

# The Social Act of Exchange in Power Relations: The study of the Phenomenon of *Nichekeleko* at the Weighbridges in Zambia.

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## Abstract

*This article examines the widely practiced phenomenon of Nichekeleko at the Weighbridges (WBs) in Zambia. The commonly held understanding of Nichekeleko by the Zambian people is that, it is corruption; ranging from bribery, theft, embezzlement, gratification to favouritism. Sociologically, the phenomenon was conceived as a social act of exchange within the context of power relations by the actors who engage in it. Foucault's notion of power relations and Bourdieu's concepts of "practice" and "fields" provided the theoretical framework for the study. Power was considered as a system, and a network of relations, encompassing the whole society than a relation between the oppressed and the oppressor. Methodologically, this study was based on mixed method research; the large part of it involving participant- observation, interviews and administering of questionnaires*

*The argument in this paper is that failure to analyse corruption from a linguistic and philosophical perspective implied in 'Nichekeleko' reduces the practice to mere violation of the law or moral rules. A much closer look at corruption from a language vantage point provides us with essential dimensions of the practice, why, and how it has persisted in Zambia*

**Key words:** *Corruption, Nichekeleko, Power relations, Social act of Exchange, Practice.*

## Résumé

*Cet article examine le phénomène largement répandu de Nichekeleko sur les ponts Weigh (WB) en Zambie. La compréhension commune de Nichekeleko par le peuple zambien est que c'est de la corruption; allant de la corruption, le vol, le détournement de fonds, la gratification au favoritisme. Sociologiquement, le phénomène a été conçu comme un acte d'échange social dans le contexte des relations de pouvoir par les acteurs qui s'y engagent. La notion de relations de pouvoir de Foucault et les concepts de «pratique» et de «champs» de Bourdieu ont fourni le cadre théorique de l'étude. Le pouvoir était considéré comme un système et un réseau de relations englobant toute la société plutôt qu'une relation entre l'opprimé et l'opresseur. Méthodologiquement, cette étude était basée sur la recherche de méthodes mixtes; la plus grande partie implique l'observation des participants, des interviews et l'administration des questionnaires*

*L'argument dans cet article est que l'échec d'analyser la corruption d'un point de vue linguistique et philosophique implicite dans 'Nichekeleko' réduit la pratique à la simple violation de la loi ou des règles morales. Un examen plus approfondi de la corruption d'un point de vue linguistique nous fournit des dimensions essentielles de la pratique, pourquoi et comment elle a persisté en Zambie*

**Mots clés:** Corruption, Nichekeleko, Relations de pouvoir, Acte d'échange social, Pratique.

## Introduction

The phenomenon of *Nichekeleko* has widely been considered to be a problem by Zambians. Its persistence remains a major concern. The word, literary, means “cut a slice for me or what is in it for me?” This somehow explains its everyday usage by the people of Zambia to mean corruption, such as bribery, theft, embezzlement of funds to the exchange of small improper gifts and use of personal connections to obtain favours. The fact that *Nichekeleko* is generally considered as corruption is understandable given that many reports in Zambia show its prevalence in all sectors of the economy since the government introduced the privatization program. Viewed as corruption, it is argued that the phenomenon is on the increase, especially since the past 24 years when state assets were privatised.. In this sense, the phenomenon is not new in Zambia (Mbao, 1998; Ndulo, 2004). Fundanga (2009) states that, “privatization program was introduced in compliance with the ideology that state property was unable to operate efficiently and only an economy which is based on private property can be effective.” The government introduced the Zambia Privatization Act (ZPA) Chapter 386 of the Laws of the Republic, aimed at converting state property into private hands so that it can fulfil the demands of the economy and operate more efficiently. A five-year plan was put in place, which included all sectors of the economy, to improve performance and efficiency. In the transport sector; government targeted the Zambia corridor-highway: road transport, railways and airports. The objective of the programme was to reduce the cost of doing business and improve quality of services. However, the road to privatization was not easy; the concern for the loss of jobs led resistance to the privatization (Mbao, 2006). But this did not stop privatization. Actual experience has shown that in many of the firms that were sold, existing jobs were preserved while in a number of others, jobs have been lost. A good example is the sale of the publicly owned transport firms such as United Bus Company (UBZ), Contract Haulage (CH) and Zambia Airways (ZA) to private investors.

