Chitimukulu has acknowledged descending from the line of that princess. The Ngoni blood in the Bemba royal

¹² A. Gini, 'Dirty jokes, Tasteless jokes, Ethnic jokes', *Florida Philosophical Review*, 15, 1 (2015), pp. 50-65.

¹³ Gini, 'Dirty jokes, Tasteless jokes, Ethnic jokes', pp. 50-65.

¹⁴ L. Rapport, *Punchlines: the case of Racial, Ethnic and Gender Humour* (London: Westport, 2005)

¹⁵ J. Keith Rennie, 'The Ngoni states and European intrusion', in Eric Stokes and Richard Brown (eds.), *The Zambezi Past: Studies in Central African History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1966), pp. 302-331

¹⁶ Ackson Kanduzwa and C. H. Chirwa, 'The Ngoni after Zwangendaba's Death', Sifiso Mxolisi Ndlovu (ed.), *The Road to Democracy in South Africa Volume 8 South African Diaspora in southern and eastern Africa in Precolonial times, Part 1* (Braamfontein: Pan African University Press, 2020), pp. 168-176.

¹⁷ Alexander B. Mulenga, 'Chitimukulu Musenga Number 34', Unpublished, 22 March 2022.

family has been effectively handled through cousinage, *ichimbuya*. Humour is a powerful social tool that sustains and controls relationships between societies.¹⁸ Cousinships help to keep dominant groups in society in their positions, but at the same time, they are a force of resistance for subordinate groups. Thus, Arthur Berger suggests that there may be complex struggles in relationships that are given a positive outlet in ethnic joking.¹⁹

Ethnic-based joking relationships exist in many countries in Africa. In Burkina Faso, Youssouf Diallo has shown that pastoralists and blacksmiths enjoy a joking relationship with the Fulani in West Africa.²⁰ Similarly, writing about the Fulbe and the blacksmiths, Sten Harberg argued that joking relations were not only remnants of the past but were also part of the present-day national political and social culture.²¹ This can also be applied to Zambia, where ethnic joking ties exist in the present based on events of either hostile or supportive interaction in the past.

Marcel Mauss studied joking relations in societies where respectful address was necessary, such as between the men's and the wives' parents. Similarly, the husbands had a respect of avoidance towards their wives' parents. However, a man could have a joking relationship with his wife's grandparents, brothers and sisters. Similarly, a woman enjoyed relations of humour and easy communication with the grandparents, the brothers and sisters of her husband. Mauss thus looked at joking relationships as "formalised avoidance" between, for instance, a man and his mother-in-law or father-in-law. Similar relations existed between a woman and the parents of her husband. For Mauss, joking relationships existed between kin based on marriage.²² These relationships formed part of social and kinship systems and defined occasions and expressive forms for displaying dimensions of identity. This type of joking relationship is also practised in Zambia, where, for instance, a man treats his wife's younger sisters as his wives. Yet he was supposed to keep a respectful distance from his parents-in-law.

With their interest in analysing and understanding structures in society, anthropologists took an interest in studying African societies from the early 20th Century. For instance, A. R. Radcliffe-Brown was fascinated with the position of a brother to a married woman with her children among matrilineal and patrilineal societies in South Africa.²³ In matrilineal societies such as the

¹⁸ Chris Chirwa and Ackson Kanduza's interview with George Michael Simfukwe, Lecturer at Zambia Open University in the School of Education, Lusaka, 29 March 2019.

¹⁹ Arthur Asa Berger, *An Anatomy of Humour, First Edition* (New York: Routledge, 1993), Chapter 12.

²⁰ Youssouf Diallo, 'Identity and Joking relationships among the Fulani in Western Burkina Faso', *Cahiers detudes Africaines*, 184, 4 (2006), pp. 779-794.

²¹ S. Hagberg, 'The Politics of joking relationships in Burkina Faso', *Journal of Social and Cultural Anthropology*, 131, 2, (2006), pp. 197-214.

²² M. Mauss, 'Joking relations'. *Journal of Ethnographic theory*, 3, 2 (2013), pp. 1-23.

²³ A. R. Radcliffe-Brown, 'A further note on Joking relationships', *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, 19, 2 (1949), pp. 133-140.

Tswana communities, the brother to a married woman played a decisive role in her children's lives. The opposite was and still is the case with the patrilineal Nguni societies. In both situations, joking relations exist between the children of a brother and those of his sisters. In both societies, children have relaxed access to the sisters of their fathers. All children have relaxed and joking ties with their grandparents. In the late 1950s, Jack Goody took up research similar to that of Radcliffe-Brown. Goody studied relations between children of the mother's brother and sister's sons. A common understanding was that children of sisters were either brothers or sisters. They had controlled regulations in their ties.²⁴ For example, they were prohibited from marrying each other. This was not the case with the mother's children and those of her brothers, who were cousins. As such, marriage was permitted. In such situations, marriage sometimes grew from joking relations among cousins.

