

The background image shows three individuals standing on a dirt path in a rural, arid landscape. They are wearing traditional, highly decorative costumes. The person on the left has a red-painted face and a costume made of dark, layered fabric with a large, light-colored, shaggy mass on their chest. The person in the middle has a red-painted face and a costume made of many colorful, rectangular pieces of fabric hanging from their shoulders. The person on the right has a natural skin tone and a similar costume of colorful fabric pieces. The sky is blue with some light clouds, and the ground is dry and dusty.

# The Political Salience of Cultural Difference: Why Chewas and Tumbukas Are Allies in Zambia and Adversaries in Malawi

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# The Chewas and Tumbukas

- Both groups divided by the Zambia-Malawi border
- Border exists since the British conquest, set arbitrarily
- In Malawi relations between these groups are largely hostile, in Zambia friendly

# Cultural differences as sources of conflict

- cultural differences often evoked when conflicts are analyzed, yet they cannot fully explain the emergence of conflicts
- Why some cleavages matter more?
- Suggested explanations:
  - - Degree of cultural differences, progress in society
- The Malawi-Zambia situation seems to contradict the „Culturalistic” approach

# Research setup

- ~~Members of both groups were interviewed on both sides of the border~~
- Villages were similar: homogenous, no variation in geography and economy
- Questions: 5 questions: what makes Chewas different from Tumbukas? Would a member of your tribe vote for a member of the other tribe in the case this person stood for president? Would you personally? Are you married to a member of the other group? Would you consider it?

# Findings

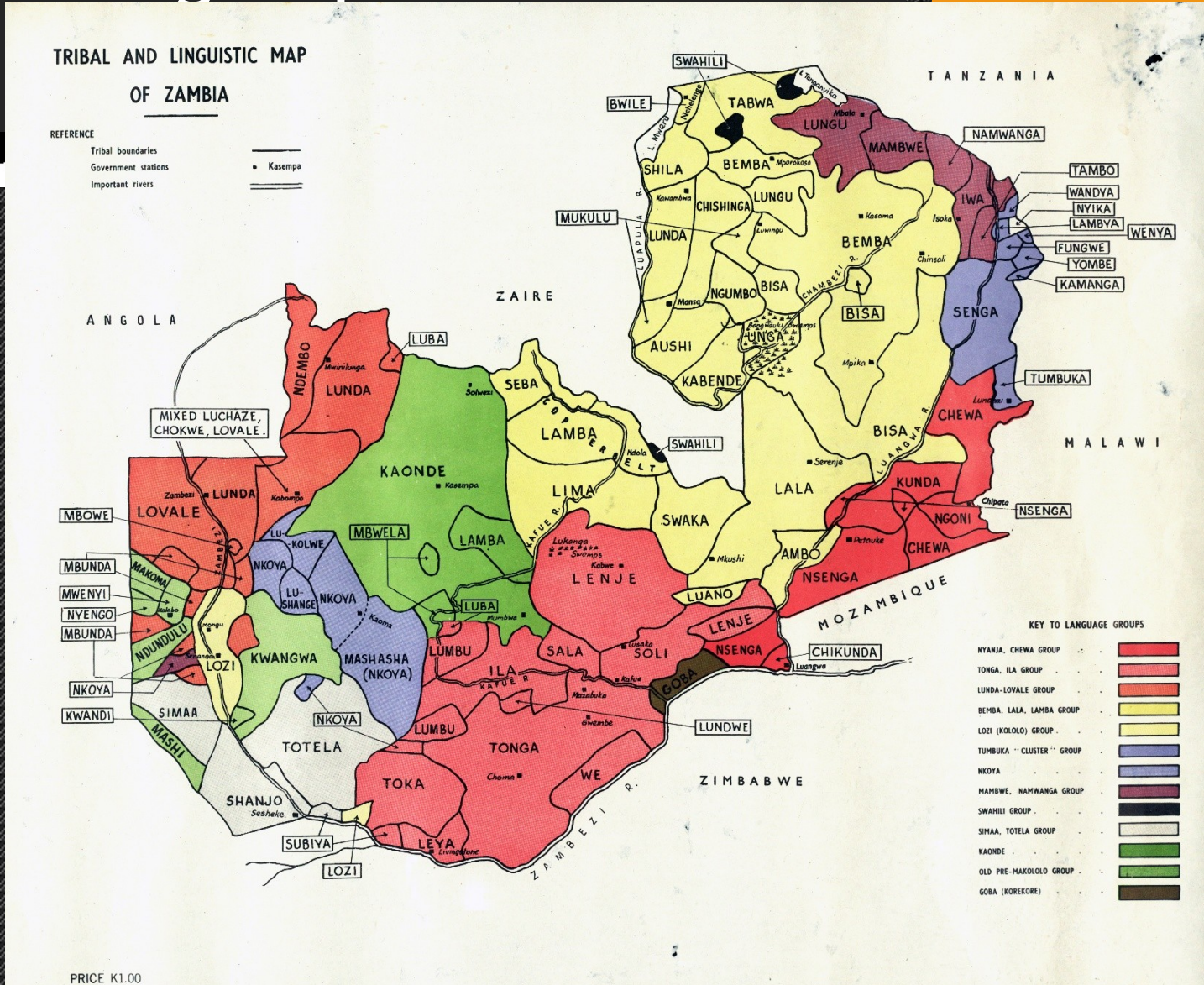
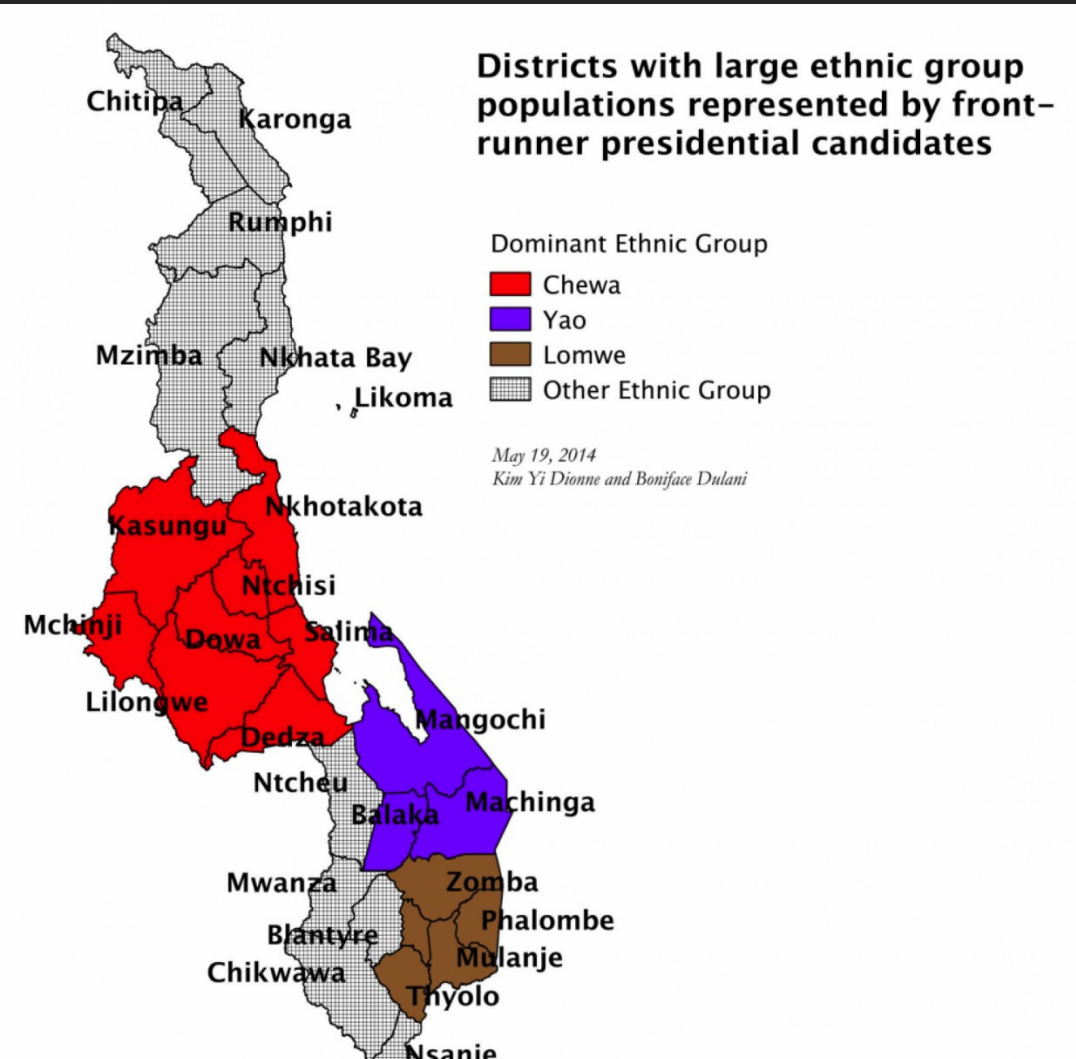
- small differences in language and culture
- 61 % in Malawi thought their group would not support a presidential candidate from the other group, just 21 % in Zambia, similar pattern by the marriage question

