Kenneth Kaunda's Humanism in Contemporary Zambian Politics: Is It an Enduring Echo?

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Abstract

This study explored the enduring influence of Kenneth Kaunda's humanism on contemporary Zambian politics, investigating its relevance and impact in a post-colonial context. Kaunda's humanism, rooted in values of dignity, unity, and social justice, served as a moral and ethical framework during his presidency. However, with Zambia's transition to a multiparty democracy and the introduction of neoliberal economic policies, the practical application of these ideals has diminished. This study analyses existing literature, policy documents, and critical assessments through desk-based research to evaluate how much Kaunda's humanist principles persist or have been eroded in contemporary governance. The findings show that while Kaunda's values continue to serve as symbolic references in political rhetoric and education, there is a significant gap between the ideals of humanism and the practical governance observed today. Factors such as neoliberal reforms, corruption, and clientelism have contributed to the erosion of humanism, although some elements, such as the "One Zambia, One Nation" motto, continue to resonate. These findings have important policy implications, suggesting that reintegrating humanist principles into Zambia's governance could foster more inclusive and equitable development. This study contributes to discussions on post-colonial governance and the role of ethical leadership in contemporary African politics.

Keywords: *Humanism; Ethical Leadership; Neoliberal Reforms; Postcolonial Governance; Ubuntu*

1. Introduction

Kenneth Kaunda, Zambia's first president, embedded humanism at the heart of his governance philosophy, shaping the political landscape of the newly independent nation. Kaunda's version of Humanism, underpinned by ideals of unity, social justice, selflessness, and moral integrity, emphasised the primacy of communal welfare over individual gain. These principles were not merely ideological but served as the operational framework for Zambia's political and social structures during his presidency (1964–1991) (Mbewe et al., 2023). Central to Kaunda's political philosophy was the conviction that social solidarity and equality were the cornerstones of national development. His "One Zambia, One Nation" slogan epitomised this vision, seeking to unify Zambia's ethnically diverse population and direct efforts towards nation-building (Prokopenko, 2018). Kaunda's humanism emphasised the collective

responsibility of the people and advocated for leadership that prioritised the common good and championed ethical conduct in governance and public service.

Even after Kaunda departed from power in 1991, his humanist legacy has continued to resonate in Zambia's political discourse, reflected in the ongoing reference to his ideals by political leaders and public figures (Chama & Simataa, 2024). However, the practical application of humanist values has become increasingly contentious, especially with the shift from Kaunda's socialist-inspired policies to embracing neoliberal economic reforms in the 1990s. This transformation marked a significant departure from the social justice-based framework Kaunda had established, prioritising market-driven solutions and individualistic approaches that undermined the collective values central to Kaunda's humanism (Siachisa, 2021). The adoption of neoliberal policies further exacerbated issues of corruption, inequality, and the increasing influence of global financial institutions, all of which presented substantial challenges to maintaining Kaunda's vision of a just and equitable society (Mboyonga, 2024).

While Kaunda's humanism holds moral and symbolic significance, its practical application has faltered in contemporary Zambia, mainly due to the rise of economic individualism and the growing privatisation of state assets. Political leaders continue to invoke Kaunda's ideals, yet the underlying economic and political changes have diluted the core tenets of his philosophy. The erosion of public services and the marginalisation of vulnerable populations have compounded the disconnect between Kaunda's humanism and contemporary governance practices (Egbunu, 2014).

This study addresses a critical gap in the literature regarding the transformation of Kaunda's humanism post-1991. Although much has been written about Kaunda's humanist ideals, scholarly discussions on the post-Kaunda era and the erosion of these ideals remain underexplored. This study investigated the shift towards neoliberal economic policies and the decline in ethical leadership present important challenges. By examining the extent to which Kaunda's humanist principles have endured, transformed, or become marginalised, the paper explored whether humanism remains a relevant guiding principle for contemporary Zambia.

The research questions guiding this study are:

1. To what extent have Kaunda's humanist values persisted in Zambia's modern political landscape?

2. What factors have contributed to the erosion or transformation of humanist principles?

3. How do contemporary leaders and political practices align or diverge from the humanist ethos?

1.1 Significance of the Study

Revisiting Kenneth Kaunda's humanism is crucial in the context of the growing political disillusionment and leadership crises currently afflicting Zambia. As political ideologies evolve, understanding how foundational principles adapt—or fade—offers valuable insights for scholars and policymakers concerned with the ethics of leadership and the sustainability of ideological legacies. Kaunda's humanism, once the moral and ethical framework for leadership in Zambia, has diminished in prominence within the nation's contemporary political landscape (Mbewe et al., 2023). This shift has sparked critical inquiry into the enduring influence of his humanist ideals in modern governance. Understanding the evolution of Kaunda's humanism is essential for comprehending Zambia's post-colonial political trajectory and the relationship between guiding ideologies and practical governance (Siachisa, 2021).

2. Understanding Kaunda's Humanism

The emergence of Kenneth Kaunda's humanism was intrinsically linked to Zambia's specific historical context at the time of its independence in 1964. As a newly independent nation comprising over

70 distinct ethnic groups, Zambia faced the complex challenge of forging a unified national identity in the wake of colonial rule. Kaunda and his leadership recognised that establishing a standard set of values and principles was essential to overcoming potential divisions and fostering a sense of shared belonging (Kaunda, 1966). Kaunda, heavily influenced by the pan-Africanist ideals of figures such as Julius Nyerere of Tanzania and Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, sought to develop an ideology that was distinctly African, drawing inspiration from indigenous traditions and philosophies (Egbunu, 2014). This intellectual exchange among African independence leaders marked a broader movement toward articulating post-colonial visions grounded in African experiences and values. Kaunda's humanism stood as a testament to this vision.

