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# Ethno-Regionalism, Politics and the Role of Religion in Zambia: Changing Ecumenical Landscapes in a Christian Nation, 2015-2018

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## Abstract

This contribution explores the interaction between religion and politics in a religiously plural and ethnically multidimensional Zambian context. Given the political salience of both religion and ethnicity in Zambian politics, this research locates an understudied aspect in the discourse on religion and politics in Zambia, namely the multiple relations between religion, ethnicity and politics. It specifically offers a historical-theological analysis of the implications that the political mobilisation of religion has for ecumenism in Zambia since Edgar Chagwa Lungu became the country's president (2015-2018). Underlining the church-dividing potential of non-theological (doctrinal) factors, the article argues that the 'political mobilisation of religion' and the 'pentecostalisation of Christianity' in Zambia are reshaping the country's ecumenical landscapes. Accordingly, this contribution posits the significance of ecumenical consciousness among churches and argues for a contextual ecumenical ecclesiology.

## Keywords

Christian nation – Christianity in Zambia – church and state – ecumenism – ecumenical movement – ethnicity – religion and politics

## 1 Introduction

This contribution explores the implications that the political mobilisation of religion has for ecumenism in Zambia since Edgar Chagwa Lungu became the country's president. Although Zambia is religiously pluralist, it is predominantly Christian. The prominence of Christianity in Zambia's public sphere<sup>1</sup> may be traced to the *Declaration* of Zambia as a Christian nation by Zambia's second Republican President Frederick Chiluba on 29th December 1991. First enshrined in the 1996 amended constitution, the *Declaration* has been upheld in all subsequent constitutional reviews essentially on the basis of "Christian demographics and the perceived normative contribution of Christian values" to the Zambian society.<sup>2</sup> Statistically, 95.5% of Zambia's population are said to be Christian, 0.5% Muslim, 0.2% other and 1.8% none.<sup>3</sup> However, these statistics are not necessarily indicative of the tensions and relationships between religious belief, belonging and practice.

Since becoming the country's President, Edgar Lungu has made several decisions and pronouncements that accentuate the role of religion in state affairs. These include the declaration of 18th October as an official national day of prayer and fasting, the construction of the National House of Prayer for All Nations Tabernacle in the capital city, Lusaka, and the creation of the Ministry of National Guidance and Religious Affairs (MNGRA). MNGRA's key functions include the operationalisation of the Declaration, interdenominational dialogue, providing guidance on national values, principles and ethics, coordination of public religious celebrations, and the preservation of Christian and religious sites, and religious affairs.<sup>4</sup> In its 7th National Development Plan, the government of the Republic of Zambia further undertakes to deliver "Zambia's Christian heritage as a standard of governance approach".<sup>5</sup>

The above raises at least three questions that beg further reflection. First, do the above initiatives suggest that Lungu is implicitly extending the role of the Declaration beyond its framing of Zambian Christian nationhood to that

1 My appropriation of this Habermasian notion is attentive to the critique levelled on it given its neglect of gender, a narrow understanding of religion and conceptualisation of the public sphere as a homogeneous space.

2 Green, Christian, "Religious and Legal Pluralism in Recent African Constitutional Reform," *Journal of Law and Religion* 28/2 (2013), 428.

3 See CSO, "Census of population and housing," *Republic of Zambia* (2012), 19.

4 Republic of Zambia, "Gazette Notice No. 836 of 2016," *Government Gazette* 52/76 (2016), 941. <https://zambialii.org/node/12892> (accessed 26 November 2018).

5 *Seventh National Development Programme 2017-2021* (Lusaka, Ministry of Finance and National Planning, 2017), 112. <http://www.mndp.gov.zm/download/7NDP.pdf> (accessed 10 June 2018).

of making Christianity a state religion?<sup>6</sup> This is crucial given that in its preamble, the Zambian constitution declares the “Republic a Christian Nation” yet guarantees the “freedom of conscience, belief or religion”<sup>7</sup> for all persons. That the constitution recognises the Republic as being multi-religious begs further questions regarding the nature of Zambian Christian nationhood. As Freston argues, it “is the nation that is declared Christian and not the state. There is no established church, no legal discrimination of non-Christians in public life and no limitation on religious freedom.”<sup>8</sup> The second question prompted by Lungu’s initiatives is whether the state can become a religious actor. Third, does the Christian faith serve as an alternative political ideology? These questions beg contextual conceptual clarification of the relationship between religion and politics.

Taking its cue from Cheyeka et al<sup>9</sup> on “the implications of the ever-changing face of Christianity and politics in Zambia”, this article explores how the pentecostalisation of Christianity<sup>10</sup> and the political mobilisation of the identities of religion and ethnicity are reshaping Zambia’s ecumenical landscapes. This has significance for the Zambian and indeed larger Southern African context in which Christianity has always been diverse since its very beginnings in the evangelistic work of missionaries. Methodologically, I draw on a historical-theological analysis of primary and secondary literature on religion and politics in Zambia focussing on the Third Republic (1991-current). This is augmented with data on Christianity and politics in Zambia accessed from

6 For a discussion on the conceptualisation and categorisation of state religion within a religion market model see Barro, Robert and Rachel, McCleary, “Which countries have state religions?” *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 120/4 (2005), 1333-334. See also the distinctions made in a recent survey by the Pew Research Centre between states with an official religion, a preferred or favoured religion, no official or preferred religion and states with a hostile relationship toward religion. See Pew Research Centre, “Many countries favor specific religions, officially or unofficially,” (2017), 5, 17. <http://www.pewforum.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/7/2017/09/FULL-REPORT-FOR-WEB.pdf> (accessed 4 June 2018).

7 Republic of Zambia, *Constitution of Zambia (Amendment) Act, 2016*, Article 19.

8 Freston, Paul, “Evangelicalism and fundamentalism: The politics of global popular Protestantism,” in *The Sage Handbook of the Sociology of Religion*, eds. Beckford, J.A. and Demerath, J (London: Sage, 2007), 215.

9 Cheyeka, Austin, Marja Hinfelaar, & Bernhard Udelhoven, “The Changing Face of Zambia’s Christianity and its Implications for the Public Sphere: A Case Study of Bauleni Township, Lusaka,” *Journal of Southern African Studies* 40/5 (2014), 1034.

10 Following Asamoah-Gyadu, I employ this phrase to refer to attempts by mainline churches in Africa to accommodate Pentecostal elements. Asamoah-Gyadu, Kwabena, *African Charismatics: Current Developments within Independent Indigenous Pentecostalism in Ghana* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 30.

digital, print and social media for the period 2015 to August 2018. The research further draws on selected field work and ethnographic studies on religion and politics in Zambia.