Some scholars have also observed that joking ties are essential in conflict management. Mark Davidheiser explored the contemporary role of joking relations in conflict mitigation in rural southwestern Gambia. He found that joking ties were social institutions that reinforced intra and inter-ethnic integration and mitigated inter-group conflict.²⁵ This paradigm can also be seen in Zambia, which has enjoyed decades of peace despite many ethnicities. Among foundational studies are those of Audrey Richards among the Bemba and Elizabeth Colson in the Plateau Tonga, from the late 1930s to the 1950s.²⁶ Further, Handelman and Kapferer studied joking activities in Zambia during the 1970s. They analysed the social rules that characterised these relationships, showing that cousinship within and between ethnic communities was complex. Complex rules of engagement, learnt over a long period, were transmitted from generation to generation.²⁷ Handelman and Kapferer thus showed that cousinship existed only in specific contexts, among particular people drawing on certain subjects. Among the Lozi, cousinship was not recognised because siblings' children extended and perpetuated the relationship between their mothers and their brothers or vice versa. Yet, relaxed or joking relations existed between grandparents and their grandchildren. These social realities prepared the Lozi children to learn and understand joking relations between the Lozi communities and their neighbours in Southern,

²⁴ Jack Goody, 'The Mother's Brother and sister's son in West Africa', *Africa: Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, LXXXIX, 1 (1959), pp. 61-68.

²⁵ M. Davidheiser, 'Harmony, Peace-making and Power: Controlling Processes and African Mediation', *Conflict Resolution Quarterly*, 23, 3 (2005), pp. 281-299.

²⁶ For more details, see A. I. Richards, 'Reciprocal clan relationships among the Bemba of North Eastern Rhodesia', *Man*, XXXVII (1937); and E. Colson, 'Clans and the Joking Relationships among the Plateau Tonga of Northern Rhodesia', *Kroeber Anthropological Society*, 8-9 (1953), pp. 45-58.

²⁷ D. Handelman and B. Kapferer, 'Forms of joking activity: A comparative approach', *American Anthropologist*, 74, 3 (1972), pp. 484-517.

Central and North-western Provinces. A Lozi, for example, did not have to be invited to feel at home among the Tonga, Kaonde, Luvale or Ila. Knowing or understanding events or situations that were the foundations of community joking relations was unnecessary. What was demonstrable was the joy of easy and relaxed access to other people. This freedom of belonging allowed free expression. The benefits at local and small-scale levels led to expanded goodness in the form of national unity.²⁸

In 2021, Chidongo Phiri and Chileshe Selestino Kandondo explored the *ichimbuya* phenomenon at the University of Zambia (UNZA) in the School of Education. They used the perspective of lecturers and learners at UNZA, applying a critical sociological lens through the practical social exchange theory to investigate and deconstruct whether the *ichimbuya* phenomenon generated benefits for those involved as a form of micro-social order in the school. The *ichimbuya* phenomenon was contextualised by uttering practical jokes and subtle sexist words detrimental to the recipients in various ways. This practice was essential to the student's learning, the lecturer's ways of teaching, accessing resources and living, and creating micro-social equilibrium and disequilibrium for the learners and lecturers.²⁹

From the foregoing, it is seen that joking relationships are not a new phenomenon but have existed even before the coming of colonialism. However, studies have shown that outside Zambia, most joking relationships exist only in familial, marriage and kinship contexts. They are a way for formal relationships to become more manageable. In Zambia, these joking relationships are also in the form of ethnic or community cousinships. They exist between ethnic groups that otherwise would have no connection to each other. The Bemba and the Ngoni are perhaps the best-known ethnic cousins. However, there are also such relationships among the Tonga and the Lunda/Luvale and the Kaonde, Lamba and Lozi. The Zambian case study is unique as there are few recorded instances of joking relationships among non-related groups. Tanzania and parts of West Africa are the only other countries that have experienced these.³⁰

Origins of Ethnic Joking Relationships in Zambian Society

Intra-Ethnic cousinship centred around the clan. The clan was a fundamental socio-political institution which formed the basis of complex political transactions. Membership in a clan was rigid and a testament to the history of a particular group.³¹ Since the 1920s, there has been

²⁸ Handelman and Kapferer, 'Forms of joking activity: A comparative approach', pp. 484-517.

²⁹ Phiri and Kandondo, 'Exploring and Deconstructing the Chimbuya Phenomenon at the University of Zambia in the School of Education', pp. 40-53.

³⁰ Radcliffe-Brown, 'A further note on Joking relationships', pp. 133-140.

³¹ M. T. Mazimba-Kaunda, *A history of the Unga people of the Bangweulu swamps. Pre-colonial times to 1953* (Lusaka: Lead First publishers, 2021), pp. 61-62.

sustained scholarly interest in understanding the nature of joking relationships in Africa. The literature clearly shows that this is not a neglected theme. The origins of these joking relations, as demonstrated by A. R. Radcliffe-Brown in general terms or Richards and Colson on Zambia, were at the family level.