Therefore, Zambian humanism emerged as a deliberate effort to break away from the legacy of British colonialism and establish a unique African identity that would guide the newly independent nation's political, economic, and social development (Mboyonga, 2024). This ideological shift was part of a larger decolonisation project that sought political independence and aimed at cultural and philosophical autonomy. Humanism was formally endorsed by the United National Independence Party (UNIP) and adopted as Zambia's official national ideology in April 1967, signalling its centrality in shaping national policy and identity (Mbewe et al., 2023).

2.1 Principles of Zambian Humanism

At the core of Zambian humanism were eight fundamental principles articulated by Kaunda, each aimed at guiding political governance and social interactions within the newly independent state (Kaunda, (1966). These principles represented Kaunda's vision of a just society, where the individual and community welfare was paramount.

1. **The Human Person at the Centre:** This principle emphasised the intrinsic value of every individual, regardless of background or social status. It positioned the well-being and needs of people as the central focus of all societal and governance activities, placing human dignity at the heart of national development.

2. **The Dignity of the Human Person:** The second principle affirmed that human dignity was an inherent right of all individuals, necessitating respectful treatment and consideration in all interactions, whether political, economic, or social.

3. **Non-exploitation of Man by Man:** This principle was a direct response to the exploitative structures inherited from colonialism, particularly in the economic sphere. Kaunda condemned any form of **economic exploitation**, advocating for equity, fairness, and respect for human labour (Siachisa, 2021).

4. **Equal Opportunities for All, Non-discrimination:** Kaunda's vision sought to eliminate the entrenched social hierarchies and inequalities in the colonial era. This principle aimed to create an egalitarian society where all citizens had equal opportunities to develop their potential, irrespective of their ethnicity, religion, or social class.

5. **Hard Work and Self-reliance:** This principle encouraged personal responsibility and national self-sufficiency, focusing on building a society where citizens worked diligently towards the nation's prosperity. Kaunda's policy of self-reliance was particularly evident in the nationalisation of key industries, such as the copper mining sector.

6. **Working Together:** Reflecting traditional African values of communalism and collective action, this principle emphasised the importance of cooperation at every level of society, particularly in pursuing national development (Kanu, 2014).

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7. **The Extended Family:** In a departure from the nuclear family structure typical in Western societies, Kaunda promoted the extended family model, which extended kinship ties to the broader community. This principle underscored the value of mutual support and social solidarity as critical elements in building a cohesive, compassionate society.

8. **Loyalty and Patriotism:** The final principle urged citizens to be loyal to the nation and committed to the collective welfare, ensuring that the nation's unity and stability were upheld through a strong sense of national identity and patriotism (Mboyonga, 2024).

These principles were meant to guide the country's governance and social practices, ensuring that Kaunda's humanist ideals were theoretical and deeply embedded in national policies (Mooney, 2024).

2.2 Philosophical Underpinnings of Zambian Humanism

Zambian humanism was a synthesis of diverse intellectual and cultural influences. It blended communal values and social norms from traditional African societies with elements of Western socialism and Christian ethics (DeRoche, 2023). This fusion was intentional, designed to create an ideology that resonated with the Zambian people while addressing the needs of a modernising nation (Mbewe et al., 2023).

At its core, Zambian humanism recognised God as the Supreme Being and the human person as central to the moral order. Serving humanity, Kaunda believed, was intrinsically linked to serving God, thereby positioning human dignity within a spiritual framework (Scarritt, 1987). This religious dimension provided the moral foundation for the humanist principles and was a guiding force for governance and social interactions. Kaunda's humanism drew heavily from pre-colonial communalism, which prioritised social solidarity and the inherent dignity of each community member, challenging the individualistic nature of capitalist systems (Egbunu, 2014).

Moreover, Kaunda's humanism was directly opposed to the capitalist structures and inequalities inherited from colonialism (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2025). By establishing a socialist society based on principles of justice and equity, Kaunda's vision aimed to create an egalitarian society where opportunities were available to all and exploitation was eradicated. In this regard, Zambian humanism sought political autonomy and cultural and philosophical independence from Western capitalist influences (Siachisa, 2021).

2.3 Implementation of Humanism in Zambia (1964-1991)

Zambian humanism was not a mere theoretical construct but a practical and deliberate policy framework implemented nationwide during Kaunda's presidency. The UNIP government made substantial efforts to embed humanist values into national governance by translating these principles into policies and social initiatives (Scarritt, 1987).

A central aspect of Kaunda's approach was expanding access to education and healthcare, aiming to ensure that every citizen had the opportunity to contribute to national development and achieve personal fulfilment (DeRoche, 2023). The humanist belief in the intrinsic value of every human being underpinned this policy. For instance, Kaunda's government provided free education and introduced policies that ensured equal access to public services to eliminate the social inequities inherited from colonialism (Mboyonga, 2024).

Additionally, the "One Zambia, One Nation" slogan became integral to the national identity, focusing on ethnic unity and social cohesion (Emedo, 2025). This philosophy was reflected in tribal balancing in the appointments of key national positions, which aimed to promote inclusivity and national unity (Gould, 2023).