## 2 Religion and Politics: a Conceptual Mapping

Some argue that the politicisation of religion is part of a progression in competitive politics that comes with multi-party democracy. Such analyses depict religion as a cleavage that may be mobilised for votes if salient. However, such explanations for why African politicians appeal to religion do not sufficiently capture the scope and relation of religion and politics. In most African contexts, the religious and the political are not treated as separate spheres. As “systems of ordering power inherent in human society,”<sup>11</sup> Ellis and ter Haar argue, religion and politics in Africa are closely related. Further, given that religion in Africa is “a mode of apprehending reality,”<sup>12</sup> they demonstrate that most African epistemologies of power do not separate the material and the immaterial. Nevertheless, the spiritual world is perceived as the ultimate source of power and that it impinges on the material world. As Ellis and Ter Haar illustrate, African politicians “believe that access to the spiritual world is a vital resource in the constant struggle to secure advantage over their rivals in political in-fighting.”<sup>13</sup> Most significantly, Ellis and Ter Haar opine a view of religion as a “key to understanding politics in Africa.”<sup>14</sup> Along similar lines, the late Nigerian historian Ogbu Kalu argued that there is a “religious substratum” to African political culture that is informed by the sacralisation of power prevalent in African traditional societies.<sup>15</sup> In a nuanced analysis of religion and politics in Africa, Ruth Marshall maintains that “the sphere of the religious perpetually flows into other domains, in particular the political.”<sup>16</sup>

While leading analyses such as the one’s proffered by Ellis and ter Haar probe the political significance of religion, they are criticised for seemingly

11 Ellis, Stephen, and Gerrie ter Haar, “Religion and politics in sub-Saharan Africa,” *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 36/2 (1998), 195.

12 Ellis, Stephen, and Gerrie ter Haar, “Religion and politics: taking African epistemologies seriously,” *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 45/3 (2007), 387.

13 Ellis and Ter Haar, “Religion and Politics in,” 187.

14 Ellis, Stephen, and Gerrie ter Haar, *Worlds of Power: Religious Thought and Political Practice in Africa* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 23.

15 Kalu, Ogbu, *African Pentecostalism: An introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 199–201.

16 Marshall, Ruth, *Political spiritualities: The Pentecostal revolution in Nigeria* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 20.

buying into exoticising and essentialising discourses on African religiosity and culture.<sup>17</sup> For Ruth Marshall, the critique extends to the “domestication of modernity”<sup>18</sup> thesis — exemplified in the work of Birgit Meyer and the Comaroff’s — for being reductionist. Constructively, Marshall reconceptualises the debate on religion and politics by positing a view of religion as a political practice yet of a unique kind. Following the Foucauldian perspective of “subjectivation”, Marshall appropriates the notion of “techniques of the self” to describe some Pentecostal practices (e.g. fasting, prayer, Bible study, and public witness) and links them to political spiritualities. Religion, Marshall argues, is “a site of *action*, invested in and appropriated by believers”.<sup>19</sup>

However, according to social anthropologist Harri Englund, the “sterile definitional disputes” regarding the scope of the political and the religious can be best addressed through a conceptual shift from politics to “public culture” (publics).<sup>20</sup> Englund’s proposal foregrounds religion as an integral aspect of public culture. Following these insights, I aver that the modernist distinction between the sacred and the secular is not only a false dichotomy within the African context in general but also inadequate to grasp the relationship between religion and politics. Accordingly, I espouse a view of religion as a multilevel phenomenon. This perspective grounds the following discussion on religion and politics in Zambia.

### 3 Christianity and Politics in Post-colonial Zambia

The place of Christianity in post-colonial Zambia may be understood in terms of three periods in recent Zambian history. The first focuses on church and state relations and mainly covers the period 1964-1972.<sup>21</sup> The second

17 Green, Maia, “Confronting categorical assumptions about the power of religion in Africa,” *Review of African political economy* 33/110 (2006): 636.

18 Marshall, *Political*, 22-25.

19 Marshall, *Political*, 22.

20 Englund, Harri, “Introduction: Rethinking African Christianities: Beyond the religion-politics conundrum,” in *Christianity and public culture in Africa*, ed. H. Englund (Athens: Ohio University Press 2011), 8.

21 See Lungu, Gatian, “The church, labour and the press in Zambia: the role of critical observers in a one-party state,” *African Affairs* 85/340 (1986), 385-410; On church-state relations focussing on independent religious movements (read: AICs) see Smith, Drew, “Missionaries, church movements, and the shifting religious significance of the state in Zambia,” *Journal of Church and State* 41/3 (1999), 525-550. See also Van Binsbergen, Wim, *Religious change in Zambia: exploratory studies* (Haarlem: In de Knipscheer, 1979), 266-316.

trajectory highlights the public role of mainline Christianity with a general focus on the second republic (1973-1991) to the return of multi-party democracy. The third period relates to the third republic (1991 to date) and accentuates Pentecostal<sup>22</sup> political engagement. While this article is concerned with religious-political interaction since 2015, it is apposite to make brief remarks on the first two periods.

### 3.1 *Church and State in the Kaunda Era*

During the first republic (1964-1972), church-state relations were generally harmonious. The positive regard of Christianity by Zambia's first president Kenneth Kaunda, whose Malawian parents (David and Hellen Kaunda) had served as pioneer missionaries at Lubwa mission of the Church of Scotland, played a crucial role in how church-state relations were shaped in this early period. Kaunda often spoke of the church as a 'mirror to the nation'.<sup>23</sup> He further utilised Christian rhetoric "to project an image of compassion, uprightness and integrity, and made political capital from his image as a Christian gentleman."<sup>24</sup>

After the introduction of the one party state in December 1972, churches adopted a different posture in their relations with the state.<sup>25</sup> Although initially positive towards Kaunda's philosophy of humanism given its concern with love of neighbour and human dignity, churches increasingly became critical of his latter leanings towards scientific socialism and its seemingly atheistic tone. The 1979 statement issued by the three church mother bodies entitled "Marxism, Humanism and Christianity, A letter from the Leaders of the Christian Churches in Zambia to all their members about scientific socialism" sharply expressed these concerns.<sup>26</sup> Retrospectively, humanism may be said to have been Kaunda's attempt to bolster his position on the Zambian political scene during this period. Accordingly, historian David Gordon describes

22 Given the diversity of Pentecostalism and the many definitional debates, I employ the term Pentecostal to refer to christianities that stress prophecy, experiential worship, material blessings and the role of Holy Spirit in the believer. See Sakupapa, Teddy C, "Spirit and ecology in the context of African theology," *Scriptura* 111/1 (2012), 424.

23 Hinfelaar, Marja, "Legitimizing Powers: The Political Role of the Roman Catholic Church, 1972-1991," in *One Zambia, Many Histories*, ed. G. Macola (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 132.

24 See Gifford, Paul, "Chiluba's Christian nation: Christianity as a factor in Zambian politics 1991-1996," *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 13/3 (1998), 363.