The relations were expected to be close, warm and free-flowing. The grandchildren were expected to recognise grandparents as deep pools of knowledge which had high value in human society. It was a highly sought-after commodity for a variety of reasons. They were expected to develop an interest in understanding the nature of this knowledge, and how it was generated, stored and transmitted. The grandchildren were also supposed to cultivate curiosity in how to acquire and use this knowledge. This relationship between grandchildren and their grandparents produced the term *ichimbuya*. Cousins at a family level were expected to have relations of humour among themselves. A woman was also expected to have free but respectful relations with the siblings of her husband. A man was similarly expected to have joking relations with defined limits with the siblings of his wife.

Joking relations recognise that individuals and families are not isolated islands. Families are members of clans through the parents and marriages. These clans multiply the social networks of both families and clans. These networks promote cooperative activities to share skills available at the family or clan level. These complementary operations lead to intensive production of resources required for survival, reproduction and recovery from natural disasters. Plans to increase goods and services may also cause conflict. Joking relations at the family or clan level are intended to show good things that come through collaboration and judicious use of resources. Therefore, if conflicts have emerged without planning for them, joking relations are oils that facilitate movement. People who are free to interact, such as because of joking relations and frequent reciprocity, are bound to see relations that may return progress.

Ethnic jesting is part of indigenous African culture. However, some researchers have argued that joking among “tribes” began in the colonial period. Writing about joking tribes in the Copperbelt towns, Albert Matongo argued that this arose from former enemies living in close quarters in the mines where they could not openly express their hatred of one another.³² Thus, joking relationships developed to navigate these complex relationships.

³² A. B. K. Matongo, ‘Popular Culture in a colonial society: Another Look at Mbeni and Kalela dances on the Copperbelt, 1930-64’, in Samuel N. Chipungu (ed.), *Guardians in their Time: Experiences of Zambians Under colonial Rule, 1890-1964* (London: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1992), pp.180-217.

However, there is a historical aspect to *ichimbuya* which should not be ignored. 'Joking bonds are typically associated with particular events in the history of the partners.'³³ Among the Ngoni and the Bemba amalgam, *ichimbuya* dates back to the late 19th century during the twenty-year Ngoni-Bemba war. The *ichimbuyaship* between the Bemba and the Ngoni deserves closer scrutiny because it is the oldest relationship resulting from a well-documented interaction. The Ngoni origins point to South Africa. After the defeat of Zwide at the Mlatuze River in 1818, Shaka turned his attention to attacking the Cunu and Tembu. This gave Zwangendaba and his Jele people a chance to escape from the horrors of the Mfecane. By 1822, Zwangendaba was at Delagoa Bay. Conflict with Mzilikazi, Soshangane and Nxaba forced the Jele to continue northwards, crossing the Zambezi near Zumbo on 19 November 1835. After Zwangendaba's death at Mapupo in Tanganyika, a succession dispute ensued. One of the contenders, Mpezeni, whose mother was stripped of queenship due to accusations of witchcraft, returned to Zambia and again settled near the Bemba.³⁴

The Bemba came from Luba land in Katanga in the late seventeenth century. They were from the Abena Ng'andu (crocodile) Clan. Led by Chiti, they established themselves among small Luba chiefdoms in northern Zambia. The Bemba kingdom grew largely as a result of conquering surrounding groups such as the Mambwe, Lungu and Bisa. This was because of the lack of resources in the kingdom.³⁵ By 1850, they were the strongest kingdom in the north and their military prowess was well established largely as a result of raiding their neighbours.³⁶

The Ngoni attacked the Bemba during the reign of Chitapankwa. In one of the battles at Chief Makasa's village, the Ngoni killed Chitimukulu's sister, Mukukamfumu. In retaliation, all the Bemba chiefs came together and avenged her death, forcing the Ngoni to withdraw in 1870.³⁷ Thus, the Ngoni were repelled and left the borders of Lubemba, moving east to settle in Chipata. The Bemba-Ngoni war, therefore, is the foundation of their cousinship. Joking relationships exist between the Bemba and the Ngoni because they had previously gone to war with each other. Ethnic cousinship, therefore, illustrates indigenous dispute settlement and conflict management. Two scholars from the University of Zambia, *mbuyas* in the strongest sense of the term, aptly summarized this relationship in the following excerpt:

³³ M. Davidheiser, 'Joking for peace: Social organisation, tradition and change in Gambian conflict management', *Cahiers d'études Africaines*, XLVI (4) (2006), p. 838.

³⁴ T. J. Thompson, 'The Origins, migration and settlement of the Northern Ngoni', *The Society of Malawi Journal*, 34, 1 (1981), pp. 6-35.