In the economic sphere, Kaunda's humanism was manifested in the nationalisation of key industries, particularly copper mining, to ensure that Zambia's resources benefited its people rather than foreign corporations (Kuhumba & Mhando, 2024). This move was aligned with the humanist principles of non-exploitation and national self-reliance, prioritising economic justice and equity over the individual gain of multinational corporations (Mboyonga, 2024).

2.4 The Transition to Multipartyism and Its Aftermath (Post-1991)

The transition to multiparty democracy in 1991 marked a significant break from Kaunda's era, which had been characterised by one-party rule under UNIP. The shift was catalysed by a combination of economic hardship, political dissatisfaction, and growing demands for democratic reforms, both domestically and internationally (Chama & Simataa, 2024). The MMD (Movement for Multiparty Democracy), led by Frederick Chiluba, swept to power in the 1991 general elections, effectively ending UNIP's rule and Kaunda's humanist-inspired governance (Siachisa, 2021).

Adopting neoliberal economic reforms, particularly privatising state-owned enterprises, represented a sharp departure from Kaunda's socialist and humanist principles (Gould, 2023). These reforms were advocated by international financial institutions and were seen as necessary for Zambia's economic recovery (Mooney, 2024). However, they also marked the beginning of a process that undermined the humanist ideals of social welfare and economic self-reliance that Kaunda had championed (Siachisa, 2021).

In the post-Kaunda era, Zambia's political landscape shifted towards a more market-oriented economy, which increasingly prioritised economic liberalisation over the egalitarian values that had previously been central to the national ideology (Kuhumba & Mhando, 2024). The declaration of Zambia as a Christian nation by President Chiluba in 1991 also introduced a new religious identity into the political discourse, further diminishing the secular and African traditional elements of Kaunda's humanism (Emedo, 2025).

2.5 Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in the theoretical framework of Kaunda's humanism as a political philosophy and its interaction with evolving political ideologies in Zambia. Kaunda's humanism championed human dignity, social justice, and communal welfare, drawing from a synthesis of African traditional values, Christian ethics, and socialist ideals (DeRoche, 2023). At its core, Kaunda's humanism placed moral responsibility and equality at the centre of governance. It advocated for a vision where the state functioned as a custodian of collective well-being and social harmony (Mboyonga, 2024). This vision closely aligned with the broader doctrine of African socialism, which sought to localise socialist principles within African cultural realities. African socialism, as articulated by Kaunda and his contemporaries, promoted inclusive governance and emphasised the moral accountability of leadership (Egbunu, 2014).

However, in Zambia's post-liberalisation era, Kaunda's humanist ethos has faced increasing pressure from modern political realism. This pragmatic, power-centric approach prioritises political stability, electoral strategy, and market-led development over normative ideals (Gould, 2023). The advent of neoliberal reforms and technocratic governance has shifted national priorities, eroding the humanist values that once characterised Zambia's political ethos. Neoliberal reforms, particularly economic ones, have largely overshadowed Kaunda's vision of social equity and communal well-being (Siachisa, 2021).

To critically assess this trajectory, the study draws upon ideological persistence and adaptation theories, exploring how founding political philosophies either evolve to retain relevance or become marginalised due to shifting sociopolitical dynamics (Gould, 2023). Considering institutional memory, political legacy, and historical reinterpretation, this framework provides a lens to investigate the

endurance, transformation, or erosion of Kaunda's humanist ideals within contemporary Zambian governance.

3. Methodology

This study employed a desk-based research methodology to critically assess the persistence of Kaunda's humanist ideals within Zambia's contemporary political landscape. The desk-based research design allows for an in-depth analysis of existing scholarly literature, policy documents, and critical assessments related to the evolution of Kaunda's humanism in post-independence Zambia. This methodology was chosen as it facilitates a systematic exploration of secondary data sources, providing a comprehensive understanding of historical developments and ideological shifts (Leavy, 2022).

3.1 Source Selection

A systematic review of literature and policy documents was conducted to ensure a comprehensive analysis of relevant academic debates and governmental policies. This review process aligns with established guidelines for qualitative research, particularly those recommended by Braun et al. (2022), who highlight the importance of clear, structured thinking in the data selection and thematic analysis. The sources were carefully chosen through searches in academic databases such as Google Scholar, JSTOR, and ResearchGate. The inclusion criteria focused on peer-reviewed journal articles, books, and published reports from the post-independence era to the present, specifically related to Kaunda's humanism and its influence on Zambia's political and governance systems.

In selecting sources, the study followed Leavy (2022) approach to research design, ensuring that both primary sources (for example, Kaunda's speeches, government reports) and secondary sources (for example, academic critiques and historical analyses) were systematically reviewed. The review process adhered to Creswell and Poth's (2018) recommendations for qualitative inquiry, ensuring the sources selected were representative of the various perspectives on the topic, focusing on capturing a wide range of historical, theoretical, and political viewpoints.

3.2 Evaluation of Sources

The evaluation of the sources was an essential part of this methodology. Following Cohen et al. (2018), this study critically assessed the bias and credibility of each source. Primary sources, such as official government documents and Kaunda's writings, were prioritised for their direct connection to the humanist ideology. However, these sources were evaluated in the context of the political climate of the time, acknowledging that the political objectives of the UNIP government shaped Kaunda's speeches and policies.