25 Lungu, "The church," 397; Sakupapa, Teddy, C, "Christianity in Zambia", in *Anthology of African Christianity*, eds. I.A. Phiri and Dietrich Werner (Oxford: Regnum Books International, 2016), 763.

26 Komakoma, Joe, *The social teaching of the catholic bishops and other Christian leaders in Zambia: Major pastoral letters and statements, 1953-2001* (Ndola: Mission Press, 2003), 108-130.

Kaunda's humanism as a state religion "with its own secular invisible world".<sup>27</sup> While Gordon's depiction of humanism as a religion is questionable, that there was a religious substratum to Kaunda's politics is consistent with the theoretical framing of religion and politics discussed in section 2 above.

The earlier image of Kaunda as a Christian leader subsequently waned owing to *inter alia*, his new interest in Eastern religions manifest in the erection of the "David Universal Temple" at State House and his airing of a television project called "Heaven on Earth". These developments were seen to be contradictory to Christianity by most churches. In sum, church-state relations during Zambia's first and second Republics oscillated between various forms of engagement including resistance, accommodation and collaboration.<sup>28</sup>

During the early 1990s, mainline churches played a conspicuous role in Zambia's transition from a one-party state to multi-party electoral democracy. This may be explained in at-least two ways. First, given the government's stifling of the articulation of political dissent through political parties during the one-party state, churches became the avenue for agitation and critique of the authoritarian one party state. The second reason relates to the vibrancy of institutional ecumenical networking amongst churches,<sup>29</sup> mainly within the ambits of the Council of Churches in Zambia (CCZ) and the Zambia Episcopal Conference (ZEC). The CCZ brought the protestant traditions of ecumenical social ethics from its wider ecumenical networks to bear on its social engagement. On the other hand, the ZEC (now Zambian Conference of Catholic Bishops, ZCCB) has long embodied the tradition of Roman Catholic Social thought which became pronounced in the aftermath of Vatican II. Although the CCZ, ZCCB and EFZ remained the dominant face of the public role of Christianity for much of the 1990s, new Christian bodies emerged such as the International Fellowship of Christian Churches (IFCC) and the Independent Churches of Zambia (ICOZ) established in 2000 and 2001 respectively.

### 3.2 *Religious Demographic Shifts and the Dawn of Zambian Christian Nationalism under Chiluba*

The return of multi-party democracy in 1991 was accompanied by significant changes in Zambia's religious demographics most evident in the proliferation

27 Gordon, David, *Invisible Agents: spirits in a Central African history* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2012), 158.

28 See Phiri, Isaac, "Why African churches preach politics: The case of Zambia," *Journal of Church and State* 41/2 (1999).

29 This resonates with the analysis offered by Gibbs and Ajulu. See Gibbs, Sara, and Deborah Ajulu, "The role of the church in advocacy: Case studies from Southern and Eastern Africa," *INTRAC Occasional Paper* 31 (1999), 82.

of Pentecostal and charismatic churches,<sup>30</sup> and the prominence of Christianity in the public sphere. Chiluba's Declaration of Zambia as a Christian nation added a unique semblance in this regard. As Gordon observes, "the declaration subjected the nation to the Pentecostal discourse of being born again in Christ."<sup>31</sup> Further, as Amos Yong argues, the *Declaration* motivated a "form of pentecostal nationalism."<sup>32</sup> The *Declaration* inaugurated a new era of the explicit mobilization of Christian resources in Zambian politics. Isabel Phiri highlights some of the tangible consequences of Chiluba's declaration: namely, the creation of a department of Christian Affairs in the office of the president and the re-establishment of diplomatic ties with Israel [in an almost Zionist fashion] amongst others.<sup>33</sup> Further, Chiluba appointed a number of pastors to government positions and his government granted diplomatic passports to prominent Zambian clergy such as former tele-evangelist Nevers Mumba.

Ironically, the *Declaration* had an unintended consequence for Chiluba: namely, that his rule would later be judged on the basis of the implied Christian moral vision of the *Declaration*. This is crucial given that "the Christian Nation declaration is foremost a moral discourse"<sup>34</sup> at least in practice. Therefore, the perceived failure of Chiluba to deliver on such a moral discourse and vision, given allegations of corruption in his government, attracted Pentecostal critique and arguably accounts for Pastor Nevers Mumba's eventual formation of a political party founded on explicit Pentecostal ideals.<sup>35</sup> It remains ironic that a pastor like Mumba, who also served as vice-president under Mwanawasa (2003-2004), can't be president in a Christian nation.<sup>36</sup>

30 Cheyeka traces the historical roots of the emergence of charismatic churches to the mid-1970s. See Cheyeka, Austin, "Towards a history of the Charismatic churches in post-colonial Zambia," in *One Zambia, many histories: towards a history of post-colonial Zambia*, ed. M. Giacomo (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 144-163. For a detailed historical study see M'fundisi-Holloway, Naar, *Pentecostal and Charismatic Spiritualities and Civic Engagement in Zambia* (London: Palgrave, 2018).

31 Gordon, *Invisible*, 195.

32 Yong, Amos, *In the days of Caesar: Pentecostalism and political theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 9.

33 Phiri, Isabel, "President Frederick JT Chiluba of Zambia: the Christian nation and democracy," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 33/4 (2003), 409.

34 Cheyeka, Hinfelaar, & Udelhoven, "The Changing," 1034.

35 Gordon, *Invisible*, 196.

36 Haynes, Naomi, "Why Can't a Pastor Be President of a 'Christian Nation'? Pentecostal Politics as Religious Mediation," *PoLAR: Political and Legal Anthropology Review* 41/1 (2018), 60-74.



#### 4 Lungu's "Christian Nation": a New Era of "Christian" Politics

Several studies on religion and politics in Zambia explore how the *Declaration* has been deployed to mobilise and frame notions of Zambian Christian citizenship<sup>37</sup> and in discourse on the politics of sexuality.<sup>38</sup> Arguably, the language and politics of the *Declaration* has become prominent in Zambian politics since Edgar Lungu became president. Lungu has added a unique semblance to the political rhetoric of Christian nation in radical and ironic ways compared to other presidents after the Chiluba era.

