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The Cleavage Model, Ethnicity and Voter Alignment in Africa: Conceptual and Methodological Problems Revisited

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Abstract

Recent research on political parties and ethnicity has challenged the conventional wisdom about ethnicity as the major factor that explains voter alignment in Africa. The paper maintains that the cleavage model, although modified to include ethnicity, still provides heuristically the best foundation for the explanation of party formation and voting behaviour in Africa. It points out that inconclusive and contradicting research results about the salience of ethnicity can be attributed to a variety of unresolved methodological and conceptual problems linked to the 'fluidity' of the concept of ethnicity. To overcome these problems refined research designs and more sophisticated analytical tools are required. Finally, it is safe to assume that the relevance of ethnicity for the formation of party systems and voter alignment is not a uniform pattern across Africa, but will differ from one country to the other.

Key words: Africa, social cleavages, cleavage model, ethnicity, political parties, party systems

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Zusammenfassung

Das Konfliktlinienmodell, Ethnizität und Parteienbindung in Afrika: Methodische und konzeptionelle Herausforderungen

Jüngere Forschungsergebnisse stellen Ethnizität als Erklärungsfaktor für das Wahlverhalten in Afrika (südlich der Sahara) in Frage. Der Beitrag bestätigt die These, dass der soziale Konfliktlinienansatz in heuristischer Weise und im Hinblick auf Ethnizität modifiziert auf Afrika anwendbar ist und eine maßgebliche Erklärung für die Formation von Parteiensystemen in Afrika liefern kann. Die widersprüchlichen und wenig aufschlussreichen Forschungsergebnisse zum Zusammenhang von Ethnizität und Wählerverhalten können mit einer Reihe ungelöster methodischer und konzeptioneller Schwierigkeiten erklärt werden, die mit der Fluidität des Ethnizitätsbegriffes verbunden sind. Um diese Probleme zu überwinden, sind spezifische Forschungsdesigns und ausgefeiltere Analyseinstrumente notwendig. Grundsätzlich lässt sich mit einiger Sicherheit festhalten, dass Ethnizität für die Parteienformation und das Wählerverhalten nicht überall in Afrika gleichermaßen relevant ist, sondern sich ihre Bedeutung von Land zu Land erheblich unterscheiden kann.

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Article Outline

1 Introduction[1]

Voting behaviour in Africa is predominantly explained by factors such as ethnicity, personal linkages, and clientelism (Hyden & Leys 1972; Barkan 1979; Bratton & Van de Walle 1997; Van de Walle 2003; Scarritt & Mozzafar 1999; Mozzafar et al. 2003; 2005; Erdmann 2004; Posner 2005: 217-250). As indicated by a recent anthology (Berman et al. 2004), ethnicity as a social cleavage has gained a prominent place in the understanding of politics in Africa. While many authors seem to accept the prominence of ethnicity as a given fact, only a few have tried (and in different ways) to explain the relevance of ethnicity in the context of Seymour

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M. Lipset's and Stein Rokkan's (1967) social cleavage model. This is a model which provides an analytical framework for the formation of political parties and the structuring of voter alignment (Scarritt & Mozaffar 1999; Weiland & Erdmann 2001; Erdmann 2004).

Most recently the idea that ethnicity is a major factor that explains voter alignment in Africa has been challenged. Staffan Lindberg and Minion K.C. Morrison (2007) suggest that there is no strong empirical evidence available for this 'conventional wisdom'; 'evidence' is often assumed rather than empirically provided. In fact, in many cases the conclusion that ethnicity is the predominant 'motif'' for the electorate is based on inferences from aggregate election data of the national level. However, as Lindberg and Morrison rightly point out, this kind of inference may entail an ecological fallacy. The pointer that the local discourse refers to an 'Akan', 'Bemba' or 'Kikuyu party' does not make the kind of inference more valid.

On the basis of individual voter interviews in Ghana, Lindberg and Morrison (2007: 34) conclude that 'clientelistic and ethnic predisposed voting are minor features' of the electorate. Similarly, albeit more cautious, Michael Bratton and his colleagues raise doubts – again based on individual survey data of the Afrobarometer from several countries – as to whether political parties are formed 'primarily along ethnic lines'. They 'suspect' that party formation is 'more pluralistic' than 'concerns about ethnic fragmentation would have one believe' (Bratton et al 2005: 257). At the same time, they refrain from suggesting other variables for explaining voting behaviour in Africa.

On the other hand, Kevin S. Fridy comes to the conclusion that ethnicity seems to be an 'extremely significant although not deciding factor in Ghanaian elections' (Fridy 2007: 302). Most interestingly, his analysis is also based on individual data analysis from Ghana, just as Lindberg's and Morrison's, and on a mixture of regression based on aggregate data and focus group interviews. Results from the analysis of individual survey data collected in Zambia suggest a very similar conclusion: 'Ethnicity matters for voter alignment and even more so for party affiliation', but also 'ethnicity or 'ethno-political' identity is certainly not the only, but one factor that accounts for election outcomes in Zambia' (Erdmann 2007: 28).

Hence we are faced with a puzzle. What accounts for the conflicting conclusions about the role of ethnicity for explaining voter behaviour in Africa? I suggest there are a number of conceptual as well as methodological issues that lie at the heart of the problem. In a first step, I shall revisit the Lipset-Rokkan model in order to draw out the explanatory power. The main point is that the model is a useful heuristic device but one that needs to be modified to be applicable to African societies. Although the model is certainly unable to explain electoral behaviour in its totality – nobody is claiming that – it is applicable only for some parts of the electorate.

Linked to these general theoretical points and my own observations, I shall decipher a number of methodological and conceptual problems and flaws encountered in research on eth-

nicity in relation to political party formation and party affiliation in Africa – and what makes generalisations so difficult. I will address several research issues starting with the social and political sensitivity of the concept. I will then raise the question whether the historical dimension of the cleavage model makes it useful for the study of political parties in Africa of which many have only a short history. This is followed by an elaboration of the fundamental challenge how to come to grip with the complexity of ethnicity and its operationalisation for empirical research. Finally, the paper discusses a number of research problems related to the particularities of ethnic congress parties, party identification and the high numbers of ethnic groups in most African societies. It concludes that a refinement of research concepts and instruments is necessary in order to tackle the challenge posed by ethnicity and lose not sight of other factors explaining voting behaviour in Africa.