A critical assessment was made of the author's perspective and institutional affiliations for secondary sources. Peer-reviewed journal articles were given precedence due to their rigorous methodologies and balanced viewpoints. Creswell and Poth (2018) note that evaluating the institutional credibility of sources ensures that findings are grounded in reliable data. In addition, sources that engaged with neoliberal economic reforms, particularly the privatisation of state-owned enterprises, were selected to explore how these shifts impacted humanism in Zambia. Bias was considered, especially in sources that could be closely aligned with particular political agendas or influenced by international organisations advocating neoliberal reforms.

This evaluation process aimed to eliminate confirmation bias, ensuring that diverse viewpoints, particularly those critical of Kaunda's vision or the implementation of humanism, were included. Cohen et al. (2018) also stress the importance of this balanced approach to enhance the validity and comprehensiveness of the analysis.

3.3 Data Analysis

Following Braun et al. (2022) guidelines for thematic analysis, this study employed qualitative data analysis methods to identify key themes and patterns across the selected literature and policy documents. Thematic analysis involves identifying and interpreting recurring ideas within the data, allowing for an in-depth understanding of the shifts in Zambian political ideology over time.

The analysis was structured around key themes such as:

- The evolution of political ideology in post-independence Zambia, particularly the shift from socialism to neoliberalism.

- The role of neoliberal economic reforms and their impact on Kaunda's humanist values in shaping governance.

- The socio-political implications of Kaunda's humanist principles, particularly concerning equality, non-exploitation, and social welfare.

The study closely followed Leavy (2022) recommendation to use mixed-method approaches, even within a desk-based framework, by combining qualitative content analysis with a thematic lens to capture both the narrative and conceptual shifts within the data.

3.4 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were integral to the research design. This study adhered to the principles of academic integrity, ensuring that all sources were appropriately referenced, and no data were misrepresented. The transparency of the methodological process was maintained throughout, particularly in the source selection and data analysis phases. As recommended by Creswell and Poth (2018), the study maintains a neutral stance, ensuring that the interpretations of Kaunda's humanism were presented objectively while acknowledging the ideological biases that may influence historical and political narratives.

4. Findings and Discussion

The trajectory of Zambian politics since the post-Kaunda era reveals a marked decline in the practical application of humanist principles as envisioned by Kaunda. While Kaunda's leadership was grounded in moral governance, social justice, and communal welfare, the shift toward political realism and neoliberal economic policies has reoriented national priorities towards market-driven strategies. This ideological transformation became evident in the post-1991 governance landscape, where economic liberalisation and privatisation were pursued, often at the expense of social equity—an essential tenet of Kaunda's humanism (Siachisa, 2021). The fundamental shift towards economic individualism has undermined Kaunda's vision of collective welfare and equitable development.

One of the most illustrative examples of this shift is the adoption of Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs), which, while introduced to stabilise and modernise Zambia's economy, resulted in widespread socioeconomic dislocation and deepened inequality (Prokopenko, 2018). These outcomes directly contradicted Kaunda's humanist ideals of inclusive welfare and non-exploitation, effectively betraying the compassionate and egalitarian ethos underpinning his governance (Siachisa, 2021). The emphasis on market-driven reforms, including the privatisation of key industries, ran counter to Kaunda's commitment to state-led development aimed at benefiting the broader population rather than multinational corporations (Siachisa, 2021).

Despite these contradictions, elements of Kaunda's humanism endure in symbolic form. Politicians reference humanist ideals in their rhetoric, often invoking moral leadership and community

upliftment themes. However, such invocations are largely superficial, with little evidence of substantive alignment in contemporary policy frameworks (Mboyonga, 2024). On the other hand, public perception remains deeply influenced by Kaunda's moral vision. There is a palpable nostalgia among segments of the Zambian populace who regard Kaunda's humanism as a model of ethical leadership, contrasting sharply with perceptions of political opportunism and elitism in the current era (Prokopenko, 2018). This sentiment suggests that while humanism may no longer define governance in Zambia, it persists as an aspirational ideal and a touchstone for ethical critique in the public and political imagination.

4.1 The Fading or Enduring Legacy of Humanism

In contemporary Zambia, the once-dominant philosophy of humanism and its associated annual commemoration of Humanism Week have largely receded from the forefront of national consciousness and political discourse (Siachisa, 2021). The cited scholar notes that present-day political leaders rarely explicitly reference the core tenets of humanism or actively promote its values in their public pronouncements and policy initiatives. This absence suggests a significant shift in Zambia's ideological landscape since Kenneth Kaunda's era. Contributing to this fading legacy is the increasing prominence of Zambia's identity as a Christian nation, a declaration made in 1991, which has led to a greater focus on religious discourse in the political sphere (Emedo, 2025). This shift potentially overshadowed humanism's secular and traditional African foundations (Prokopenko, 2018).

Moreover, persistent challenges of corruption and significant social and economic inequalities within Zambia starkly contrast the humanist ideals of non-exploitation and equal opportunities for all citizens, suggesting a disconnect between the historical ideology and the current realities (Siachisa, 2021). While the emphasis on hard work and self-reliance remains a personal value for many Zambians, it is no longer a central driving force in national policy or public discourse as it was during Kaunda's tenure.