During the tenure of President Levy Mwanawasa (2001-2008), the Christian nation rhetoric found expression in neither his political ideology of "a new deal government" nor his public pronouncements. Mwanawasa had been a member of the Jehovah's Witnesses and his wife Maureen was excommunicated because of the couple's active engagement in politics. Mwanawasa later joined the Baptist church. His successor, Rupiah Banda (2008-2011), was deeply diplomatic about his interaction with religion. Zambia's fifth president Michael Sata (2011-2014), who was popularly known as "King Cobra" for his orotundity, never politicised the rhetoric of the Christian nation despite being a staunch Catholic.<sup>39</sup> In fact, his political opponents portrayed him as a danger to the *Declaration*. Thus understood, Sata's remarks that he would govern Zambia on the basis of the biblical Ten Commandments,<sup>40</sup> made two days after becoming President during a church service at St. Ignatius Catholic Church in Lusaka where he was a regular parishioner, is neither an instance of deliberate nor veiled deployment of the Christian nation rhetoric. Rather, it was an expression of his continued commitment to the Roman Catholic faith and its social teaching given him being Zambia's first Roman Catholic President. It is nevertheless worth noting that at the presidential mausoleum in Lusaka, Sata's tomb is fashioned around the Ten Commandments. Arguably, it is only posthumously that Sata's statement is employed toward Christian nationalist ends.<sup>41</sup>

37 Sperber, Elizabeth, "Democratic backsliding, religious institutions and the constitution of citizenship in sub-Saharan Africa," in *Christian Citizens and the Moral Regeneration of the African State*, eds. B. Bompani and Caroline Valois (London: Ashgate, 2017), 75-92.

38 Van Klinken, Adriaan, "Homosexuality, politics and Pentecostal nationalism in Zambia," *Studies in World Christianity* 20/3 (2014), 259-281.

39 Cheyeka, Austin, "Zambia, a 'Christian nation' in Post Movement for Multiparty Democracy (MMD) Era, 2011-2016," *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science* 6/7 (2016), 162; Cheyeka, Hinfelaar, and Udelhoven, "The Changing," 1032.

40 Mail and Guardian, "Zambia will follow '10 Commandments.'" <https://mg.co.za/article/2011-09-25-zambia-will-follow-10-commandments> (accessed 10 June 2018).

41 I am indebted to Naomi Haynes for pointing out a possible interpretation along this line.

#### 4.1 *We Are God's Nation*

The contemporary prominence of the Christian nation rhetoric in Zambian politics may be traced to Edgar Lungu's 2015 presidential campaign following Sata's death in October 2014. That campaigns during the 2015 PF succession wrangles and the national presidential by-elections focussed on the personalities of the candidates<sup>42</sup> illumines the roots of the Christian nation rhetoric in Lungu's politics. Being an unlikely incumbent candidate, Lungu was subjected to negative media coverage in the period leading up to the January 2015 Presidential by-elections, except in government owned media. Some of his opponents described him as a *chakolwa* (drunkard) and newspaper editorials commented on his "drinking problem". Further, news circulated regarding his suspension from practicing as a lawyer by the Law Association of Zambia in 2010. To counter such negative media publicity, Lungu was not only portrayed as Sata's anointed successor, but most significantly, his candidature for national presidency was branded in Christian rhetoric<sup>43</sup> depicting him as a humble man of faith, a man of God and a man of the people. Tapping into religious resources, as intimated in section 3 above, Lungu appropriated the rhetoric of the *Declaration* in his public utterances and campaigns to affirm and accentuate Zambia's Christian nationhood.

Lungu won the presidential by-elections but his first year in office was characterised by an ailing economy exacerbated by drought, a poorly performing currency and high unemployment. Amidst these challenges, Lungu called for a national day of repentance, prayer and fasting on 18 October 2015 and subsequently declared this day as the official national day of prayer and fasting. At that event, Zambia's founding President Kenneth Kaunda blessed the nation of Zambia in a typical Pentecostal theological fashion:

I bless and therefore release the nation, its people, and the Presidency from every negative force made against this nation ... I further declare that Zambia shall forever enjoy tranquillity and shall remain a united and peaceful people under the Motto: One Zambia, One Nation. The Lord bless Zambia and keep Zambia. God bless you all.<sup>44</sup>

42 Fraser, Alastair, "Post-populism in Zambia: Michael Sata's rise, demise and legacy," *International Political Science Review* 38/4 (2017), 466.

43 Kaunda, Chamamah, "Christianising Edgar Chagwa Lungu: The Christian nation, social media presidential photography and 2016 election campaign," *Stellenbosch Theological Journal* 4/1 (2018), 215-245.

44 Lusaka Times, "KK prays and blesses the nation". <https://www.lusakatimes.com/2015/05/26/kk-prays-and-blesses-the-nation/> (accessed 10/06/18).

Lungu's appeal to the Christian religion and Kaunda's blessing of the nation is illustrative of the religious substratum to politics in Africa as intimated in section 2 above. Lungu soon won the approval of some among the increasingly pentecostalised Zambian constituency. Elias Munshya, a Canadian based Zambian lawyer and Pentecostal theologian hailed Lungu's call for national prayers yet called upon Zambian Christians to hold President Lungu "accountable to democratic tenets".<sup>45</sup>

The political deployment of Christian symbols and rhetoric intensified in the period leading up to the August 2016 general elections. The main contenders for presidency, namely Lungu and Hakainde Hichilema (popularly known as HH) of the opposition United Party for National Development (UPND), attended various church services. At a church service of the United Church of Zambia (UCZ) congregation in Chingola on 5 June 2016 where Lungu was present, the then Copperbelt Presbytery Bishop of the UCZ described him as follows; "The love you have shown is a magnet that draws all of us to you and people will follow you the way multitudes followed Jesus Christ."<sup>46</sup> If Lungu's campaign team had managed to project him as a pro-Christian nation candidate, the newly found political alliance between Geoffrey Mwamba and Hichilema would have helped to introduce the latter to Christian settings other than his own Seventh Day Adventist church. This was crucial for Hichilema given public perception created by his political opponents that he was a Satanist and Freemason.

Meanwhile, at the launch of a partisan religious group called "Christians for Lungu" in March 2016, the group's founder Liya Mutale made glaring remarks in support of Lungu: "Edgar Lungu deserves our support, he has reaffirmed the *Declaration of Zambia as a Christian Nation*, declared a national day of prayer and fasting and as if that is not sufficient, he leads the way in building a Tabernacle for the worship of our God",<sup>47</sup> Mutale observed. A medical doctor by profession, Mutale was later appointed to a government position as permanent Secretary when Lungu won the 2016 elections. The foregoing is indicative of the shifting face of Christianity and politics in Zambia. The former is evident in the considerable pentecostalisation of mainline Christianity in Zambia

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45 Munshya, Elias, "After we have said 'Amen': Towards a Pentecostal theology of Politics in Zambia" (2015). <https://eliasmunshya.org/2015/10/15/after-we-have-said-amen-towards-a-pentecostal-theology-of-politics-in-zambia/> (accessed 14 September 2018).

46 <https://www.lusakatimes.com/2016/06/06/president-lungu-urges-christians-continue-praying-peace-unity-zambia/> (accessed 18 March 2018).