2 The Cleavage Model: A Short Review

The Lipset-Rokkan model is, first of all, concerned with the identification of social cleavages and the historical sequence in which they emerged in Western Europe, i.e. the sequence of conflicts. The relevant social cleavages in Western Europe are the conflicts of centre versus periphery (subject/dominant culture), state versus church (secularization), rural versus urban (primary/secondary economy), and capital versus labour (owner/worker). The second topic addresses the 'conditions for the development of a stable system of cleavage and opposition' in the national polity and its articulation in political parties and the particular national party system. Finally, it is the third complex which is concerned with a question related to individual (voting) behaviour within the established political party system (Lipset & Rokkan 1967: 1-2).

For our purposes, the most relevant question is that about the crucial characteristics of voters mobilised by political parties. Lipset and Rokkan made it quite clear that the existence of a social conflict does not automatically imply a mobilisation or identification of voters along this cleavage. The effective mobilisation of a particular party is dependent on a number of other factors as well which are not grounded in social cleavages, but related to the political strategies of the elite. There are number of economic, social, and cultural conditions which support or hinder the mobilisation efforts along cleavage lines. There is no clear cut linkage or deterministic relationship between a social cleavage and party formation together with a lasting identification and mobilisation of voters. It is important to note that the model combines a structural and an agency-orientated approach towards the explanation of voting behaviour. Hence, we need to ask what the model actually gives us.

- It makes it possible to empirically analyse and compare the formation and development of political party systems in relation to social cleavages or socio-structural conditions.

- The cleavage is defined as an institutionalised, socio-structurally embedded and politically effectual conflict.

- The model comprises four dimensions: 1. a socio-structural one, 2. an interest and/or value oriented one, 3. a political party one, and 4. a voter alignment one.

- The formation of a permanently institutionalised cleavage in form of a specific party system occurs only if the political elite takes up societal conflicts and articulates these issues through political parties within the established framework of political institutions.

- The repeated political articulation of these conflicts through political parties promotes political identities and political party alignments and affiliations among the citizens and voters.

Above all, the Lipset-Rokkan model emphasises the long lasting historical dimension of the genesis and development of party systems and voter alignment. Its scope is not restricted to the identification of social cleavages which might constitute the party system, but extends to the treatment and institutionalisation of these conflicts into more or less stable political party systems.

Given this long-term historical dimension envisaged in the model and the comparatively short history of many political parties in Africa, especially of those formed in the aftermath of the '1989-juncture', it may appear doubtful if the model can provide empirically grounded findings about voter orientation and party alignments. At the same time, there are a number of political parties which trace their development back for more than half a century (see below 4.2). Therefore we are confronted with a number of older, probably more institutionalised parties and with a larger number of young, less institutionalised parties. These considerations suggest a first crucial qualification that under fluid political conditions, the cleavage model might be useful to explain the voting behaviour and party alignment of only a fraction of the electorate – perhaps only of a few core groups which exhibit the same characteristics.

A second, more general qualification is called for. Insights on voting behaviour in established and institutionalised party systems suggest that party alignment cannot be explained exclusively by socio-structural variables. The perception of the input and output performance of the political regime, the government and political parties are also important determinants of voting behaviour. Nowadays there seems to be a broad consensus among psephologists that

voting behaviour and party affiliation cannot be explained by a single model (Roth 2006: 23). Voting behaviour and partisanship are simply too complex for this.

Usually, besides the sociological model, two other classical approaches are available, namely party identification (Campbell et al. 1954; 1960) and rational choice models (Downs 1957; Key 1966; Fiorina 1981) which are applied to the puzzle of voting behaviour. According to the party identification model, voter alignment is shaped by the perception of three factors: candidates, issues, and links between parties and social groups. However, the latter factor, the social dimension is conceptually not well elaborated. Party identification is loosely understood as a socio-psychological product of family and social group ties, and the focus of the model is on the functions of party identification (Dalton 2002: 20-21). It is important to note that party identification does not only have a direct impact on voting decisions but also on the perception of candidates and issues. Hence, there is a tautological twist or circular argument. To put it differently, party identification shapes the evaluation of candidates, issues, and the expected capacity of parties to solve problems.

A rational choice model cannot explain why a substantial number of voters support the same party at election after election despite changes in government and policy performance. The approach ignores the fact that political perceptions and evaluations are structured by 'predisposed' partisan attitudes such as party identification. The model is not interested in where the voters' values come from which coordinate decisions. However, it helps to explain the electoral behaviour for those voters with a weak or no party identification, whose numbers have increased in old democracies and in young democracies of Eastern and Southern Europe. It may also help to understand why people vote different from their party identification, and why they chose a candidate or how they decide on issues. A modified model of rational choice views the voter as 'an appraiser of past events' (Key 1966; Fiorina 1981) who judges retrospectively on the past performance of the government. This modified model takes for granted that voters identify with parties. The major difference to the party identification model is, however, that the identification is determined by rational calculation or reflection and not by affective ties which are crucial for the party identification model.

It has been suggested to view the sociological Lipset-Rokkan model as the backbone for the two other models. According to research on voter alignment in Europe, this model is still the best for explaining party alignment for most of the electorate despite increasing voter de-alignment. This even applies to highly mobile societies such as post-war West Germany where socio-structural determinants such as capital/labour and religion/no-religion are still the most reliable *explanans* (Roth 2006: 32; Pappi 1990).

To sum up, the rational choice model helps to explain why *some* citizens change their vote. The party identification model provides an understanding why many citizens do not change

their vote. Finally, the sociological model explains why people identify with particular parties over a period of elections (often undisturbed by the government's performance).

3   The Cleavage Model and Its Application to Africa

A fundamental question is whether the Lipset-Rokkan model based on Western Europe can be applied to Africa. Lipset and Rokkan never claimed that it would be directly applicable to other parts of the world. It is common knowledge that party and party system formation outside Europe differ from the model. In particular, the specific cleavages and their sequencing are different (Eith & Mielke 2001; Randall 2001: 258). Indeed, the cleavage model cannot be applied in a sequential (diachronic) but only in a heuristic manner as a synchronic model of party formation in Africa (Erdmann & Weiland 2001; Erdmann 2004: 44), providing a framework for analysing the socio-structural conditions of party and party system formation.