Despite this decline, some aspects of humanism's legacy subtly endure. For instance, the "One Zambia, One Nation" motto, a cornerstone of Kaunda's efforts to forge national unity, continues to be invoked as a symbol of national identity and the aspiration for social cohesion, even if the practical achievement of unity faces ongoing challenges (Mbewe et al., 2023). Moreover, traditional Zambian values of communalism and the extended family, integral to Kaunda's humanist philosophy, likely still influence social interactions and community support networks, providing a foundation for mutual assistance and social solidarity, even if not explicitly framed within the context of humanism (Dauda, 2017).

The significant investment in education during Kaunda's presidency has also impacted Zambia's human capital development, reflecting his emphasis on nurturing human potential. However, challenges remain within the education system, highlighting the disconnection between Kaunda's humanist vision and the current state of policy implementation (Egbunu, 2014).

4.2 Factors Shaping the Trajectory of Humanism

The trajectory of Kaunda's humanism in Zambia has been shaped by various socio-economic and political factors, most notably the significant economic shifts in the decades following independence. The economic decline Zambia experienced from the mid-1970s, particularly the collapse of global copper prices, severely constrained the government's ability to implement the ambitious social and economic policies central to Kaunda's humanism (Murove, 2020). This economic hardship necessitated a re-evaluation of existing ideological frameworks, as the nation faced growing financial challenges (Chama & Simataa, 2024).

The shift to multiparty democracy in 1991 marked a turning point in the ideological landscape. The introduction of neoliberal economic policies, aligned with global trends towards market liberalisation, shifted the nation away from Kaunda's socialist-leaning humanism towards a market-

oriented approach that prioritised foreign investment and private property rights (Siachisa, 2021). This change starkly contrasted the community-oriented and state-controlled economic model central to Kaunda's philosophy.

Furthermore, globalisation and the increasing influence of international financial institutions, such as the World Bank and IMF, played a role in Zambia's adoption of neoliberal economic policies, reinforcing the shift away from Kaunda's humanist ideals (Gould, 2023). The influence of external actors on Zambia's policy decisions furthered the erosion of humanism, highlighting the tensions between local values and global economic pressures (Prokopenko, 2018).

4.3 Alignment and Divergence: Comparing Past Ideals with Present Realities

Contemporary Zambian political realities present a mixed picture compared to the ideals espoused by Kaunda's humanism. A significant divergence is evident (see Table 1).

Table 1. Comparing Past Ideals with Present Realities

Core Principle of Kaunda's Humanism	Description of the Principle	Evidence of Contemporary Alignment	Evidence of Contemporary Divergence
The human person at the centre	Prioritising human well-being	Social Cash Transfer programme (Mbewe et al., 2023), Community development initiatives (Mboyonga, 2024)	Persistent poverty and inequality (Mbewe et al., 2023; Siachisa, 2021)
The dignity of the human person	Respect and consideration	Constitutional guarantees of rights (Chama & Simataa, 2024), Bill of Rights in Zambia's Constitution (Mboyonga, 2024)	Reports of police brutality and harsh prison conditions (Prokopenko, 2018; Siachisa, 2021)
Non-exploitation of Man by Man	Fairness and equity	Rhetoric against corruption by some leaders (Egbunu, 2014), Anti-corruption policies (Mbewe et al., 2023)	Widespread corruption (Gould, 2023; Siachisa, 2021)
Equal opportunities for all	Egalitarian society	Efforts to expand access to education (Kanu, 2014), Free primary education policy (Prokopenko, 2018)	Disparities in access to quality education and healthcare (Mboyonga, 2024; Siachisa, 2021)
Hard work and self-reliance	Individual effort, national self-sufficiency	Emphasis on entrepreneurship in some policy documents (Mboyonga, 2024), Promotion of small-scale enterprises (Mbewe et al., 2023)	High unemployment rates (Chama & Simataa, 2024; Mbewe et al., 2023)
Working together	Communalism and teamwork	Community-based development projects (Gould, 2023), Grassroots mobilisation for infrastructure development (Siachisa, 2021)	Political polarisation and partisan intolerance (Chama & Simataa, 2024; Gould, 2023)
The extended family	Mutual support and care	Social safety nets for vulnerable populations (Mboyonga, 2024), Public health initiatives (Mbewe et al., 2023)	Strain on traditional support systems due to urbanisation and economic hardship (Mboyonga, 2024; Siachisa, 2021)
Loyalty and patriotism	Dedication to the nation	Continued use of the "One Zambia, One Nation" motto (Chama & Simataa, 2024), National unity rhetoric (Siachisa, 2021)	Regional and ethnic voting patterns (Egbunu, 2014; Siachisa, 2021)

Table 1 highlights the ongoing tension between Kaunda's humanist principles and contemporary Zambian realities. While some principles, such as the emphasis on human well-being and national unity, remain symbolically aligned with current policies and practices, there are significant divergences,

particularly in areas like economic inequality, corruption, and the erosion of communal values. These discrepancies suggest a shift in focus from collective welfare to individualism, underscored by the challenges posed by neoliberal reforms and political fragmentation.

The persistent problem of corruption across various levels of government remains a stark contradiction to the humanist principle of non-exploitation of man by man, which advocates fairness and equity in governance (Gould, 2023). This situation indicates a considerable gap between the ethical aspirations of humanism and the practical governance in Zambia. Despite public condemnations of corruption, entrenched patronage networks and systemic inefficiencies continue to undermine the institutionalisation of Kaunda's ideals of moral leadership and accountability (Siachisa, 2021).