# How to explain this discrepancy?

- Political system
- Electoral cycle
- Different experience during colonialism
- Higher relevancy of ethnicity in Malawi
  
- None of the approaches above is satisfactory



# Relative size of the ethnic groups in their countries



# Ethnicity as a basis for political mobilization

- Both countries work on the basis of patronage networks
- In Zambia, when the „ethnic card” is played, Chewas and Tumbukas are relatively small and are lumped together as „Easterns”
- In Malawi, they are the biggest ethnic groups and are played out against each other



# Other findings

- Political hostility spills over to social situations
- An arbitrary drawing of a border just as potent in creating a sense of belonging as cultural differences (the case of the Tongas) - this fits constructivism better than primordialism

# Conclusion

~~ethnic diversity is a poor predictor of actual animosity, let alone violent conflict~~

- In The Malawi-Zambia example, the real reason of non-violent conflict is access to resources and politicians attempt to mobilize support along cleavages, with ethnic cleavages being the most obvious cleavage to exploit as they already exist, but cleavages can be created artificially (by drawing a border arbitrarily). However, cultural differences alone, without politicians playing the “ethnic cards” are not enough for conflict
- Conflicts rarely start out as ethnic, but they can become one after politicians instrumentalize cultural differences to mobilize support and thus divide their country along ethnic lines

# Critical notes and questions for discussion

- a well-written article about an often neglected region
- It shows that the instrumentalization of cleavages by elites is critical for the emergence of animosity
- It is also a clear example against the essentialist “ancient hatreds” argument
- It also suggests interesting questions: if identity is seemingly so easily created, why couldn't other states, that were carved out arbitrarily by colonial masters, ignoring ethnic-cultural realities (Sudan, Iraq) come up with a common identity?
- Thanks to what factors didn't the hostilities in Malawi turn violent?