Elsewhere we have shown that none of the four classical cleavages known from the Western European history are politically relevant in present day Africa – perhaps with the exception of South Africa (Erdmann & Weiland 2001; Erdmann 2004). Some of the traditional cleavages can be identified in Africa, but they are weakly developed and thus contribute little, or in a few cases only, to the formation of political parties and party systems. This applies, for example, to the capital-labour cleavage which is obviously there, but the relevant group of industrial workers is too small. In many countries, there are trade unions which provide the organisational basis for articulating the cleavage and its 'translation' in party politics. However, the members of these unions are mainly comprised of public employees, less so of industrial workers (again, apart from a few exceptions like Zambia). At the same time, after trade unions involvement with the one-party rule during the 1970s and 1980s and the democratization of the 1990s the trade union movement has split. Genuine communist or social-democratic parties have become rare, and they are usually small and irrelevant.[2]

The second, urban-rural cleavage which again accompanies industrialisation has little relevance in Africa in the way we know it from Western Europe. It describes the conflict of interest between the mercantile and industrial bourgeoisie on the one hand, and of the feudal landowners on the other hand. Increasing urbanisation in Africa might provide the potential for a conflict between the urban and rural population (e.g. about the pricing of basic foodstuffs). Up to now, this has not been developed into a clear cut line of cleavage and, more

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[2]   The proliferation of self-proclaimed 'social-democratic' parties since 1989 should not be taken at face value. Max Mmuya has pointed out the idiosyncratic 'mutations of social democracy and liberalism' in the programmes of many of the Tanzanian opposition parties (Mmuya 1998: 27).

importantly, into specific political party formations or orientations. One reason might be that urbanisation, which is not linked to industrialisation in Africa, is, sociologically, to some degree only an extension of the village into the (shanty) town, and the urban and rural population maintain close personal links as well as their ethnic identity (Elwert & Segbenou 1983; Gluckman 1960: 55; Epstein 1958).

The state-church cleavage which was so important in Western Europe has basically no meaning in Africa. With the end of the colonial era, countries south of the Sahara became independent as secular states. Early Christian or Muslim orientated parties (e.g. in Uganda or Sudan) of the 1950s and 1960s were not interested in a religious state but operated as representatives of a particular denomination or sect (*tariqa*). Only during the 1990s the secular state has been challenged by some fundamentalist religious groups (e.g. in Nigeria). This, however, was not accompanied by the formation of corresponding political parties.

Finally, ethnicity has been identified as one important social cleavage in Africa. Although ethnicity is not addressed in the Lipset-Rokkan model explicitly, it can be subsumed under the centre-periphery cleavage. In Western Europe, this cleavage described the conflict about the dominant culture of the emerging nation state – which of the various regional cultures would become the nation's state culture. Put differently, it was the conflict between various ethnic groups about cultural dominance in the state. In Africa, the problem is slightly different; in most cases the conflict is not so much about the dominant culture but about who controls the commanding heights of the state for the selective or particularistic distribution of patronage. Within the Lipset-Rokkan model this cleavage is based on the concept of 'territorial opposition' which is explained (under the conditions of universal suffrage) as 'the commitment to the locality and its dominant culture: you vote with your community and its leaders irrespective of your economic position' (Lipset & Rokkan1967: 13). In so far as ethnicity can be incorporated into the model, it can be utilised as one social cleavage which might provide the basis for political party formation and voter alignment.

Ethnicity denotes a historically and socially constructed identity – not as a primordial or essentialist attribute – and one that is multifaceted, changeable, and has multiple meanings. Ethnicity is constituted by the interaction of self-ascription and ascription by others (Young 1976; Lentz 1994: 25; Lentz & Nugent 2000: 2-6). It can be comprised of several elements: Language, common history, values and symbols, territory or political entity. Ethnicity is not a question of fixed boundaries or neatly delineated entities. It is historically and regionally articulated in different ways. Ethnic cleavages are variable, and ethnicity can, but need not, lead to voter alignment. This depends on the way ethnic identities are politically developed – which implies different forms of cultural ideologies up to chauvinistic expressions of ethnic supremacy.

The relevance of ethnicity in African politics is hardly disputed in the literature. However, the crucial question is whether ethnicity provides *the*, or only one of a number of relevant cleavages for party formation and voter alignment, and how this can be analysed empirically. As Lindberg and Morrison indicate, this particular linkage is often more assumed or maintained but hardly substantiated by empirical facts. As we have learned from revisiting the Lipset-Rokkan model, a social cleavage does not automatically imply corresponding political party formation. It should be noted as well that – apart from some self-proclaimed experts – in the academic literature hardly anybody has claimed that ethnicity is the only and exclusive cleavage for party formation and voter alignment in Africa. It has, however, been suggested as the predominant cleavage (Scarrit & Mozzafar 1999; Erdmann & Weiland 2001; Erdmann 2004; Nugent 2004).

4   Conceptual and Methodological Problems of Analysis

The assumption of the relevance of ethnicity for political party formation and voter mobilisation is usually derived from one of the four following methodological approaches. The first approach is based on inferences from aggregated national elections data. In the case of repeated election victories of a party in a region, district, and constituency inhabited by a single ethnic group, ethnicity is *assumed* to be the major variable for explaining election outcomes (Nugent 2004; Fridy 2007). A second, qualitative approach uses results of various interviews and participatory observations at the national and local level as well as the analysis of newspapers and other reports. This kind of research involves national and local elites, ordinary citizens as well as political party members, activists and leaders. Focus-group discussions and interviews are one of the techniques applied; interviews with party leaders and activists might reveal the strategic calculations for the nomination of candidates in parliamentary elections, which candidate with which ethnic affiliation might have the best chance to win a particular constituency populated predominantly by one ethnic group. A third approach tries to analyse (i) the ethnic composition of major government members and their distribution among ministers and vice-ministers to determine which ethnic groups are participating in the government; and (ii) the government's policy and favours towards the various regions and districts (Hwedi 1998; Throup 2003).

Recently, individual level data have been systematically used for statistical analyses, but with conflicting results. Lindberg and Morrison used a relatively small and regionally limited sample of Ghanaians for their research; in 2003 they conducted 700 interviews in six out of 200 constituencies and in four of 20 regions. They attributed little relevance to ethnicity: 'Clientelistic and ethnic predisposed voting are minor features of the Ghanaian electorate'

(Lindberg & Morrison 2007: 34). However, based on a very similar research design, 600 interviews in three out of 230 constituencies of three out of ten regions (2004-5), Fridy comes to nearly the opposite conclusion: 'ethnicity is an extremely significant although not deciding factor in Ghanaian elections' (Fridy 2007: 302).

To make matters more complicated, using a backward stepwise logistic regression of my own data collected from 1,000 interviews from eight of ten randomly selected regions of Zambia and other socio-structural and attitudinal variables, it appears that 'ethnicity matters for voter alignment and even more so for party affiliation in Zambia' (Erdmann 2007: 29).[3] However, I also found that:

- Ethnicity or ethno-political identity is not the only, but just one factor that accounts for election outcomes.
- There seems to be only a core group of ethnic voters and ethnic party members.
- The degree of ethnic voting can differ from one ethnic group to the other (ethnicity operated as the most powerful variable only for two ethnic groups and parties).
- Not all ethnic groups identify consistently with one particular party (ibid.).

