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INSTITUTIONS AND ETHNIC POLITICS IN AFRICA

This book presents a theory to account for why and when politics revolves around one axis of social cleavage instead of another. It does so by examining the case of Zambia, where people identify themselves either as members of one of the country's six dozen tribes or as members of one of its four principal language groups. The book accounts for the conditions under which political competition in Zambia revolves around tribal differences and the conditions under which it revolves around language group differences. Drawing on a simple model of identity choice, it shows that the answer depends on whether the country is operating under single-party or multi-party rule. During periods of single-party rule, tribal identities serve as the axis of electoral mobilization and self-identification; during periods of multi-party rule, broader language group identities play this role. The book thus demonstrates how formal institutional rules determine the kinds of social cleavages that matter in politics.

Daniel N. Posner is Assistant Professor of Political Science at UCLA. His research focuses on ethnic politics, regime change, and the political economy of development in Africa. He has published articles in numerous journals, and he has received grants and fellowships from the Russell Sage Foundation, the Harry Frank Guggenheim Foundation, and the Harvard Academy for International and Area Studies. In 2001–2, he was a National Fellow at the Hoover Institution at Stanford University. He is currently a Carnegie Scholar of the Carnegie Corporation of New York.

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For Rebecca

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Preface

This is a book about ethnic conflict, but it is not about ethnic conflict in the usual sense. Most treatments of the subject focus on explaining variation in the occurrence or intensity of ethnic violence across time and space. They ask: why did tensions between Hutus and Tutsis in Rwanda erupt into full-blown genocide in 1994 (Prunier 1995; Gourevitch 1998)? Why have Hindu–Muslim riots taken place in some Indian towns but not in others (Varshney 2002; Wilkinson 2004)? Why, since the mid-1970s, has there been so much more ethnic violence in Sri Lanka than in Malaysia (Horowitz 1989)? This book, by contrast, seeks to explain not when or where communal conflict breaks out but why it breaks out along one line of ethnic division instead of another. It seeks to explain why politics comes to revolve around the particular axis of ethnic cleavage that it does.

I fell into this research topic by accident. When I first went to Zambia in 1993, I thought I was going to be studying how Zambia's recent transition to multi-party politics had affected the relations among the country's ethnic groups. I thought I was going to be studying whether the introduction of competitive multi-party elections had deepened ethnic divisions and made ethnicity a more salient part of the country's political affairs. Given this motivating question, I began my research by conducting a series of open-ended interviews in one of Lusaka's poor residential compounds to probe how people from different ethnic communities were getting along in the new multi-party era. Again and again, I was told that ethnic politics was rife. I was also told that one group in particular – the Bembas – were dominating the country and that Zambian politics had been transformed into a conflict between Bemba power-holders and everyone else. Almost always, these charges of Bemba domination were substantiated with long lists of Bembas who had been appointed as cabinet ministers, diplomats, or senior civil servants, had emerged as business

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leaders, or were otherwise enjoying more than their fair share of the best jobs and government contracts.

Yet when I then met with the people whose names had been provided, many of them told me that they were not, in fact, Bemba. One identified himself as Bisa; another as Lunda; another as Chishinga; another as Mambwe. All of them were members of tribes that belonged to the broader Bemba language family, but they did not self-identify as Bembas.

At first I was confused. How could there be such a disconnect between the way people saw themselves and the way they were viewed by others? Eventually, I came to understand that Zambians saw their country's politics through multiple lenses. Some saw it through the lens of language group differences. Through this lens, all of the allegedly "Bemba" winners in the regime change were, in fact, Bembas, since they all were members of Bemba-speaking tribes. But other Zambians viewed the country's politics through the prism of tribal differences rather than language. Seen this way, all of the "Bembas" who were benefiting from the change in government were from other – and, in some cases, *under-represented* – ethnic communities. Whether or not Bembas were dominating the country depended entirely on the rule – linguistic or tribal – that one applied to code the people in the positions of power.

As soon as I recognized that this was what was going on, I realized that I had to acquire a better understanding of the conditions under which people came to understand the country's politics in terms of language differences versus tribal differences. My quest for an understanding of when and why conflict arises was transformed into a mission to comprehend why conflict was perceived to be taking place along the lines of one ethnic cleavage instead of another.

In the nearly ten years that I have worked on this project, I have benefited from the support of a number of institutions and from the insights, intellectual stimulation, friendship, and generosity of a great many individuals. My greatest debt of gratitude is to the hundreds of Zambians who served as survey respondents and focus group participants and to the many current and former politicians who patiently answered my endless questions. To the extent that this book "gets Zambian politics right," it is because of their generous tutoring in its intricacies.