47 <https://www.lusakatimes.com/2016/03/03/christians-for-lungu-group-defends-its-open-support-for-pf/>.

since the early 1990s.<sup>48</sup> Nevertheless, this does not suggest the loss of vitality amongst mainline churches.<sup>49</sup>

#### 4.2 *The Paradox of Religious-Political Interaction in Lungu's Christian Nation*

That Pentecostalism is a prominent feature of Zambian Christianity is evident in recent studies on the public role of Christianity that draw attention to the unique patterns of Pentecostal political engagements.<sup>50</sup> These studies debunk older views that portray Pentecostals as apolitical and lacking a “conscious social agenda”.<sup>51</sup> Nevertheless, these new studies highlight the ambivalence of Pentecostal political engagement. In her study of Pentecostals on the Copperbelt, Naomi Haynes describes this ambivalence as an interplay between egalitarianism (democratic access to the power of the Holy Spirit) and hierarchy (charismatic authority) in Pentecostal belief and practice. This tension, Haynes argues, “is fundamental to Pentecostal belief and practice,” and “reflects established models of social organisation.”<sup>52</sup> Some researchers employ the expression “Pentecostal Big Men” to illustrate how Pentecostalism has reformulated African traditional “big man rule”.<sup>53</sup> These “Big Men”, it is argued, often display oligarchic tendencies of a neo-patrimonial nature. As Gifford postulated early on, Pentecostals replicate the neo-patrimonial nature of the political elites into spiritual patrimonialism that thrives on patron-client relations.<sup>54</sup>

48 See Cheyeka, Austin, “Charismatic churches and their impact on mainline churches in Zambia,” *The Journal of Humanities* 5 (2005), 54; Sakupapa, “Christianity,” 761.

49 See Cheyeka, Hinfelaar, and Udelhoven, “The Changing,” 1040.

50 Haynes, Naomi, “Zambia Shall be Saved!”: Prosperity Gospel Politics in a Self-Proclaimed Christian Nation,” *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions* 19/1 (2015), 5-24; Sperber, Elizabeth, and Erin Hern, “Pentecostal Identity and Citizen Engagement in Sub-Saharan Africa: New Evidence from Zambia,” *Politics and Religion* (2018), 6.

51 Gifford, Paul, *African Christianity: its public role* (London: Hurst and Company, 1998), 333, 341; Haynes, Jeffrey, *Religion and politics in Africa* (London: Zed Books, 1996).

52 Haynes, Naomi, “Egalitarianism and hierarchy in Copperbelt religious practice: on the social work of Pentecostal ritual,” *Religion* 45/2 (2015), 175, 289. Gordon describes this as a tendency to “encourage both democratic engagement and patrimonial authoritarianism.” See Gordon, *Invisible*, 181.

53 McCauley, John, “Africa’s new big man rule? Pentecostalism and patronage in Ghana,” *African Affairs* 112/446 (2012), 11-14; Kalu, *African Pentecostalism*, 114-115.

54 Gifford, Paul, “Evangelical Christianity and democracy in Africa: A response,” in *Evangelical Christianity and democracy in Africa*, ed. T. Ranger (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 225.

The Zambian case shows that the political elites cultivate linkages with religious elites (pastors), particularly during election times. Although such linkages are not always instrumentalist given the complexity of why individuals seek religion, Sperber and Hern infer that such elite linkages may well facilitate clientelism.<sup>55</sup> For instance, in a meeting with the late President Micheal Sata in a meeting at State House in 2011, some Pentecostal pastors admitted that prior to the 2011 elections, some of their colleagues supported the ruling party rather than Sata's party [then in opposition] in the hope of political recognition and the benefits that accrue thereof.<sup>56</sup> More recently, the UPND's Hichilema met with about thirty Pentecostal clergy including a prominent Chingola based Pentecostal clergy, Bishop Joseph Kazhila of Life Gospel Fellowship Ministries.<sup>57</sup> The case of President Edgar Lungu attending and speaking at gatherings of especially large mainline churches such as the UCZ — the largest single Protestant church in the country — is another case in point. Interestingly, it was at an induction church service of the Synod Bishop of the UCZ on 4th September 2016 that President Lungu announced his plans to establish a government ministry for religious affairs. However, in a joint statement issued on 19th September 2016, the CCZ and the ZCCB were opposed to such plans while the EFZ generally welcomed the idea.<sup>58</sup> The creation of the government ministry was later approved by Parliament on 27th October 2016 and Rev Godfridah Sumaili, a Pentecostal pastor in the Bread of Life Church International, was appointed as minister for the new government ministry.

## 5 Multiple Identities: Religion, Ethnicity and Other Social Cleavages in Zambia

While many underscore the political salience of ethnicity and religion in Zambia, the multiple relations between ethnicity, religion, and politics remain understudied. This section will draw attention to the political mobilisation of multiple identities that characterised the 2015 and 2016 elections. Therefore, this article gains its significance by exploring the ecumenical implications of

55 Sperber and Hern, "Pentecostal," 6.

56 See <https://www.lusakatimes.com/2011/12/01/sata-meets-pentecostal-pastors/> (accessed 15 May 2018).

57 Hakainde Hichilema, Facebook Post (18 November 2015). <https://m.facebook.com/hakainde.hichilema/posts/989096854505803> (accessed 28 July 2018).

58 See <https://www.lusakatimes.com/2016/09/20/statement-position-council-churches-zambia-ccz-zambia-conference-catholic-bishops-zccb-proposed-creation-ministry-national-guidance-religious/> (accessed 15 May 2017).

the strategic mobilisation of ethno-linguistic and religious identities for political purposes.

### 5.1 *Ethno-Regional Politics*

Analyses of various media<sup>59</sup> sources and public pronouncements made by religious,<sup>60</sup> traditional and government officials on the recent presidential elections reveal an emerging trend of ethno-regional coalition building. This research found that the main contenders during the 2015 and 2016 elections inconspicuously embraced ethno-mobilisation while tactfully ascribing ethnic labels to opponents.<sup>61</sup> For instance, Lungu's supporters emphasised the entrenched perception of the opposition UPND as a tribal party. Arguably, the perception that some political parties are more ethnically oriented than others has been popularised by some sections of the Zambian media. This is not surprising given media influence in the representation of public opinion on the one hand and concerns within the media industry regarding press freedom and the tension between editorial integrity and business on the other. As such, some argue that the now closed but previously influential *Post Newspapers* is largely responsible for the public perception of the UPND as a tribal party.<sup>62</sup>

Nevertheless, that politicians mobilise ethnic identity as the basis of political competition is not in dispute. To put this in perspective, I follow Daniel Posner's useful distinction between "tribal identities" and "linguistic identities". Consistent with Kashoki, Posner argues that Zambia is split along four large linguistic lines nationally based on four major languages, namely Bemba, Nyanja, Lozi, and Tonga.<sup>63</sup> Problematising the dubious accuracy of the view that Zambia has seventy-three tribes, Posner affirms Kashoki's description of

59 Daily mail (2015), "Tribalism has no place in Zambia". <https://www.daily-mail.co.zm/tribalism-place-zambia/>; Daily Mail (4 April 2016), "First Republic tribal, political rivalries"; Lusaka Times, "Tribalism and the Tonga People, A Curse or a Natural Phenomenon?" <https://www.lusakatimes.com/2016/08/21/tribalism-tonga-people-curse-natural-phenomenon/> (accessed 20 February 2018).