³⁵ Andrew Roberts, 'Chronology of the Bemba (N. E. Zambia)', *The Journal of African History*, 11, 2 (1970), p. 222

³⁶ Andrew Roberts, *A History of Zambia* (London: Heinemann, 1976), p. 87.

³⁷ A. L. Epstein, 'Military organisation and the pre-colonial polity of the Bemba of Zambia', *Man New Series*, 10, 2 (1975), pp. 199-217.

The *Bembas* had guns obtained from the Arabs, who used them to penetrate the shields of the *Ngonis*. The *Ngoni* who had advanced military tactics were checked and contained by the Bemba's strong military advancement in the possession of guns. These military skirmishes did not produce an outright victor. Therefore, realizing that both opponents were skilled, the warring parties saw no point in continuing the inter-tribal hostility but rather sought new ways to control the hostility between them to enhance social cohesion. Orally, this is believed to have been the birth of the concept of *Chimbuya* today formally known as (*Chimbuya*) tribal cousinship that has been institutionalized and entrenched through mutual respect.³⁸

While Ngoni has evolved as a shorthand that envelopes diverse ethnic groups in Eastern Province, so too has Bemba been conveniently crafted to include all considered to have Chibemba as a first language in Muchinga Province, Northern Province, Luapula Province, Copperbelt Province and northern parts of Central Province. A common origin in the Luba Kingdom for societies such as the Bemba, Tumbuka, Nsenga or Chewa would make them to be brothers to the Bemba. However, a common geographical position with the Ngoni who had a war with the Bemba as a foundation for their cousinage, grouped the Nsenga, Chewa, Kunda and Tumbuka into the Ngoni group as cousins of the Bemba and those assumed to be first speakers of Chibemba. It may be noted for future inquiries that the Biza and Kunda in Zambia have the Yawo in Malawi as community cousins.

On the western side of Zambia, the Lozi communities have joking relations with the Bantu Botatwe complex commonly known as BaTonga. In essence, the BaTonga group includes Gwembe Tonga, Plateau Tonga, Toka, Leya, Ila, Lenje and Soli. Both the Lozi and Tonga communities share cousinship or joking relations with all diverse groups found in the North-Western Province. The Tonga and the Luvale/Lunda have an existing cousinship dating back to the early colonial period. In the war between the Lozi and the Kaonde/Lamba at Kamusongolwa Hill, the Luvale/Lunda aided the Lozi with food and water while the Lenje aided the Kaonde. The Luvale/Lunda were thus on the Lozi side while the Lenje were on the Kaonde's side, creating a cousinship among them. Due to the Bantu Botatwe grouping, the Tonga also became part of this relationship even though there was never any warfare between the Luvale/Lunda and the Tonga.³⁹ Similar to the jesting relationship between the Bemba and the Ngoni, a cousinship exists between the Tonga and the Lozi as well. The Lozi defeated the Tonga in several raids for cattle.

³⁸ Phiri and Kandondo, 'Exploring and Deconstructing the Chimbuya Phenomenon at the University of Zambia in the School of Education', p. 41.

³⁹ *The Zambian Observer*, 27 April 2020; Kimber Chibolya, 'The origin of Tonga and Luvale/Lunda cousinship and Kaonde/Lamba brotherhood', *Zambian Eye News*, 22 April 2022.

There developed a cousinship between the Lozi and the Tonga after diverse interactions over some time. Perhaps the Lozi crafted immunity to forestall future claims for reparations. This demonstrates that Zambia comprises many complex networks of cousinships.

Meyer Fortes noted that the Tellensi had joking relationships where they could insult one another without offending as a way of dealing with latent hostility.⁴⁰ 'The exchange of insults is "cathartic" because it rids the livers of both parties of impurities'.⁴¹ A long history of labour migration in Zambia, and a deliberate policy of deploying workers, especially civil servants to foreign areas rather than places of their ethnic identity, has promoted fraternal relations whenever community cousins meet anywhere in Zambia. Thus, the Lozi, Tonga or Kaonde easily build fraternal relations when they meet in any part of the country.

These cousinage ties are encouraged with local practices within Zambia. In an interview, Mr. Kamphasa Tembo explained that among the Nsenga in Eastern Zambia and parts of north-western Mozambique, the Tembo clan considers the Ngulube clan as cousins.⁴² A telephone interview with Mr Mark Sikwenda shared the views of Mr Tembo.⁴³ In another telephone interview with a *mwina* Ng'umbo from Mbabala Island in Luapula Province, Dr Nandi Mumba explained that clan relations are based on principles of brotherhood, solidarity and mutual dependence. Though from an Island in a landlocked country, Dr. Mumba emphasised that no person is an Island. In the same way, an individual or a clan is a supplement of the knowledge and experiences of another. Inspired by such values, Bena Ng'umbo support each other and are in joking relations with other clans. Dr. Mumba emphasised that reciprocal clan relations are celebrated and there are no clan relations based on hostility. The *bena Ng'wena* clan may tease the *Isabi* (fish) clan for being diminutive. The fish clan will retaliate that the crocodiles are often too hungry and selfish not to allow fish to grow into big sizes.⁴⁴ This type of conversation is a universal value in Zambia.