My research in Zambia would have been impossible without the hard work of a team of tremendous research assistants: Misheck Banda, Richard Banda, Maureen Kashempa, Charlotte Lwanga, Hilary Mwale, Kris Mwanangombe, Robert Mwanza, Godfrey Sibeso, and Joseph

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Tembo. I could not have completed this project without their help. My nineteen months of field research were immensely enriched by the good company and friendship of Philip and Julie Alderfer, Lisa Cliggett, Mike Hall, Melinda Ham, Jim and Michelle Polhemus, Lise Rakner, Jeffrey Ryen, David Simon, and Jeremy Weinstein. I want to especially thank Malcolm McPherson, Deborah Hoover, and Heather and Malinda McPherson, who invited me into their family and provided me with a home base in Lusaka that was truly a home away from home. At the Institute for African Studies (now the Institute for Economic and Social Research) at the University of Zambia, Ilse Mwanza and Chris Simuyemba were, as they have been for foreign researchers in Zambia for more than two decades, sources of administrative guidance, advice, and friendship. I would also like to thank Kumbutso Dzekedzeke, the census manager at the Central Statistical Office in Lusaka; Joel Sikazwe, director of the Electoral Commission of Zambia; and the staff of the Zambia Consolidated Copper Mines archives in Ndola for help that went well beyond the call of duty. I also thank Fred M'membe and Ngandi Mwananjidi for our numerous stimulating conversations. To all of these people I am immensely grateful.

This book began as a doctoral dissertation in the Department of Government at Harvard University. I owe a deep intellectual debt to my three dissertation advisors, Samuel Huntington, Robert Bates, and Jennifer Widner. Throughout my graduate training, and during the two years I subsequently spent as an Academy Scholar in the Harvard Academy for International and Area Studies, they were wonderful mentors. They were also terrific role models. Much of what I have learned about political science, about Africa, and about conducting myself as a scholar I have learned from their fine examples. I am also indebted to a group of remarkable friends and colleagues at Harvard, whose camaraderie and incisive comments contributed much to this project. In particular, I would like to single out Henry Hale, Devesh Kapur, Michael Kevane, Pauline Jones Luong, Shaun Malarney, Michael Montasano, Maria Victoria Murillo, Mark Nagel, Karissa Price, Richard Snyder, Edward Steinfeld, Ashutosh Varshney, and Steven Wilkinson.

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Taylor provided much appreciated help and support. I received useful feedback on various pieces of the project at meetings of the Laboratory in Comparative Ethnic Processes and the American Political Science Association, and at workshops at Stanford University, Princeton University, the University of Chicago, New York University, UCLA, and the Santa Fe Institute. In addition to the helpful criticisms offered by participants in these workshops and seminars, I received valuable comments and suggestions from Joel Barkan, Carles Boix, Michael Bratton, Kanchan Chandra, Alberto Diaz-Cayeros, Pierre Englebert, James Fearon, Karen Ferree, Judy Geist, Jeffrey Herbst, Macartan Humphreys, Nahomi Ichino, Nelson Kasfir, David Laitin, Drew Linzer, Beatriz Magaloni, Shaheen Mozaffar, Benjamin Reilly, Robert Rotberg, James Scarritt, Kenneth Scheve, David Simon, Smita Singh, Richard Sklar, Paul Sniderman, Michael Thies, Matthew Turner, Nicolas van de Walle, Ashutosh Varshney, Leonard Wantchekon, Lisa Wedeen, Steven Wilkinson, Elisabeth Wood, and anonymous reviewers of the manuscript. Their comments strengthened the book immeasurably.

Intellectual support may be a necessary condition for writing, but it is not sufficient for research involving field work and large amounts of data collection. Financial support is also necessary. I am therefore particularly grateful to the institutions that provided financial support for the project at various stages. The International Predissertation Fellowship Program of the Social Science Research Council funded my initial trip to Zambia. A Dissertation Improvement Grant from the National Science Foundation made possible a nine-month follow-up trip the next year. The Harvard Academy for International and Area Studies provided two extremely valuable years of support at the dissertation stage of the project and underwrote a third field research trip. At UCLA, the Academic Senate provided support for the project throughout its transformation from a dissertation into a book. The Hoover Institution at Stanford provided a year of support during which I completely rewrote the manuscript. A Faculty Career Development Award at UCLA also provided useful resources at a key stage. I also owe thanks to the UCLA International Institute and the James S. Coleman African Studies Center at UCLA, particularly its former director, Edmond Keller, for their support of this project.

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Finally, I thank my parents, Robert and Rita Posner, who never in a million years would have guessed that their son would write a book about African politics. They taught me how to read and ask questions, and kindled in me a desire to try to understand the world outside of Tenafly, New Jersey. They did not read a single page of the manuscript or offer much in the way of comments or suggestions. But their fingerprints are everywhere on its pages. Most of all, I thank my wife, Rebecca. She joined me late in the process of writing this book but provided the love and support – the home – I needed to finally get it finished. This book is for her.

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