Without testing and suggesting other variables, the Afrobarometer survey comes to a, perhaps, slightly different conclusion by claiming that a more differentiated, multi-factor explanation than ethnicity is required for party affiliation in Africa (Bratton et al. 2005: 257).

All the methodological approaches mentioned above have weaknesses of their own which might affect the research results. The analysis of aggregate data might entail the danger of an ecological fallacy which arises as we use aggregate election data to make inferences about individual voting behaviour. If there is a constituency with a population of about 50 per cent of a particular ethnic group and a repeated similar percentage of votes for one party identified with this particular ethnic group, this might suggest that this party is supported mainly by members of that ethnic group. However, this can be completely wrong, simply because, based on aggregate constituency data, we do not know which individuals voted for which party. Even if there is a much higher percentage of a particular ethnic group in a constituency we cannot be sure who voted for which party, given the comparatively low election turnout of about 30 to 40 per cent of the population in many African countries.[4] Only in rare

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[3] Based on a sophisticated model analysis of aggregate election data, Posner (2005: 227) comes to basically similar results , viz. that ethnic voting matters in rural areas, and that 'the pattern of tribal voting (…) is more pronounced in the one-party elections than in the multi-party elections'.

[4] To give one example: A constituency might be comprised of 1,000 people of which 600 belong to group A, 350 to group B, and the 150 people to various other groups. Given a percentage of 35 %t of the population which participated in the election (as in Ghana 2000) and 60 % voted for the X-party and 20 % for each Y- and Z-party, the usual conclusion (and possible ecological fallacy) would be that probably the 60 % votes for X-

cases, if there are hardly any other people in the constituency, might it be plausible that the party in question has this particular ethnic basis – but yet not proven because there might be other, hidden factors in the game which we do not know until we have tested them.

The second approach is usually based on people's opinion and often is not free from internal contradictions. For example, our own focus group interviews in rural Zambia seemed to have revealed clear results. Nobody objected to the statement of one participant, but many agreed with the proposition that 'voting is tribal'.[5] In Lusaka, urban participants rebuffed the idea and maintained that only people in rural areas vote tribal, but not in towns.

Reports on interviews in Ghana claim that Ghanaians resolutely repudiate the idea of ethnic voting; after further discussions, however, some of the interviewees point out that other ethnic groups, apart from their own, do tend towards that kind of voting (Fridy 2007: 301f.).

Again, our own focus group interviews produced mixed results.[6] On the one hand, participants claimed that voting behaviour is 'traditional' – which, however, did not imply a traditional tribal behaviour but referred to the long established ideological divide between the Nkrumaist (leftish) and the Danqua (conservative, liberal) tradition in Ghana. Interestingly, neither the focus-group participants nor local political party activists and functionaries were able to explain the difference between the two traditions in terms that could be related to the classical left-right pattern with which we are all familiar in Europe. Some participants also mentioned that in the past people voted along 'tribal lines' and that even today some politicians tried to appeal to ethnic identities in order to win votes. Others stated the only 'enlightened' citizens would vote according to 'issues', but some would still follow what the Chiefs would tell them to do. However, Ghanaian political analysts clearly emphasised that ethnicity is the most important variable to understand politics and voting behaviour in Ghana.[7]

A similar pattern emerged from interviews with political party functionaries on the national and local level in a number of African countries (Ghana, Malawi, Zambia and partly Tanzania) who disavowed an ethnic base for their own party, but pointed to other parties as 'tri-

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party came from group A – in fact, it could be completely the other way round: Group B together with the people of other groups, and perhaps a small number of people from group A as well, could have voted for X-party provided, for example, a higher degree of mobilisation because of a specific (local) grievance; a more extensive discussion of the problem can be found in Posner (2005: 223-225).

[5] Neo Simutanyi (Institute of Social and Economic Research, University of Lusaka), Matthias Basedau (GIGA Institute of African Affairs) and the author conducted a number of focus-group discussions with 29 participants in Chibombo (High School), Chibombo District, Central Province, 15 March 2003; in Chinyunyu (Basic School), Chongwe District, Central Province, 17 March 2003; and Lusaka, Longacre, 18 March 2003.

[6] The focus-group interviews were conducted 11 December 2003 in Akwatia, Kwaebibirim, Eastern Region. The constituency is ethnically heterogeneous with a high degree of immigrants from the North; in 1992 and 1996 it was won by the National Democratic Congress and in 2000 by the National Patriotic Party.

[7] Interviews, Kwesi Jonah, Senior Lecturer Dept. of Political Science University of Ghana; Head of Governance Centre, Accra, 3 December 2003; Emmanuel Gyimah-Boadi, Director, Ghana Center for Democratic Development, Accra, 24 November 2003; see also Frempong 2001.

balist'. This is also the usual character of the national political discourse between political parties on which the analysis of official party statements in the national media is based upon: 'Tribalism' always refers to the conduct of others. It should be obvious that the local opinions about ethnicity are heavily 'biased' and not very reliable.

The inter-party discourse on ethnicity could be interpreted, perhaps, as an elitist controversy which might have little meaning for the value orientation and behaviour of ordinary citizens. Although one should not dismiss this interpretation entirely, but, given the fact of the widespread issue of ethnicity in the daily life of ordinary people (in many cases people can identify other people simply by their names) it seems to be farfetched to de-link an elite discourse entirely from citizens' concerns. In fact, there is no doubt that this discourse took root quite some time ago.

What obviously remains is the puzzle of contradicting statements and of inconclusive results which cannot easily be solved. However, based on these various observations, and despite the methodological problems involved in all the different approaches, one can argue that altogether the ethnicity hypothesis could be accepted. However, this would be dissatisfying. In addition, the results of the individual data analysis call for some prudence and suggest a number of necessary modifications and further qualifications. Yet, we have to be aware that there are no alternative explanations for party formation and voting behaviour in Africa – apart from a rational choice approach which holds its own basic shortcomings and weaknesses especially for how it is applied for Africa.