This can be further explained concerning the largest matrilineal group in the Eastern Province, the Nsenga. According to Mr Tembo and Mr Sikwenda, the Nsenga are divided into clans, *Mikoka*. This social unit is universal among all ethnic groups in Zambia. Reciprocal relations easily emerge between members of the Tembo and Ngulube clans everywhere they meet. Thus, the Ngulube and Tembo clans consider themselves as relatives and will expect support from each

⁴⁰ Meyers Fortes, *The Dynamics of clanship among the Tallensi* (London: Oxford University Press, 1945).

⁴¹ Radcliffe-Brown, 'A further note on Joking relationships', p. 138.

⁴² Ackson Kanduza's interview with Mr Kampasa Tembo, Lusaka, 14 March 2022.

⁴³ Ackson Kanduza's interview with Mr. Mark Sikwenda, via telephone, 6 April 2022.

⁴⁴ Ackson Kanduza's interview with Dr. Nandi Mumba, 8 April 2022, Luapula Province.

other during stress. They also celebrate shared victories.⁴⁵ Thus, the Lozi or Lunda, meeting in traditional areas of the Nsenga such as in Nyimba, or Petauke, will easily establish fraternal ties or cousinships that correspond to some social practices among the Nsenga. The hosts in Petauke or Nyimba, will learn and quickly understand that people from the Western Province are cousins to those from the Southern Province or North-western Province. Cousinage in Zambia has deep and diverse roots. It is a set of relationships from which to build democracy because many Zambian ethnic groups understand that diversity enriches and builds unity. *Ichimbuya*, thus promotes a wide range of collaborations and partnerships.

Zambian joking frames are rooted in mutual past experiences which are then utilised by successive members of the joking groups. This frame is category routinized, meaning that joking is anchored 'in the common recognition that particular categories of persons can joke with one another'.⁴⁶ Therefore, counting on a known joking frame, members are free to abuse and insult each other without destroying the joking frame while moving from a jesting mood to a serious one. Because it is normatively and traditionally prescribed, category routinized joking, ethnic cousinships, have a high degree of consensus about the context of the joking. They are very clear about who can joke with whom and the content of the jokes themselves.⁴⁷ In terms of context, there is no situation in which the relationship cannot be enjoyed. Topics for joking may include dietary habits, peculiar customs or immorality. Ethnic Cousinship is fluid and can allow transfers of roles of target and the introduction of new content. This makes it adaptable to changes in society and inherently makes it relevant in successive generations.

Socio-Political Functions of Ethnic Cousinships

In 1948, Professor Griaule studied ethnic joking among the Bozo and Dogon of West Africa. He cautioned that to understand a custom, we need to examine the role it plays in the society in which it is found.⁴⁸ Above all, it is important to understand the meaning that the local people have attached to these relationships. Ethnic cousinships permeate every facet of life; in workplaces, schools, churches and even the political arena. For Arthur Asa Berger, 'Humour is everywhere. It insinuates itself into every aspect of our lives and sticks its big nose in where we don't want it.'⁴⁹ In social contests, "ichimbuyaship" is often invoked. For instance, if a Ngoni family is hosting a wedding, any Bemba can hold the food hostage until a ransom is paid as a way of

⁴⁵ Ackson Kanduza's interview with Mr Kampasa Tembo, Lusaka, 14 March 2022; Ackson Kanduza's interview with Mr. Mark Sikwenda, via telephone, 6 April 2022.

⁴⁶ Handelman and Kapferer, 'Forms of joking activity: A comparative approach', p. 485.

⁴⁷ Handelman and Kapferer, 'Forms of joking activity: A comparative approach', p. 485.

⁴⁸ Radcliffe-Brown, 'A further note on Joking relationships', p. 138.

⁴⁹ Berger, *An Anatomy of Humour*, 1.

demonstrating their power over the Ngoni. Similarly, a Ngoni woman can jokingly claim the husband of a Bemba woman as her own and vice versa.