60 Pastoral Letter, Zambia Episcopal Conference, 2016, No longer will violence be heard in your land, a call to peaceful, credible and transparent elections, Pastoral Letter, ZEC, Lusaka.

61 E.g. Chishimba Kambwili's remarks that the PF would copy and paste the southern province voting pattern. See <https://www.lusakatimes.com/2016/07/26/copy-and-paste-the-southern-province-voting-pattern-kambwili/> Retrieved 01 August 2018.

62 <https://www.zambiadailynation.com/2016/08/27/post-to-blame-for-upnd-tribal-tag-changala/> (accessed 25 October 2018).

63 Posner, Daniel, *Institutions and ethnic politics in Africa* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 28-30, 73.

this myth as a “pervasive erroneous notion.”<sup>64</sup> Posner avers that tribal identities tended to play a central role in Zambia’s politics during the one-party rule<sup>65</sup> while linguistic identities tended to do so in periods of multi-party rule. Analyses of aggregated national elections data and the periodic ethnicization of electoral campaigns since 2001 support this claim.<sup>66</sup> Further, analyses of the 2016 general elections illumine an emerging trend of regional electoral coalitions based on linguistic identities. As figure 1 below indicates, the PF garnered significant votes from the Bemba and Nyanja speaking regions of Eastern and much of Northern Zambia while the UPND received significant votes from the Tonga and Lozi speaking regions. The implied geographically

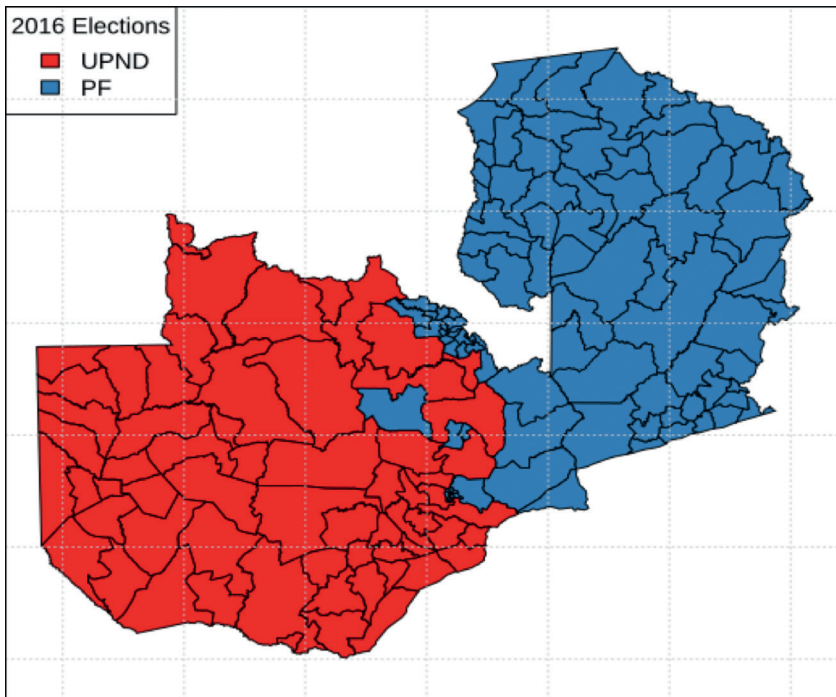


FIGURE 1 2016 Zambia presidential election results by constituency  
SOURCE: LIGHTON PHIRI. [HTTPS://COMMONS.WIKIMEDIA.ORG/W/INDEX.PHP?CURID=52326581](https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=52326581)

- 64 Kashoki, Mubanga, *Nation Building in the Context of 'One Zambia One Nation'* (Lusaka: Gadsden Publishers, 2018), 62.
- 65 For instance, the perceptions of a Bemba dominance in national politics during the late 1960s led Kaunda's imposition of the one-party state in 1972.
- 66 Erdmann, Gero, "Ethnicity, voter alignment and political party affiliation — an African case: Zambia," *GIGA Working Papers* 45 (2007), 29.

bounded nature of such identities is a colonial legacy as will be illustrated in section 6. However, this does not suggest that ethnicity (linguistic identities) is a perfect determinant of the complex phenomenon of voting behaviour and political party strategies in Zambia. Politicians strategically mobilise multiple identities;<sup>67</sup> most notably ethnicity and religion.

### 5.2 *The Declaration as Polemical Concept*

The August 2016 elections were characterised by unprecedented violence in recent Zambian history. Political violence spilled into the post-election period arguably owing to contestations around Lungu's legitimacy as the real winner of the 2011 elections. On 26th October 2016, Lungu appointed a "Commission of inquiry on voting patterns and electoral violence" but this has been criticised by some as a mere smokescreen by the PF Government. Given the threat that political violence and polarisation posed to the country's peace and unity, politicians and the general citizenry articulated forms of Christian nationalism by emphasising Zambia's Christian nationhood and appealing to the unifying character of Christianity and its message of peace and love. Thus Christian nationhood is framed as transcending boundaries constituted by other factors such as ethnicity and political affiliation. Being Zambian overrides 'tribal' identity. However, this deployment of Christian nationhood as a "safe" and "neutral" symbol in periods of intense contestation is ambiguous. To borrow Pamela Klassen's conceptualisation, the *Declaration* becomes a "polemical concept".<sup>68</sup>

On 11th April 2017, Hichilema was violently arrested by the police on allegations that his convoy refused to give way to Lungu's motorcade on the way to a traditional ceremony in Western province on 8th April 2017. This fuelled further tension in the country. Amidst such tension, the three church mother bodies issued a statement on 16th June 2017 in which they condemned political polarisation and called for the release of Hichilema from prison.<sup>69</sup> However, the General Secretary of the EFZ, some church leaders such as the

67 For instance, Sata's election victory in 2011 was underpinned by an ability to simultaneously recruit "ethnic' and 'populist' support" (ethnopolitism). See Cheeseman, Nic and Marja Hinfelaar, "Parties, platforms, and political mobilization: The Zambian presidential election of 2008," *African Affairs* 109/434 (2009), 69.

68 Klassen, Pamela E, "Christianity as a polemical concept," in *A Companion to the Anthropology of Religion*, eds. Boddy, Janice, and Michael Lambek (West Sussex: Wiley, 2015), 345.