As regards the latter, two major works on electoral behaviour in Africa disagree fundamentally on the understanding of ethnicity. While Lindberg and Morrison (2007: 7), view 'ethnicity' as a 'primordial' and 'non-rational', Scarritt and Mozzafar (1999: 84; Mozzafar 1995) treat ethnicity as a 'cost-effective strategic resource for organizing collective political action'. Moreover, Lindberg and Morrison (2007: 33) in their analysis of voting behaviour in Ghana decided to ignore

> issues of structural factors affecting voting rationale and behaviour such as class, gender, age, social status, employment status and ideological orientation, in favor of a detailed examination of the reasons for voting behaviour ascribed by the voters themselves [sic!][8]

and come to negative conclusions about the supposed 'prevalence of family and ethnically predisposed voting'. This is surprising in two ways. First, most researchers would view ethnicity as a structural factor (just like Scarritt and Mozzafar or myself) or as 'part of a rational

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[8]   See below 4.1 on the related problem of self-identification.

efforts to secure benefits created by the forces of modernization' (Bates 1983: 152). Secondly, this makes the whole argument more or less unconvincing.

Beyond these particular contradictions, there are a number of additional conceptual problems which partly explain why it might have been so difficult to find clear-cut evidence or rejection of the ethnicity hypothesis even on the basis of individual data. It should be noted that the intricacies involved are not only a challenge for large-N surveys using a standardised questionnaire for the collection of individual data, but also for qualitative approaches as well. Before outlining the various conceptual issues involved, a fundamental issue needs to be addressed, and this is the social and political sensitivity of ethnicity.

4.1   Social and Political Sensitivity of Ethnicity

I start to address the theme with a personal anecdote. When I was a student at the School of Oriental and African Studies in the early 1980s, I tried to raise the question of tribalism and ethnicity during a seminar. My lecturer cut me short with the claim: 'Tribalism is a colonial invention'. For most scholars this was the academically correct wisdom at that time, often with an added remark that ethnicity was politically used by the African elites to bolster their rule. All this is clearly correct, but did not account for the political reality of the issue. A few years later when I first went to Africa I was surprised by a headline of the Kenyan newspaper *Daily Nation* (October 27, 1984): 'All tribalists to be sacked' – and the article continued that, 'President Daniel Arap Moi declared war yesterday on leaders who practise tribalism'. This indicated two points; first, that tribalism *was* an issue of daily political debate, and second, that it was also a delicate issue to talk about in Kenya. A couple of months later, I learned it was a non-issue to talk about in Tanzania – indicating a variance about how ethnicity was publicly dealt with in different African states. Despite these differences, the usual reaction of African governments after independence was to stop taking stock of and counting ethnic identities in their population census until today.

Even today ethnicity is a delicate or at least a tricky social and political issue to discuss in Africa (as elsewhere). There seems to be no problem asking people about their ethnic identity in a straightforward way: 'What is your tribe (or *groupe ethnique*)'. None of our interviewers in five Anglophone and four Francophone African countries reported any trouble with this question – not even in Tanzania.[9] This, however, provides only one, very basic or rather simplistic approach to the problem and, as one could argue, it might be misleading because it already presupposes ethnic identities.

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[9]   We first tried to avoid this question by asking the respondents about their mother tongue. But many people seemed to recognise the disguise of this question, so we went for the proper question.

As has been indicated above, if one asks people or politicians whether they see 'tribalism' as a problem in their society, they often say 'No', but then later say that there are others who tend to behave in 'tribalist' manner. So, if we start to elaborate on the problem of ethnic identity and behaviour, the issue and the talk about it becomes more sensitive and complicated. This, in particular, poses a problem for large-N attitude surveys with a standardised questionnaire. As Daniel Corstange has pointed out, sensitive issues are not only difficult to study, but, as illustrated above, if they are based on self-reports they tend to be 'muddied by response bias' (Corstange 2007: 2). If the answers to the questions are shaped by a response bias, the attitudes (and behaviour) tend to be 'underreported in a systematic and unmeasurable way' (ibid.). This is true regardless of the reasons for the response bias, which can be caused simply by what is presumed to be socially desirable to pure fear of various kinds of repression. In the end, it raises the problem of what we can make of data which might systematically misrepresent the variable 'ethnicity'. One response could be to rephrase the question or to approach it from a different angle.

A more sophisticated approach than the simple question (What is your tribe?) which addresses the problem without a presumption of ethnicity and, perhaps, in a politically less 'sensitive' manner by openly asking about the identity does not make the whole issue much easier. The Afrobarometer used the approach of self-identification by asking 'which specific group do you feel you belong to first and foremost?' (apart from being Tanzanian, Zambian etc.) (Bannon et al 2004).[10] The results were striking (see Table 1). While in Botswana, which is the ethnically most homogeneous country in the sample, 'ethnic' was the overwhelming identity, it was also true in Malawi, which has a diverse population of ethnic groups. In Tanzania, which supposedly used to be one of the most egalitarian societies and has more than 100 ethnic groups, class/occupation was the main identity. This was the case, although to a lesser degree, in Zambia. Interestingly, with its predominantly Christian population (split between Catholics and Protestants) religion also provided an identity in Zambia. In contrast, in Tanzania, which suffers from a dispute about whether Christians or Muslims constitute a majority and has had some social and political conflicts between the two communities, religious identity has hardly any relevance.

Apart from the problem of an 'outside' or 'objective' interpretation of the results, what does this mean for the identity in relation to cleavages and possibly party affiliation? Does it mean that social and political relations in Zambia are much less determined by ethnicity than in

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[10]   The complete wording of the question: 'We have spoken to many [people in this country, country X] and they all described themselves in different ways. Some people describe themselves in terms of their language, religion, race, and others describe themselves in economic terms such as working class, middle class, or a farmer. Besides being [a citizen of X], which specific group …?' (Bannon et al. 2004: 2).

Botswana and Malawi? And is class/occupation in Tanzania more important than in Zambia which used to have a much broader industrial labour force and politically much stronger labour movement and is much more urbanised? As Bannon et al. suggest themselves, this kind of self-identification is also a product of the specific national context or discourse. In Tanzania, for instance, the official discourse has been couched in terms of 'class' for decades.

Table 1:   Selected Identities of Respondents Self-Identification

	Botswana	Malawi	Tanzania	Zambia
Ethnic	92	59	3	7
Religion	2	11	5	32
Class/occupation	3	23	79	54

Source: Bannon et al 2004: 4.

It is quite clear that as much as this kind of question arises, it cannot be answered adequately. It suggests, above all, that we cannot rely on this kind of self-identification for the purpose of finding out about voting behaviour. The major problem is that 'identity' is (just like ethnicity, see 4.4) a situational concept, and, as it has been noted by the same authors for ethnicity, it 'can change – not just over the course of years, but even over the course of a few months, particularly at election time' (Bannon et al. 2004: 18). If the latter point is taken seriously, one cannot use the data gathered in this way without a precise knowledge of the concrete social and political context of the interviewees for any meaningful analysis.