In addition, while efforts to expand access to education have been made, significant disparities in the quality of education and healthcare persist, especially between urban and rural areas (Mboyonga, 2024). This ongoing inequality departs from Kaunda's humanist ideal of equal opportunities for all, highlighting a disjunction between policy objectives and outcomes. Despite initiatives like free primary education, the inequities in the quality of education provided suggest a significant gap in the practical implementation of Kaunda's vision (Egbunu, 2014).

Reports from human rights organisations continue to highlight the treatment of individuals within Zambia's justice system, particularly allegations of police brutality and the harsh conditions in prisons (Prokopenko, 2018). These issues indicate a failure to consistently uphold the humanist principle of the dignity of the human person, suggesting that human rights violations are not only prevalent but institutionalised. These disparities highlight the disconnect between Zambia's legal framework, which enshrines human rights, and the implementation of those rights in practice (Mboyonga, 2024).

While Zambia has largely avoided large-scale ethnic conflicts, the rise of ethnic and identity-based politics, combined with instances of political polarisation and sporadic violence, suggests that the humanist goal of fostering genuine unity remains a challenge (Siachisa, 2021). Although the "One Zambia, One Nation" slogan continues to be invoked, the country faces difficulty in achieving national cohesion. This situation underscores the struggles of translating Kaunda's ideals into practical governance when ethnicity dominates political engagement (Egbunu, 2014).

However, certain practices still show alignment with Kaunda's humanist ideals, though this alignment is often symbolic rather than substantive. Political leaders frequently refer to the "One Zambia, One Nation" motto, indicating an enduring commitment to unity, even if the challenges to its realisation persist (Mboyonga, 2024). Furthermore, social welfare programmes like the Social Cash Transfer programme reflect a humanist approach by targeting the most vulnerable populations (Kaunda & Hinfelaar, 2020). These programmes indicate the government's recognition of human well-being as central to governance. However, these efforts face significant implementation challenges, such as underfunding and resource allocation issues, limiting their ability to reflect the broader humanist ideal (Siachisa, 2021).

4.4 Ethical Leadership in Zambia: Past and Present

Kaunda's humanism was grounded in an ethical framework that emphasised respect, dignity, and the well-being of all citizens (Kaunda, 2004). His leadership model framed political leadership as service, with leaders being accountable to the people rather than serving personal or elite interests (Kaunda & Hinfelaar, 2020). The humanist values of non-exploitation, equality, and communal solidarity were intended to guide Zambia's leaders to work for the common good (Mboyonga, 2024). However, the post-Kaunda era in Zambia has seen significant challenges to ethical leadership. Successive administrations have been criticised for widespread corruption, mismanagement of public resources, and the erosion of democratic principles (Gould, 2023). These factors highlight a departure from Kaunda's vision of leadership as a moral vocation.

The declaration of Zambia as a Christian nation in 1991, while reflecting the religious sentiments of many Zambians, introduced ethical complexities regarding religious freedom and inclusivity. While Kaunda's humanism was secular, the shift towards Christianity in governance has sometimes sidelined the pluralistic and inclusive values central to his humanist philosophy (Siachisa, 2021). This shift indicates a move away from secular humanism toward a more religious governance model, with implications for governance and policy (Prokopenko, 2018).

Despite these challenges, efforts to promote ethical leadership have persisted. Establishing institutions like the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) and introducing various anti-corruption laws reflect the recognition that unethical governance remains a problem (Kaunda & Hinfelaar, 2020). However, the effectiveness of these institutions has often been undermined by issues such as weak enforcement, political interference, and insufficient resources (Siachisa, 2021). This situation suggests that while there is political will to combat corruption, the structural challenges to ethical governance remain significant (Mboyonga, 2024). Civil society organisations continue to play an essential role in advocating for good governance, transparency, and accountability, underscoring the enduring relevance of ethical leadership in Zambia (Chama & Simataa, 2024).

5. Theoretical Reflections

In this section, the theoretical underpinnings of Kaunda's humanism are explored in relation to broader political and philosophical frameworks. Kaunda's humanism is examined as a moral-political framework that aligns with African communal values, particularly those found in Ubuntu and other African humanist ideologies. The section then connects Kaunda's humanism with other postcolonial leaders' philosophies, like Nyerere's Ujamaa and Nkrumah's Pan-Africanism, discussing their shared focus on collective well-being and the challenges they faced in implementing these ideals. Finally, postcolonial theory is employed to analyse the ideological shifts that led to the decline of Kaunda's humanism, with a focus on how neoliberal reforms and global economic pressures shaped Zambia's political landscape. This discussion sets the stage for considering how Kaunda's humanism might be reclaimed and revitalised in contemporary governance.

5.1 Humanism as a Moral-Political Framework

Kaunda's humanism transcends being a mere political ideology, positioning itself as a moral and ethical framework for leadership, deeply rooted in African communal values. Its core tenets—respect for human dignity, mutual aid, peace, and moral responsibility—align closely with the principles of Ubuntu and broader African humanism, both of which emphasise relational personhood, community solidarity, and the inherent dignity of every individual (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2021). Kaunda's humanism aimed to embed these values centrally in Zambia's governance structures, especially within the sectors of education, health, and civil service, thereby ensuring that the welfare of the people guided public policy (Kuhumba & Mhando, 2024). However, despite the erosion of these ideals in contemporary practice, the symbolic references to Kaunda's humanism remain powerful, especially during national moments of reflection or political crises, underscoring the enduring ethical significance of this philosophy (Mooney, 2024).