69 Statement available at <http://www.caritaszambia.org/index.php/multi-media/newsroom/78-press-releases/243-a-statement-by-the-three-church-mother-bodies-on-the-state-of-the-nation> (accessed 10 November 2018).



UCZ Synod bishop, and the by then Bishop of Ndola Diocese of the Roman Catholic Church, distanced themselves from the statement claiming they were not consulted.<sup>70</sup> The statement marked a watershed and illumines new forms of polarisation amongst church leaders and ecumenical bodies regarding the public role of Christianity. Several articles and editorials published in both government and private owned media commented on the debate which this statement triggered, namely on underlying divisions amongst churches and different approaches to relating with the state.<sup>71</sup> Some went further to suggest that most of the church leaders who condemned the statement did so on the basis of “tribalism” (ethnicity).<sup>72</sup> *The Mast* editorial entitled “Tribalism must go!” claimed that such clergy were not only supporters of Lungu but also hailed from Eastern Province like Lungu.<sup>73</sup> The foregoing begs reflection on the ecumenical implications of religious-political interaction.

## 6 Ethno-Regionalism and the Ecumenical Imperative in Zambian Christianity

The disagreements amongst church leaders regarding the CCZ, EFZ and ZCCB led by former Lusaka archbishop Telesphore Mpundu partly highlights the impact of the interaction between religion and politics on existing divisions amongst churches. Mainline churches in particular are historically divided along linguistic lines as a legacy of the modern missionary movement and its comity policy that entailed delimiting areas of operation for missionary groups. Such areas often coincided with ethnic boundaries. Although the policy was intended to foster cooperation among missionary societies amidst intense rivalries in the so-called mission field,<sup>74</sup> this policy contributed towards the establishment of churches that would later be identified with particular

70 <https://diggers.news/local/2017/06/20/efz-bishop-mususu-his-vice-board-chairman-refused-to-sign-our-statement-pukuta> (accessed 10 May 2018).

71 See Daily Mail (27 June 2017) “A divided Church can’t reconcile society”; Lusaka Times (29 June 2017), “Politicians have managed to split the Church owing to poverty”.

72 *The Mast* (20 June 2017), “Politics ethnically divide Catholic bishops”, <https://www.themastonline.com/2017/06/20/politics-ethnically-divide-catholic-bishops/> (accessed 20 December 2017).

73 <https://www.themastonline.com/2017/07/07/tribalism-must-go/>. See also the *Mast* editorial of 23rd June 2017 entitled “Political, tribal, regional divisions in the Catholic Church”.

74 M’Passou, Denis, *Mindolo: A Story of the Ecumenical Movement in Africa* (Lusaka: Multimedia Publications, 1983), 2-3.

linguistic and tribal identities.<sup>75</sup> This is not surprising given the readiness of mission Christianity to “valorise the idea of ethnos”<sup>76</sup> and the role of missionaries in the consolidation of language use through the codification of vernacular languages, education and bible translation.<sup>77</sup> The colonial education policies of 1925 and labour migrations only fortified this missionary and colonial legacy. Denominationalism in Zambia may therefore be described as theological tribalism.

In Lungu’s Christian nation, disunity amongst churches has come to manifest publicly in deep disagreements on how to engage the state. The debate prompted by the 16 June 2017 statement is a case in point. Speaking at a U CZ congregation in Ndola on 25 June 2018, President Lungu inadvertently spoke about divisions amongst churches in Zambia when he observed that churches were giving his government conflicting views as follows:

If the Catholics said we are wrong, the United Church of Zambia said we are right, the Evangelical Fellowship said we don’t know what’s going on ... so we sit there and say ‘who is leading us?’<sup>78</sup>

These remarks implicitly name the traditional locus of church-state relations in Zambia albeit indicative of a sophistic view of ecumenical unity. Traditionally, ecumenism has been understood as the quest of the Christian churches for the unity of church. Such unity is often construed as both a gift and goal of the ecumenical movement.<sup>79</sup> In what follows, I work with a theological understanding of ecumenical unity as an imperative of the gospel predicated on Jesus’ prayer “that they may be one” (John 17:21). Nevertheless, I am cognizant

75 E.g., the identification of the U CZ with Bemba or the Reformed Church in Zambia with Nyanja or that wide use of Bemba in the country may have contributed to the nation-wide growth of the Roman Catholic Church. See Chuba, Bwalya S, *A history of early Christian missions and church unity in Zambia* (Ndola: Mission Press, 2005), 125.

76 Peel, John David, *Religious Encounter and the Making of the Yoruba* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2003), 281.

77 See Macola, Giacomo. “Historical and ethnographical publications in the vernaculars of colonial Zambia: missionary contribution to the ‘creation of tribalism,’” *Journal of Religion in Africa* 33/4 (2003), 344-355.

78 Church division is confusing us — Lungu, <https://diggers.news/local/2017/06/25/church-division-is-confusing-us-lungu/> (accessed 10/06/18).

79 Sakupapa, Teddy Chalwe, “Ecclesiology and ethics: An analysis of the history of the All Africa Conference of Churches (1963-2013).” PhD dissertation, The University of the Western Cape (2017), 4.

of the various models, visions, concepts and forms of ecumenicity,<sup>80</sup> the crisis of institutional ecumenism<sup>81</sup> and contemporary discourse on changing ecumenical landscapes in the twenty first century.<sup>82</sup>

In the Zambian case, the pentecostalisation and political mobilisation of Christianity, as discussed in previous sections, has not only accentuated the conflict and competition for voice on pertinent social issues amongst the diversity of Christian players. It has also impacted the ecumenical landscape in Zambia in significant ways. Decisions made by Lungu such as the creation of The Ministry for National Guidance and Religious Affairs, MNGRA, problematizes the role of the state in religious affairs and further complicates church and state relations. Therefore, the Kaundas' portrayal of MNGRA's missional-theological significance is problematic.<sup>83</sup> Being a government Ministry, MNGRA may potentially function as a vanguard of state theologies of empire, thus facilitating the political acquiesce of churches in state led Christian nationalism. Hence, it may serve as a "force-field" for the polarisation of the churches prophetic ministry. How then may ecumenism be understood in contemporary Zambia?

Ecumenism in Zambia can no longer be reduced to its traditional and mainly institutional expressions characteristic of ecumenism among mainline (denominational) churches as embodied in ecumenical organisations such as the CCZ and in collaborative work amongst and between the three "church mother bodies". Nevertheless, further to the legacy of institutional ecumenism intimated in the third section of this article, mainline churches have cooperated in the fields of education, medicine (e.g. Christian Medical Association of Zambia),<sup>84</sup> media, and in joint work through ecumenical institutions such as

80 For an overview see Conradie, Ernst, "Notions and Forms of ecumenicity," in *South African perspectives on notions and forms of ecumenicity*, ed. E. Conradie (Stellensbosch: African Sun Media, 2013), 13-76. See also Meyer, Harding, *That all may be one: Perceptions and models of ecumenicity* (Eerdmans: Publishing Company, 1999).