In fact, when we tried to use the Afrobarometer question in our survey we had a major problem in explaining the meaning of 'identity' in English or French to our interviewers, not to mention the problems in most of the local languages in which there is no adequate term for the word. Moreover, in Burkina Faso, following a survey in October and November 2006, our local interviewers reported that many Mossi responded to the question about identity (oral report by Alexander Stroh, GIGA): 'What is the difference of being a Mossi and being *Burkinabé*?'

The final results of the survey (see Table 2) indicate the same problems and puzzle described above which make it hardly possible to explain the major differences of the identities in and between four francophone countries. In the end, we came to the conclusion that the 'open' identity question which does not presuppose a particular type of identity (either as an open question or one which offers a number of possible answers) and phrased in this way, does not solve our problem.

Table 2: Survey Results, Group Identities of Respondents Self-Identification, in % (2006)

	Benin	Burkina Faso	Mali	Niger
Ethnic	27.4	44.6	34.8	15.9
Religious	23.2	25.0	39.7	58.3
Class/strata	22.2	16.0	14.1	11.2
Others	8.1	9.0	10.7	9.6
Valid N	80.8	94.5	99.3	95.0
No response/Do not know	10.7/8.5	0.3/5.2	0.4/0.3	0.1/4.9
Total N	1,022	1,003	1,026	1,008

Source: GIGA Institute of African Affairs, Project on Parties and Party Systems in Francophone Africa (Matthias Basedau and Alexander Stroh, 2007).

All this highlights not so much the social and political sensitivity of ethnicity, but an academic problem about the situational relevance, operationalisation, and the translation of a concept into empirical questions.

4.2 Cleavages and Political Parties

Lipset and Rokkan's cleavage model is an ex-post construct. It covers a time span of about two to three hundred years in Europe – if we include the development of the cleavages before the actual articulation in political parties. In Western Europe, the cleavages took form as parties and party systems during the last hundred or one hundred and fifty years only; and the institutionalisation of the parties and party systems is of a more recent date.

This is quite different from the situation in Africa; the time span we are concerned with is much shorter. The institutionalisation of societal cleavages could begin, in most cases, only with the forming of the polity of the new states (in the end with independence), although some of the cleavages developed already within the framework of the colonial state, and in a few cases even before. With few exceptions, the first wave of political party formation usually dates back to the 1950s and 1960s. A second wave, from which most of the present-day parties originate, occurred only very recently during the 1990s.

The implication here is not that most of the present day parties have only a very short history and cannot be linked to a lasting cleavage. In fact, despite the high number of new parties formed during the 1990s, in a number of countries the party formation of this period can be linked to patterns of party formation and the dynamics of the party systems of the 1950s and 1960s. This does not only extend the timeframe of analysis but suggests at the same time

the existence and re-emergence and development of particular social cleavages articulated in party competition albeit under different names. This has been shown for Zambia (Burnell 2001) where the ruling United National Independence Party and the Movement for Multi-party Democracy posses regional and ethnic strongholds in the northern and eastern parts of the country on the one hand, and the opposition parties among the ethnic groups in Southern and Western province on the other. This is the case in Ghana as well where the leaders of the two major parties explicitly claim – endorsed by many people – that the Nkrumah and Danqua traditions go back to the 1950s and are linked to the same regional and ethnic strongholds. In a different way this also applies to Kenya[11] and Tanzania.[12]

Nevertheless, compared to Europe, we are dealing with a short time span during which only a few parties had the chance to become institutionalised and, possibly, to articulate a manifest societal cleavage. Hence, it can be argued that because of only a few institutionalised parties and party systems (Kuenzi & Lambright 2001; 2005; Randall & Svasand 2002; Erdmann & Basedau 2007) an analysis of voter affiliation and party membership based on the concept of social cleavages can hardly produce any meaningful results. The implication is that the concept is of little relevance for a fluid political situation such as in Africa, because it presupposes a considerable degree of institutionalisation which is lacking in this case. As indicated above, the Lipset-Rokkan model clearly states that only if the political elite takes up a social cleavage and articulates the issue in a politically and organisationally repetitive way, it can become institutionalised in the form of political parties. Only the repetitive articulation and mobilisation of these social conflicts by political parties promotes the related political identities and party affiliations. The problem in Africa is that in many cases there was little time for this to happen and little institutionalised parties and fluid party systems continue to constitute the predominant feature. Consequently, because of the time factor it will be difficult in many cases to find empirical ground for the ethnicity hypothesis.

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[11]   In Kenya, the original and ruling Kenya African National Union (KANU) of the 1960s was, among other things, a coalition of Kikuyu, Luo and sections of other ethnic groups more or less from the centre of the country and originally sedentary people, while the conservative Kenya African Democratic Union (KADU) under the leadership of Daniel Arap Moi in opposition had its strongholds among ethnic groups close to the borders of the country, many of them once nomads or transhumans. During the 1990s these coalitions re-emerged but under different names; the core of the former KADU-coalition ruled under the name of Moi's KANU, while the Kikuyu-Luo coalition (together with sections of other ethnic croups) turned up in various opposition parties which, after having formed the NARC coalition, defeated Moi's KANU.

[12]   In Tanzania, the social basis of opposition and opposition parties against the hegemonic and one-party rule of Tanganyika African National Union (TANU) and Chama Cha Mapunduzi (CCM) originated in the 1960s basically from three regions: Kilimanjaro, Shinyanga and Tabora, and around Lake Nyanza, and re-emerged in the 1990s.

4.3 Overlapping Cleavages

Closely related to the previous problem are other intricacies. In the Lipset and Rokkan model it was pointed out that there might be overlapping cleavages which makes political party organisation and voter alignments along cleavage lines difficult. Of course, this also poses a problem for analysis. It is easily assumed that under particular circumstances when the political system is still young and fluid or unstructured, and the society is confronted with rapid political change as during the last one and a half decade, the identification and analysis of permanent cleavage structures and their political articulation among the citizenry becomes extremely difficult.

Apart from a few nontypical countries such as Botswana or Mauritius, this is the situation in most African countries. Besides the political changes from the one-party to multi-party systems and the continuous problems of party organisation in many authoritarian or even hybrid regimes, rapid urbanisation contributes to the problems of fluidity as well. The little organised and highly volatile political parties and party systems in a number of countries are only an expression of the problem.