5.2 Ujamaa and Pan-African Parallels

Kaunda's humanism shares significant parallels with Nyerere's Ujamaa and Nkrumah's Pan-Africanism, philosophies that reject capitalist individualism in favour of collective well-being, promote leadership as a service to the nation, and frame national unity as a necessary tool for resisting neocolonialism (Etta & Asukwo, 2019). These leaders envisioned governance models that prioritised the welfare of the collective, eschewing self-serving individualism. However, as with Kaunda's vision, these philosophies struggled with practical governance realities such as economic fragility, external debt, and internal corruption, ultimately leading to their ideals' decline in practice (Biney, 2014). This struggle

highlights the tension between ethical idealism and political realism in postcolonial African governance. While the ideals of Kaunda, Nyerere, and Nkrumah persist symbolically, they have not been fully realised due to these challenges, suggesting a disconnect between their theoretical frameworks and the practicalities of governance (Etta & Asukwo, 2019).

5.3 Postcolonial Theory and the Ideological Drift

From a postcolonial perspective, the decline of Kaunda's humanism mirrors a broader trend of ideological fragmentation in postcolonial states, which began with moral fervour but gradually succumbed to elite nationalism and economic dependency. As Murove (2020) suggests, post-independence movements were initially fuelled by a commitment to justice and equality, but these ideals became compromised as the new leadership sought to reconcile national goals with the pressures of global economic systems. The adoption of neoliberal reforms, particularly post-1991, prioritised market-driven solutions and structural adjustments over the social ethics Kaunda championed (Gould, 1996). This shift in focus further marginalised Kaunda's humanist principles of collective welfare and social justice, which now appear to be out of step with Zambia's global economic positioning and domestic political priorities (Prokopenko, 2018).

5.4 Reclaiming Humanism: A Path Forward?

Despite the challenges and the erosion of its practical application, Kaunda's humanism offers normative resources for rethinking leadership ethics in contemporary Zambia. Recent calls for Afrocentric governance underscore a collective desire to return to governance models grounded in dignity, empathy, and community solidarity—values central to Kaunda's vision (Gould, 2023). Reclaiming this legacy would require more than ceremonial homage to Kaunda's ideals; it would demand reintegrating humanist principles into Zambia's institutional frameworks, particularly in education, leadership training, and policy implementation (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2025). This revival would ensure that humanism is not just a symbolic reference but a living ideology, with real implications for governance and public service.

6. Revisiting the Research Aim and Questions

This study set out to investigate the endurance of Kenneth Kaunda's humanism in contemporary Zambian politics by analysing the trajectory of ethical governance and leadership ideals in the postcolonial era. The study addressed three core issues:

Persistence of Kaunda's Humanist Values in Modern Zambian Politics: While largely symbolic and rhetorical, humanism remains a moral compass for citizens and leaders. Its core values are invoked in speeches and ceremonies but are rarely embedded in institutional governance (Mboyonga, 2024).

Factors Contributing to the Erosion or Transformation of Kaunda's Humanism: Political liberalisation, economic reforms, elite-driven nationalism, and institutional weakness have significantly fragmented and diluted the operational relevance of humanism in Zambia. The shift to market-oriented approaches post-1991 has further marginalised the state-centred values of social welfare and communal solidarity central to Kaunda's philosophy (Siachisa, 2021).

How Current Political Leaders and Systems Align or Diverge from Kaunda's Vision: A Leader such as Levy Mwanawasa exhibited partial alignment with Kaunda's ideals, particularly in their emphasis on anti-corruption and institutional reforms. However, others, notably during the neoliberal and authoritarian periods, have diverged significantly, focusing on economic pragmatism and electoral expediency at the expense of ethical governance (Mboyonga, 2024; Siachisa, 2021).

6.1 Key Insights and Thematic Takeaways

The findings of this study underscore several critical observations about the role and evolution of humanism in contemporary Zambian politics:

- **Humanism Is Not Obsolete; It Is Dormant**—invoked in national identity, faith-based discourse, and education, yet inadequately institutionalised within the core functions of governance and policy implementation. Ceremonial references to Kaunda's humanism persist, but its institutional entrenchment remains weak (Mboyonga, 2024).

- **Contemporary Governance Reflects a Hybrid Ethos**—where some elements of communal service and ethical leadership endure but are overshadowed by neoliberal and clientelist norms. The market-driven agenda has diluted the commitment to equity and social justice, critical pillars of Kaunda's vision (Siachisa, 2021).

- **Humanism's Legacy Offers a Normative Framework for Leadership Renewal**—especially in debates about ethics, youth leadership, civic participation, and rebuilding institutional trust. Kaunda's principles remain valuable for fostering principled governance amidst the challenges of modern political fragmentation (Mboyonga, 2024).

6.2 Theoretical Implications

This study affirms the continued relevance of Afrocentric political philosophy, challenging the assumption that postcolonial African states must choose between tradition and modernity. Theoretically, it contributes to:

- **African Humanism:** This study repositions Kaunda's humanism as a living political ethic, rather than just historical memory. By exploring its persistence in Zambia's moral discourse, this study highlights the timelessness of humanism as an ideological framework for ethical leadership in Africa (Biney, 2014).