This chimuyaship is not just practised in private spaces but also in public ones. Tribal cousinships in Zambian societies have fostered unity in various social activities such as funerals and social celebrations. Such relationships are important in supporting and reinforcing social cohesion and group membership.⁵⁰ Ethnic cousinship comes into play during mourning periods to lighten the sombreness of the death in the family. When a funeral befalls one party, the other goes to support the bereaved. They usually perform some rites which distract the mourners from the funeral. For instance, among the Northerners and Easterners, when a funeral befalls an Easterner, a Northerner will bring a payment referred to as *mukhuzo* as a way of conveying condolences. Then they will sprinkle white powder on all the Easterners present. The ensuing scuffles as people try to escape being pelted with powder create some humour in a rather sombre environment.⁵¹

On 11 March 2022, the former Zambian President, Rupiah Bwezani Banda, died and the current president Hakainde Hichilema declared national mourning. Banda was from Eastern Province, and his mother was a Ngoni. His father was a Chewa. What was strange about the death of Banda was that his kin from the Eastern Province went into hiding. They did not want to be publicly linked to the dead statesman. One of the authors of this paper even had to temporarily change the pronunciation of his name to give it a northern appearance. He changed it from Kanduzza to Kandusa. All this was done because the Easterners were afraid of what their *mbuyas* would do to them because of the high profile death. Those Easterners who braved it and went to the house of mourning were shelled with pellets of white powder and mealie-meal by the Bemba. Many were asked to offer a token before being permitted to enter the house of mourning. Simultaneously, Ngonis in workplaces, churches, markets and schools were sprinkled with white powder. This practice caused such disruption in schools, markets and the funeral house as Easterners walked about like zombies. Consequently, the government banned the sprinkling of powder and mealie meal on the grieving Ngoni during the mourning period. However, underlying the humour, was an attempt to trivialise the death and lighten the load of the grieving family. It was an illustration of communities cooperating and showing support for each other so that the

⁵⁰ Diallo, 'Identity and Joking relationships among the Fulani in Western Burkina Faso', pp. 779-794.

⁵¹ *Zambia Daily Mail*, on-line videos. Available at <https://m.facebook.com>, accessed on 24 April, 2022.

bereaved endured the hardship with humour. This confirms Louis Kronenberger's assertion that at its best, humour simultaneously hurts and heals.⁵²

In Zambia, jokes are used to demonstrate and reinforce cultural identity. For instance, a Bemba may tell a Ngoni acting in a particular way that, that was why their ancestors were clobbered during the Bemba-Ngoni war. Told by a Bemba, such a joke is an amusing expression of the Bemba's pride in their historical military prowess. The Ngoni would then respond that they were never clobbered but merely repelled because they were tired of eating monkeys among the Bemba. This would also serve as reinforcement that there was no outright winner in the war and would preserve the pride of the Ngoni. This is why Leon Rapport argued that 'depending on their context, jokes and ... involving [ethnicities] can have different meanings at different times for different audiences'.⁵³

Ichimbuya is important in maintaining peace among different social groups. Ethnic hostility is presented as jesting, thereby preventing conflict. As journalist Charles Chisala noted, 'the Ngoni and AbaBemba, share such a rich history that they should continue living in peace through their cousinship and social events'.⁵⁴ As a Complement to this, Mark Davidheiser makes the following observation:

One of the most powerful bonds is that of joking kinship. These relationships provide a script for cooperative interaction with varying degrees of reciprocal obligation. When mediators employ joking kinship, they invoke an established history of relations and create an atmosphere in which the parties are expected to be flexible and forthcoming.⁵⁵

However, some sections of society who do not appreciate *ichimbuya* get riled up when confronted with these joking relationships. In such cases, altercations can arise. This is especially true when politics are mixed into joking relationships. For example, in 2018, there was an altercation between then-President Edgar Lungu and some members of the Bemba Society over *ichimbuya*. At a gala hosted by the Economics Association of Zambia (EZA), and in the spirit of the moment, Lungu made an off-the-cuff joke about the Bembas. He commented that out of every 10 Bembas, six were thieves. Several Bembas took offence to this joke. A Bemba from the then opposition, United Party for National Development (UPND), Percy Chanda, lamented that Bembas were traumatized and shunned by society because their reputation was dented by Lungu for branding them as thieves. He went so far as to threaten legal action against the President.⁵⁶ Chanda

⁵² Don Greiner, 'Strange Laughter: The Comedy of John Hawkes', *Southwest Review*, 56, 4 (1971), p. 321.

⁵³ L. Rapport, *Punchlines: the case of Racial, Ethnic and Gender Humour* (London: Westport, 2005), p. 2.

⁵⁴ *The Zambia Daily Mail*, 2 September 2017.

⁵⁵ Davidheiser, 'Joking for peace: Social organisation', p. 844.

⁵⁶ *Lusakatimes.com*, 19 December 2018

refused to accept that Lungu's joke was consistent with the existing *ichimbuya* between the Bembas and the Ngoni. He argued that the formal nature of the occasion did not warrant such jokes. He complained that,

At that function, Mr Lungu was invited to address a professional body and not *Ukusefya pangwena* and whatever he said was official, therefore forget about that nonsense of *chimbuya*. There is no justification for Mr. Lungu to insult Bembas; we are not going to be swayed by any of his paid VUVUZELAS. Mr Lungu was fully aware of the presence of media organizations and therefore he was talking to the whole world and he could not take *chimbuya* to the whole world.⁵⁷

In defence of Lungu, the Patriotic Front (PF) deputy secretary general, Mumbi Phiri, responded that she would slap any Northerner who would try to practise traditional cousinship with Easterners going forward since some Bembas had taken offence with President Lungu's *ichimbuya*.⁵⁸ This demonstrates that cousinage is a subtle combination of social comments.