4.4 Ethnicity: Conceptual Varieties and Problems of Application

If ethnicity is not perceived as a primordial attribute, but in a constructivist sense as it has become common in political science, we are dealing with a very complex phenomenon which is difficult to investigate conceptually and empirically. Understood in the sense described above (see section 3) as a historically, socially, and politically constructed identity, one has to account for the multi-faceted and changeable character of ethnicity that can have multiple meanings. Hence, ethnic identity can have different forms of expression or, to put it differently, covers different kinds of socio-political identities or societal self-consciousness which is moulded by social (including habitual or cultural), economic and political factors. It is important to note that ethnicity has various manifestations depending on the degree of cultural, social and political articulation and mobilisation.

For these different forms of appearances we need adequate conceptual differentiations. This is also linked to the fact that ethnic identities have different historical dimensions. Some people have inherited their ethnic identity from the colonial era or even before that while others developed their special ethnic political identity only later (the Kalenjin of Western Kenya form such a case). This means political ethnic identities can be non-contemporaneously articulated. Hence, the associated social cleavages have different political manifestations. Some of the ethnic groups frequently turn up in the national political discourse over long periods while others are rarely noticed. This, however, is not dependent on the size of the group. In some countries the national political and the political party dis-

course is couched in terms of and determined by single ethnic identities such as the Kikuyu, Kamba, Luo etc. in Kenya, while in other countries it is rather what we call ethno-linguistic groups such as the Bemba and Tonga speakers in Zambia or the Akan and Ga-Adangbe speakers etc. in Ghana.

The problem of differently politicised ethnic groups has been taken up by Scarritt and Mozzafar who deal only with 'ethno-political groups'. In doing so they take the issue conceptually a step forward. These groups are defined by 'having a base in ethnic identity but constantly moulded by political interaction with other groups and the state' (Scarritt & Mozzafar 1999: 82-3). Ethno-political groups can be comprised of several ethnic groups and therefore contain 'several levels of potential internal cleavage' (ibid.: 84). This also means that cleavages can change of over time and their articulation can be situational, depending on the issues involved:

> Since different ethno-political identities may be invoked in different circumstances and at different times, ethno-political cleavages are sufficiently subject to change that ethnic groups which have never been ethno-political may eventually become so (ibid.: 88).

Hence, there is no clear-cut pattern of how ethnicity structures party formation, partisanship and voter alignment. In other words, voting behaviour of different ethnic groups can be articulated in different ways, and thus the explanatory power of the variable can be different from one ethnic group to the next.

As mentioned above, the simple equation of ethnic cleavage, political party and voter alignment is not possible, and a social cleavage needs to be politicised by the political elite and transformed into party formation. Mozzafar et al (2003: 382) have captured the process in three simplified steps: 'construction' of an ethnic identity, its 'politicisation', and finally 'particization' – a term borrowed from Gary Cox (1997: 26). Posner (2005) has shown how political institutions shape certain ethnic cleavages politically on the basis of two causal mechanisms. Firstly, why some of the potential cleavages become politically salient (and others not); and secondly, why people select one of the potentially salient ethnic identities (and not others).

However, the aforementioned issue of ethnic identity is not only a conceptual problem. If we try to gather individual data through a standardized questionnaire for quantitative analysis, it also becomes a problem of self-identification of the people involved (see above 4.1). Scarritt and Mozzafar constructed ethnic groups based on 'expert's knowledge' from data selected from the *Minorities at Risk* and *Black Africa Handbook*; while the first data set identified groups 'at the highest politically relevant level of aggregation within a country, ignoring objective [sic!] ethnographic differences', the groups of the second data set were based on 'ethnographic theory', according to 'identity and cultural ties' that define ethnic identity groups as

'sharing identity, similar institutions, and value premises'. Enriched with additional information, for example about electoral competition in the countries concerned, Scarritt and Mozzafar combined these data sets for the construction of 'ethno-political groups'.

However, the question is, do people identify with these groups and to what degree? And how can we ask them, in order to get useful answers? What about people who clearly do not identify with some of these groups? Again, we are confronted with the problem that ethno-political identities are situational. Since ethno-political groups are often comprised of several ethnic groups, it is easy to assume that not all identify in the same way with the larger ethno-political group. To give an example, if viewed from the southern perspective of the Tonga speakers, the Mambwe of northern Zambia belong to the Bemba speakers.[13] But they differ from the Bemba proper, and, as a non-Bemba pointed out, they 'identify with Bembas only when it suits them' – which they indicate, for example, by demanding a region for their own. So we are again confronted with a problem of different degrees of both ethnic and political identity.

To answer these questions, highly sophisticated questionnaires which allow to distinguish between different degrees of ethnicity are necessary. But this poses the 'awkward metric problem' (Corstange 2007) (which exists in any case with this kind of non-metric variable for statistical analysis) and limits the analytical methods that can be applied.

4.5   Ethnic Congress Parties

Following Horowitz (1985), I distinguished two types of ethnic based parties, the ethnic party and the ethnic congress party (Erdmann 2001; 2004). The ethnic party is based on one ethnic group, while the ethnic congress party is based on several such groups and is in a sense a multi-ethnic party. In most African countries, the ethnic party is rare, while the ethnic congress party is the rule. The reason for that phenomenon is quite simple. In most countries there are high numbers of ethnic groups, but the majority of these groups are small in terms of population. The number of most ethnic groups is simply too small to gain a meaningful representation in parliament, not to speak of a majority for forming a government or becoming a blackmail power (Sartori 1976: 122-3; 1994: 34). This suggests itself for coalition building even before party formation.

As a result, the members of a number of ethnic groups will vote for such a congress party – which again makes it difficult to identify the party with one particular group. Moreover, some ethnic groups or sub-groups tend to change their party allegiance from election to

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[13] For our statistical analysis (Erdmann 2007) we used the responses to the simple 'tribal question' and combined these to the larger ethno-political groups; only on this level we got some significant results.

election, depending on the behaviour of the groups' leaders. Over time, regardless of the kind of aggregate or individual data used, this makes it very difficult to identify ethnic orientated voter alignment. So the problem involved is very similar to that of the ethno-political groups.

4.6   Ethnicity-Political Party Identification

The problem of the identification of an ethnic group with a political party is closely interwoven with the previous issue. Although some parties are multi-ethnic congress parties they are identified with one particular ethnic group. The Movement for Multi-Party Democracy (MMD) in Zambia is, for example, associated with the Bemba speakers ('Bemba party'); the Malawi Congress Party (MCP) with the Chewa; the National Peoples' Party (NPP) in Ghana with the Ashanti or the Akan speakers ('Akan party'). However, not all ethnic groups are explicitly identified with one party. This usually applies to most of the smaller ethnic groups. This is the nature of the multi-ethnic congress party. One implication is – due to the nature of a coalition as well as of non-identification – that members of the elite can switch their allegiance with the party from election to election. The whole group or only parts of it can be affected (see next section). Hence we are faced with the problem that we cannot establish a fixed or institutionalised and lasting relationship between a political party and the particular ethnic group. The Lozis in Zambia are a case in point. During the Third Republic a number of different parties were successful in their region of western Zambia – big multi-ethnic parties as well as single ethnic parties. In eastern Zambia there is a similar problem. Here the various ethnic groups did not vote for one party but split their votes among different parties and at the same time changed it from one election to the next. Alexander K. D. Frempong (2001) also points to the problem of changing political party alliances for small ethnic groups in Ghana.