81 Kobia, Sam, "Denominationalism in Africa: The pitfalls of institutional ecumenism," *The Ecumenical Review* 53/3 (2001), 305.

82 "Ecumenism in the 21st Century: Final Report of the Continuation Committee on Ecumenism in the 21st Century, Geneva, 2012," in *Ecumenical Visions for the 21st Century: A Reader for Theological Education* eds. Werner Dietrich and M. Lorke (Geneva: WCC, 2013), 369-381.

83 Kaunda, Chammah and Mutale Kaunda, "Mobilising Religious Assets for Social Transformation: A Theology of Decolonial Reconstruction Perspective on the Ministry of National Guidance and Religious Affairs (MNGRA) in Zambia," *Religions* 9/6 (2018).

84 See Carmody, Brendan, "Religious education and pluralism in Zambia," *Religious Education* 98/2 (2003), 143; Crafford, Dionne, "The ecumene in Africa," *Missionalia: Southern African Journal of Mission Studies* 8/1 (1980), 13.

the Mindolo Ecumenical Foundation (MEF). Additionally, the formation of the United Church of Zambia in 1965 as a union of Presbyterian, Congregationalist and Methodist traditions has been hailed as “a remarkable ecumenical venture that is almost unique in Africa.”<sup>85</sup> Notwithstanding this story of ecumenism in Zambia, the contemporary and largely pentecostalised Zambian context evince a conceptual shift in the understanding of both ecumenism and religious-political interaction.

The newer and diverse forms of Christianity in Zambia, largely Pentecostal albeit variously self-identifying as ministries, fellowships or churches,<sup>86</sup> are notably estranged from “creedal traditions” of mainline churches and the institutionalised forms of conciliar ecumenism. Arguably, ecumenical collaboration that has as its starting point Western-centred ecclesiological notions may not be viable since “it is virtually impossible to define a consistent, historical character of the notion of ‘church’”<sup>87</sup> among the diversity of Pentecostal-charismatic groups. Notwithstanding the specific nature and ecclesial self-understanding of Pentecostal churches and ministries, the Zambian case is illustrative of the indefiniteness of boundaries between and amongst Pentecostal-charismatic groups and mainline churches. This owes, in part, to a trend anachronistically dubbed ‘dual membership’.<sup>88</sup> Within such a context, mainline churches and the so-called three “church mother bodies” no longer have the monopoly on what it means to be ‘church’.

As Dutch theologian Hermen Kroesbergen argues, a new “kind of grassroots ecumenism has emerged and is continuing to foster distinctive ways of being Christian in Zambia.”<sup>89</sup> I have previously underscored the vibrancy of grassroots innovation among rural mainline churches in Eastern Zambia.<sup>90</sup> What Kroesbergen discusses are new forms of association (fellowship) among Christians (including multi-denomination prayer meetings, funerals and community projects) and contends that these may well be sites for local ecumenical initiatives. Undoubtedly, such fellowships may indeed constitute a

85 Gifford, *African*, 183.

86 Udelhoven, Bernhard, “The changing face,” of Christianity in Zambia: new churches of Bauleni Compound,” *Fenza documents* (2010), 2-4.

87 Vondey, Wolfgang, “Pentecostals and ecumenism: becoming the church as a pursuit of Christian unity,” *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church* 11/4 (2011), 326.

88 That is, a person can be a member of one denomination, church or ministry and still associate and benefit from the religious resources of another or more.

89 Kroesbergen, Hermen, “Radical Change in Zambia’s Christian Ecumenism,” *Journal of Southern African Studies* 44/2 (2018), 343.

90 Sakupapa, Teddy, “Local Ecumenism in the Zambian Context,” in *South African perspectives on notions and forms of ecumenicity*, ed. E. Conradie (Stellensbosch: African Sun Media, 2013), 164.

new ecumenical dimension in Zambian Christianity. However, the limitation of Kroesbergen's argument lies in how he deploys the category ecumenical. His argument that Pentecostalism has reinforced the feeling that 'we are just Christians' can hardly be interpreted as "a gesture of ecumenism".<sup>91</sup> As Pamela Klassen observes, one needs to ask "what different people mean when they call themselves ... Christians."<sup>92</sup> Further, Kroesbergen's portrayal of ecumenism as a 'client cult' reveals an absence of a nuanced appreciation of the imperative and indicative aspects of ecumenism. It waters down any consideration of the various conceptualisations of the goal of ecumenism and of ecclesial identity. Such analysis I argue, requests further reflection on the nature of the church not only as a sociological reality as Kroesbergen does, but also as a theological reality. Granted reflections on ecumenism in Zambia need to be articulated with due attention to grassroots innovations where enacted theologies are developing; reflection on the nature of the church as a theological reality is indispensable for an understanding of ecumenism as an imperative of the gospel. Conceptually, there is need for a language to ground theoretical reflection on Pentecostal ecclesiality.

I argue that the cultivation of ecumenical consciousness amongst Christians and Christian bodies remains both necessary and crucial for the churches' ecumenical and prophetic witness. The notion of ecumenical consciousness as employed here designates the need for openness to an understanding of ecumenicity as an imperative of the gospel and therefore a missional imperative. Such ecumenical consciousness may benefit from the Zambian traditions of peaceful co-existence (African sociality). My earlier articulation of an African ecumenical ecclesiology predicated on the notion of *Ubuntu*<sup>93</sup> is instructive given my articulation of this notion as germane to both the ecumenical search for unity and the social responsibility of the church. Such an African ecumenical ecclesiology is missional and decries the split between the ecclesiological and the political by maintaining an integral understanding of Christian participation in God's mission. This entails that ecumenical consciousness must be at the heart of the praxis of local churches.

91 Marshall, Ruth, "Christianity, anthropology, politics," *Current Anthropology* 55/10 (2014), 345.

92 Klassen, "Christianity", 145.

93 See Sakupapa, Teddy C, "Ecumenical ecclesiology in the African context: towards a view of the church as Ubuntu," *Scriptura* 117/1 (2018), 9.

## 7 Concluding Remarks

This article explored how the *Declaration of Zambia* as a Christian nation has been utilised to frame notions of nationhood and notions for political mobilisation during Edgar Lungu's Presidency from 2015-2018. Having discussed the political mobilisation of the social identities of religion and ethnicity, it was argued that the pentecostalisation and political mobilisation of Christianity in Zambia have significantly altered Zambia's ecumenical landscape. In the absence of an ecumenical consciousness grounded in local epistemologies, this has huge implications for the credibility of the public witness of the churches. Therefore, the proposal for the cultivation of ecumenical consciousness among churches in Zambia has missional significance. This article then prompts further research on contextual re/conceptualisation of Zambian ecumenical discourse.