The issue played out in national media for some days as people attempted to deconstruct Lungu's joke. In arguing for *ichimbuya*, some Bembas insisted that there was nothing wrong with them mocking the Easterners and *vice versa*. It was because of this joking relationship that a cordial relationship existed between the Bemba and the Ngoni.⁵⁹ Others pointed out that it was immoral for politicians to make political capital out of Lungu's remarks. This was because all Zambians were aware that all Northerners and Easterners shared a joking relationship and that harmless jokes between the two groups were not supposed to become tools for dividing the country.⁶⁰ A Bemba from the opposition Movement for Multi-party Democracy (MMD), Chilufya Chishala, made the following comment:

For some disgruntled politician to shamelessly try to make political capital out of a cousinship which has existed and lasted for close to a century, is cheap. These two peoples have demonstrated this during weddings, funerals, kitchen parties, *amatebeto* and *ichombela nganda*.⁶¹

Thus, the diverse and contrasting sentiments expressed confirm that in Zambia, *ichimbuya* is a strong cultural heritage with deep historical roots. It is a manifestation of a strong affinity to culture. Contemporary joking ties promote cultural continuity while structural conditions change.⁶² For cousinship to work, there has to be a shared history, norms and values which are then transmitted

⁵⁷ *Lusakatimes.com*, 19 December 2018

⁵⁸ *News Diggers*, 21 December 2018.

⁵⁹ *News Diggers*, 21 December 2018.

⁶⁰ *Lusaka Times*, 17 December 2018.

⁶¹ *Lusaka Times*, 17 December 2018.

⁶² Davidheiser, 'Joking for peace: Social organisation', p. 844.

from one generation to another. They are customary ties that link groups, allowing them to interact in ways that would otherwise be offensive. *Ichimbuya* is one way in which the country has realized its motto of One Zambia, One Nation. Through this motto, Kenneth Kaunda's government saw a means to eliminate ethnic tensions.

Traditional leaders of ethnic joking groups often lean into these relationships to forge peace among their people. This was demonstrated in Zambia in 2018 when Paramount Chief Mpezeni of the Ngoni officiated at the Bemba traditional ceremony – *Ukusefya pa Ng'wena*. In his speech, Mpezeni called for cooperation in achieving cultural preservation and national development.⁶³ In 2023, Litunga Lubosi Imwiko II of the Lozi people was the guest of honour at *Ukusefya pa Ngwena*, in Kasama. This was a great historic achievement as the Bemba and Lozi had experienced political tensions in the past. The Lozi had referred to the Bemba as thieves, *masholi*, while the Bemba claimed that the Lozi were stingy and selfish. A Lozi-sympathetic page on Facebook described what some Lozis felt was ill-treatment from the Bemba-Ngoni camp. In a post, one Lozi member shared that:

The hatred of the Lozis has not just started now, but it is a long story that began immediately when Zambia attained independence. The basis for this hatred originated from the fact that by the time Zambia became independent in 1964 many Lozis were more educated than Bembas and Nyanjas... as a result, evil schemes were put in place to deprive the Lozi of their dignity and cultural pride... In the olden days, it was not difficult for the people of Barotseland to get information through their children on how Bembas would instruct their children to hate the Lozis. And these children who grew up with such hatred for the Lozi are now in charge of the nation's affairs, an environment that has resulted in many Lozis being discriminated against in every area of their lives...⁶⁴

Despite intermarriages over the years, these stereotypes stuck and continued to define the relationship between the Bemba and the Lozi. To address this tension, the kings of the two ethnicities decided to publicly show support for one another most tactfully- travelling to grace the other's traditional ceremony. This move was aimed at promoting unity between the two ethnic groups.⁶⁵ A commentary in a local newspaper read:

The coming together of Paramount Chief Chitimukulu and the Litunga of Bratose land at the *Ukusefya pa Ng'wena* Traditional Ceremony serves as a powerful symbol of cultural unity, regional understanding, and rich diversity of Zambia's cultural heritage. The event not only strengthens bonds between these two distinct communities but also fosters a sense of togetherness among all

⁶³ *The Zambia Daily Mail newspaper*, 12 August 2018.

⁶⁴ Saleya Kwalombota, 'Hatred for Lozi nationals and tribes of formerly North Western Rhodesia', (Available at <http://Facebook.com/Barotsebroadcastingnetwork>, 2015, accessed 23 April 2024).

⁶⁵ *Lusaka Times*, 20 August 2023.