4.7   Political Elite-split

As already indicated, neither ethnic elites nor ethnic groups behave in politically corporate or homogenous way. Within an ethnic elite internal divisions and conflicts can emerge. These divisions among regional sub-groups might entail different and changing voting behaviour, party affiliations, party alliances and party membership. If ethnic subgroups vote differently and affiliate with other parties from one election to the next, the evidence of ethnic voting becomes difficult. A few examples of divergent voting behaviour within ethnic groups have been mentioned above. A case in point are the splits among the Kikuyu in Kenya. Two sub-groups in Murang'a and Nyeri District were affiliated with two different

former opposition parties, the Forum for the Restoration of Democracy-Asili (FORD-A) and the Democratic Party (DP), while a third sub-group in Kiambu District used to be in large parts associated with the former ruling party KANU during the 1990s and up to date (see also Throup 2003). Because of intra-ethnic divisions among the elite, the voters are mobilised along different political party lines. Hence we are faced with a situation in which people of one ethnic group do not affiliate with one particular party, but ethnic sub-groups (might) do. This means we have to deal with different identities, making analysis more difficult.

4.8   Number, Size and Spatial Spread of Ethnic Groups

With the exception of a few countries, most African societies are characterised by a high number of ethnic groups of different sizes. Only in Botswana, Namibia, Burundi, and Rwanda do we find an ethnic group that counts for a large portion or even for a majority of the population. And even in these cases the main group can be broken down into smaller sub-groups. In most African countries, none of the ethnic groups can claim majority status. For example in Zambia the official count is more than 70 ethnic groups, while in other countries such as Tanzania the number is twice as high with more than 130 ethnic groups. On the other hand, Malawi has only eleven groups.

Hence, we are confronted with a sample size problem if we want to conduct a representative survey which might include all ethnic groups. In case of a sample of 1,000 persons in Zambia we would be left with 14 individuals from each ethnic group. The number of cases is just too small to make reliable inferences. To increase the sample size to 2,000 would not make a major difference, except for the costs.

However, in countries with such a high number of ethnic groups it is not only very difficult to include all ethnic groups (cost factor), but also of questionable relevance. The small size of the groups may mean that they can be ignored. This means only large ethnic groups or the large ethno-political groups will be significant in our statistical analysis. At the same time we might be confronted with the problem of smaller subgroups with different political party affiliations.

Perhaps, at minimum three different factors might be required at the same time that allows for ethnicity to show up significantly in statistical analysis of individual data:

1) Identification of one ethnic group with one party.
2) A relative large size of the ethnic group involved.
3) A high degree of political unity among the political elite of the ethnic group.[14]

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[14]   This conclusion is based on the analysis of the situation in Zambia (Erdmann 2007).

Another complication for the analysis is posed by the spatial distribution of ethnic groups. For example, due to historical migration patterns, the Ngoni in Malawi do not live in one or in adjacent areas, but wide apart from each other in Northern and Central Region, and they seem to vote for different parties. A similar situation can be found in Zambia where most of the Lundas live in Northwestern Province but also in substantial numbers in Luapula Province. The problem here is basically the same as indicated with regard to the elite-splits.

5   Conclusion

As regards the debate about the crucial role of ethnicity for an understanding of voting behaviour in Africa, I maintain that Lipset and Rokkan's cleavage model – used heuristically – still provides the best foundation for the analysis of party formation and voting behaviour. No doubt, the model needs to be modified in order to accommodate ethnicity as a social cleavage, and to be complemented by other approaches. The argument is that there is no other social cleavage that can be deducted from any theoretical or model based considerations apart from ethnicity. Even rational choice approaches, which could provide a possible alternative explanation for voting behaviour, include ethnicity in their argument. Yet others dispute the relevance of ethnicity and construct their argument about ethnicity (primordial) in an inconclusive and thus unconvincing way. In the end the debate may be viewed as an argument about the degree in which ethnicity matters for voter alignment.

There are, however, a number of unresolved methodological and conceptual challenges which make it difficult to come up with more precise and more conclusive results. One fundamental challenge is the fluid nature of the political parties and the political system as a whole. This makes the application of the cleavage model problematic since its usefulness is restricted to structured or institutionalised parties and party systems. The other basic challenge is the conceptual 'fluidity' and situational character of the ethnic identities which can manifest themselves in various ways. How can the different articulation or appearance of ethnic identities be operationalised and 'measured' for the collection of individual data by using a standardised questionnaire?

Until today we have used only data which referred to a particular point in time. What could be helpful would be proper panel surveys in order to trace possible individual changes over time. Other research *desiderata* would be a careful and systematic combination of different research methods and also more refined designs. This is not so much a problem of more sophisticated analytical tools, but, above all, a challenge for the refinement of data collection methods. For example, Daniel Posner (2005) combined the analysis of aggregate data with a

survey of campaigning and candidates' ethnic identity, but was not able to undertake a large-N survey. I was able to apply the latter combined with an aggregate data analysis of strongholds, but did not consider the candidate identity or campaigning.

What we can safely assume from the conceptual as well as from empirical findings is that the significance of ethnicity will be different from one country to another in Africa; there will be no universal pattern of the significance of ethnicity across Africa. And even within one country we need to be aware that ethnicity might be of different relevance for one party to the next. As it currently stands it seems that the degree to which ethnicity can explain voting behaviour depends on issues of ethnicity itself such as the specific constellation of ethnic groups, the development of ethnic cleavages, and its particular articulation in the party systems which are all different in each country. We should, therefore, take a very guarded stance against any generalisation about the role of ethnicity in explaining party affiliation in Africa.

Further efforts to improve our research tools should concentrate on a more sophisticated operationalisation of ethno-political identities in order to get more 'responsive' items and a differentiation of various degrees of ethnicity. Another challenge is to consider the situational character of identities – not only to the ethnic but possible other social and political identities as well.

This leads to the final point. While focusing our research on ethnicity we should better not lose sight of other factors that might explain voting behaviour. Hence, the we should concentrate on the more general question of 'What makes the voter tick?'.

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