- **Postcolonial Theory:** The study reveals how indigenous ideologies, like humanism, have been suppressed or selectively co-opted under the pressures of neocolonialism and market-oriented reforms. The evolving role of African identity and ethics in governance is examined through the lens of historical materialism and the political economy (Siachisa, 2021).

- **Comparative African Governance:** This research contributes to the debate on ethical leadership by revisiting the Pan-African and socialist legacies of governance, drawing parallels between Kaunda's humanism, Nyerere's Ujamaa, and Nkrumah's Pan-Africanism. All three philosophies share a common foundation in ethical governance but faced similar challenges in implementation (Gould, 2023; Mboyonga, 2024).

6.3 Bridging the Gap Between Ideals and Reality

In summary, the findings of this study reveal that while Kaunda's humanism continues to have symbolic significance, its practical application in contemporary Zambian politics has been deeply compromised. Adopting neoliberal reforms, combined with the persistence of corruption, economic inequality, and education disparities, suggests that Kaunda's humanist principles have been significantly eroded (Gould, 2023). The evidence suggests a disconnect between political rhetoric invoking humanist ideals and contemporary Zambia's economic realities and leadership practices (Siachisa, 2021).

The study highlights the tensions between ethical idealism and political realism, demonstrating how neoliberal policies have reshaped Zambia's political and economic landscape. Kaunda's vision of a,

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egalitarian society remains an important reference point, but its practical application requires a renewed commitment to moral governance and social justice (Orbisi-Orlu & Mbayele, 2021).

Actionable Recommendations for Policymakers

Based on the findings of this study, several actionable recommendations can be made for policymakers seeking to reintegrate Kaunda's humanist principles into contemporary governance:

1. **Reaffirmation of Ethical Leadership:** A national commitment to ethical leadership should be central to Zambia's governance framework. Policymakers could adopt specific ethical codes that align with Kaunda's values of non-exploitation, fairness, and equal opportunity for all citizens. This commitment could be reflected in policies that prioritise transparency, accountability, and public service over political patronage and personal enrichment.

2. **Education and Civic Engagement:** The government should revitalise the emphasis on civic education that focuses on Kaunda's humanism, particularly in schools, universities, and civil society organisations. By incorporating humanist principles into educational curricula, young Zambians can be encouraged to adopt the values of social justice, community welfare, and national unity that Kaunda espoused.

3. **Economic Policies for Social Equity:** While the neoliberal economic model has brought certain benefits, it has also entrenched inequality. Policymakers should adopt inclusive economic policies that promote wealth redistribution, ensure equitable access to education, healthcare, and social welfare, and reduce the concentration of wealth in the hands of a few. Inclusive economic policies would help to realign Zambia's economic development with the core tenets of humanism.

4. **Strengthening Social Safety Nets:** Expanding the reach and efficiency of social welfare programs such as the Social Cash Transfer programme is essential. These initiatives should be better funded, more widely implemented, and subject to transparent oversight to ensure they effectively reduce poverty and address inequality, per Kaunda's vision of a compassionate and inclusive society.

5. **Promoting National Unity:** The continued invocation of the "One Zambia, One Nation" slogan is a step in the right direction. However, practical policies for fostering ethnic unity and reducing political polarisation should be introduced. This invocation could include policy reforms to address ethnic inequalities, tribal balancing in political appointments, and more inclusive national dialogues to encourage unity across diverse groups.

Future Research Directions

The study highlights several gaps in the literature and areas for future exploration:

1. **Comparative Research Across African Nations:** There is a need for comparative studies examining how other African countries, such as Tanzania under Julius Nyerere and Ghana under Kwame Nkrumah, have navigated the tension between post-colonial humanism and neoliberal reforms. Such research could provide valuable insights into the broader African experience and offer lessons on reintegrating humanist values in governance.

2. **Empirical Studies on the Socio-Economic Impact of Humanism:** Future research could focus on empirically measuring the socio-economic impacts of reintroducing humanist principles into governance. Studies could look into specific policy outcomes related to education, healthcare, income distribution, and poverty alleviation to assess the tangible benefits of humanism in contemporary governance.

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3. **Exploring the Role of Youth in Humanism's Revival:** Given the crucial role of younger generations in shaping the future, it would be valuable to study how youth movements and civil society organisations engage with the legacy of Kaunda's humanism. Understanding their perspectives and initiatives can guide future efforts to reintegrate humanist values in Zambia's political landscape.

7. Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that while Kaunda's humanism still holds significant symbolic value, its practical application in contemporary Zambia has been deeply compromised, particularly with neoliberal economic reforms, corruption, and socio-economic inequality. The findings reveal a disconnect between the ethical ideals Kaunda promoted and the current realities of governance in Zambia.

However, this study also highlights that Kaunda's vision of moral leadership, social justice, and communal welfare is not entirely obsolete. It remains a touchstone for national identity and a source of inspiration, despite being inadequately embedded in institutional governance. The tensions between ethical idealism and political realism persist, particularly in light of Zambia's ongoing challenges with corruption, inequality, and the erosion of public services.

Overall, the study highlights the enduring significance of Kaunda's humanism and offers concrete policy interventions that could help re-align Zambia's governance with the ideals of moral leadership, social justice, and communal welfare. Although challenged by neoliberal reforms, this approach ensures that Kaunda's vision can still inform and inspire contemporary political practices in Zambia.

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