Zambians, regardless of their cultural affiliations. It is a testament to the enduring importance of traditional customs in the nation's collective identity.⁶⁶

The Litunga reciprocated the action taken by the Bemba and invited Chitimuklu Kanyanta Manga II to be the guest of honour at the 2024 Kuomboka Ceremony in Mongu. After the success of the two exchange visits, citizens made calls on social media outlets such as Facebook for the Bemba and the Lozi to establish a new *ichimbuya* relationship. The news broke on social media as it was quickly carried by all major Zambian Online news outlets.

Picture 1: Mwine Lubemba Chitimukulu Kanyanta Manga and Litunga Lubosi Imwiko II in Mongu



Source: Available at www.facebook.com/Nkani, 20 April 2024, accessed on 22 June 2024

The idea of establishing *ichimbuya* quickly progressed into a serious issue as the two kings became part of the conversation. Chitimukulu officially accepted the Lozi challenge of a cousinship between the two ethnicities. Speaking through a representative at the Kuomboka ceremony on 20 April 2024, Chitimukulu said that 'the move will help cement the relationship that

⁶⁶ Lusaka Times, 20 August 2023.

the Lozis and Bembas have built'.⁶⁷ Speaking on behalf of the Litunga, Induna Imangambwa extended his gratitude to the people of Western Province for their warm welcome of the Bembas.⁶⁸ Not even a day went by before a response from the Ngoni section was reported on the Online platform, *Zambian Observer*. The outlet carried a news item of a letter from a purported Ngoni prince addressed to the Bemba King. The letter revealed that the Ngoni were apprehensive about the new relationship that had developed between the Lozi and the Bemba. To that effect, the writer of the open letter declared that 'it has come to our attention that you unilaterally announced a new *ichimbuyaship* with the Lozi... We have been asked to demand ... for you to rescind your decision within 48 hours.'⁶⁹ However, the rest of the letter betrayed the jesting in the words as it was clear that it was consistent with the joking relationship between the Bemba and the Ngoni. This was seen in the way the writer stated, 'By copy of this letter, we also warn the Litunga of the Lozi people to be careful when dealing with the Bembas AKA "*masholi*". These people are very unstable and will dump you at any time as they have done to us'.⁷⁰ Once again, *ichimbuya* was used to navigate a difficult relationship in the pursuance of national unity. This is staying true to the national motto of *One Zambia One Nation*. Ethnic jesting in the 21st century proves that the ideals set out in the first republic have become embedded in the national fabric. It should further be noted that the frequency of humour among Zambians has often received high ratings from many tourists.

The political ideology of humanism expressed in the motto, *One Zambia One Nation*, has become a manifestation of *ichimbuya* in Zambia. It creates social bonds and affection among the jesting groups. For example, people from the East may use self-deprecating language such as "primitive easterner". This tends to reduce tension in social settings. It 'is the way and the link in which one relates to one another in respect, beliefs and values... an act of African cultural inheritance contained in what is known as "social support"'.⁷¹ Members of joking groups can thus reasonably expect support from their *mbuyas* in any setting.

Conclusion

This article has argued that *ichimbuya* emanated from familial and historical relationships. With charity having begun at home, healthy relations between members of society were likely. Alliances for advancement were easy to build as was the case between the Bemba and the Lozi.

⁶⁷ *Daily Nation*, 21 April 2024.

⁶⁸ *The Zambian Eye*, 21 April 2024.

⁶⁹ *The Zambian Observer*, 22 April 2024.

⁷⁰ *The Zambian Observer*, 22 April 2024.

⁷¹ Phiri and Kandonondo, 'Exploring and Deconstructing the Chimbuya Phenomenon at the University of Zambia in the School of Education', p. 49.

Again, where unintended conflicts emerged, joking relationships became paths leading to reconciliation. The discussion has demonstrated that Zambia is a product of complementary diversity. When people from different kingdoms first encountered each one another, both cooperative and conflicting interactions emerged before Zambia became a British colony. Pre-colonial co-existence showed Zambians that they had more in common among themselves than they had with the British colonisers. There was natural unity such as was demonstrated by joking relations that emerged through peaceful interactions and through recognising the value of peace at family, clan and inter-clan platforms. These experiences were invaluable assets in transforming isolated resistances to British injustices and building formidable nationalist organisations. As British colonialism was an episode in the long-term development of Zambia, Zambians came together to remove a constraint to national unity and development. Cousinage was one dynamic tool to mobilise and with which to beat the British. With many ethnic groups, and a colonial history that managed two protectorates to emphasise and display British policy of 'divide and rule, experiences of unity evolved through joking relationships. The discussion has demonstrated a rich and valuable history for national unity as a primary condition for peace and economic development. We have here a simple argument of how to use past experiences to build unity in diversity. By using written history accounts and marrying them to current oral sources, this paper connects the past to the present. While history documents change over time, it also shows consistencies which continue to persist from generation to generation. These consistencies serve several functions to society, hence the people's need to cling to them. In essence, the paper evidences that culture and traditions can be utilised to forge national unity and development as the country reflects on its sixty years of independence.

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