Workers in the transport sector were highly affected by job losses as most of them could not be absorbed by new owners of the privatized firms. Job losses meant dwindling income. In order to survive, those who lost their jobs started running private business such as operating minibuses or taxis that were mostly defective and usually fail to meet the required motor vehicle safety standards. To avoid the vehicles being impounded by the officials the owners resort to bribery as well as instructing their drivers to avoid

the Weighbridge (WB) or road blocks during official hours. Bribery became a survival strategy. So, to those who engage in it, it was an act of exchange: *I give you money in exchange for passage*. This social act, *Nichekeleko* was considered as corruption and linked to privatization by commentators. Attempts to deal with it, as it increases with the fragile economy, led the government to enact the Penal Code, Chapter 246 of the laws of Zambia. But the problem still persists. So, how can this be explained? To explain it, it is necessary to study the act itself. Hence this study. But to study it, it is critically important to make sense of the word *Nichekeleko*, which is generally used to describe the act, as corruption.

## Nichekeleko

The common *Chewa* sayings and proverbs that are implied in the word, *Nichekeleko* are: *Thandizo* and *Wafwilisho* (both meaning support). Most academic literature ignore these about *Nichekeleko*. Instead, the word "corruption" is often used to analyse it. Generally, measures to deal with corruption in Zambia are well documented in several regional and international instruments. For instance, the United Nation Convention against Corruption (UNCAD), the Southern African Development Community (SADC) protocol against Corruption, the government of the Republic of Zambia (GRZ) enactment of statutory instruments number 12 of 2005, (s) 3 (Lubinda, 2013) and the re-introduction of the Public Service Code of Ethics in 2010. The earliest juridical framework aimed at reducing it is found in the Public Bodies Corrupt Act of 1889, the Prevention of Corruption Act of 1916, which penalized it in the public sector through law enforcement agencies. These prevention strategies have failed to reduce it because the focus remains at the surface level in the sense of not understanding the act as one reflecting gift exchange or support. The point being made here is that the English translation of the word overshadows the literal meaning of it. Implied in the word, is *Ulemu*, (respect). Therefore, the over reliance on the word "corruption", as if it were a label for a pre-existing fact to analyse *Nichekeleko* at the Weighbridge fails to understand the embodied social relations. Actors who engage in the phenomenon see it less as corruption and hence its persistence as shall be discussed. I focus on the lived experiences of Weighbridge Operators (WBOs) and Truck Drivers (TDs) at the Weighbridge station. The WBOs are stationed at the Weighbridge (WB) and TDs pass through it from Tanzania, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and the Republic of South Africa (RSA).

Michel Foucault's theory of power relations and Pierre Bourdieu's notion of practice, habitus and fields provided the appropriate theoretical thinking tools. The theories are particularly important because they allowed us to delve into individual and institutional practices, which embody power. Further, the theory has proven useful as a theoretical

lens in gaining a better understanding of the life-worlds of the respondents. The term “life experiences” was conceived by Habermas (1987: 124) as the “culturally transmitted and linguistically organized stock of interpretive patterns” that guide the individual’s interaction with others and social institution.

The primary concern of the life experience research is to arrive at a point where actors in social relations reach a common understanding regarding the reasons and functional nature of power relations. The argument is that there is an ideal type of relations of power which without suppression or coercion influences actors to engage in the phenomenon of *Nichekeleko* at the WB.

In reviewing Michel Foucault theory of relations of power in connection to the meaning of the word “corruption”, Friedrick (2004) observed two schools of thoughts. Firstly, the Universalist defines corruption using certain common properties with the principle that such properties make certain behaviour corrupt in all societies. The problem with this as applied to *Nichekeleko*, is that it does not situate *Nichekeleko* contextually - linguistically and socio-culturally. This failure suggests that people’s ways of thinking and acting is missing in any universalistic understanding of *Nichekeleko*. Such understanding is that it is corruption. As Wierzbicka (1997) notes, there are links between the social relations of a society and language spoken.. Words reflect not only the existence of a certain social ritual but also the way of thinking about life’s important events. How we interpret words and actions are critical. For example, when the word *Nichekeleko* is applied to non-permanent relationships at the WB, it is seen as meaning “corruption”, but when applied to closer patterns of relationships; it refers to someone who must share his life. This means that the word highlights assumptions of special relationships based on intimate communication. This means that when the universalistic word, corruption, is used to analyse practises at the WB, it misrepresents the social actors’ ways of thinking.

On the other hand, the relativist definition of corruption as applied to *Nichekeleko*, is rather reactive and narrow in content because it is detached from society’s complex social systems. A relativist definition of corruption, states that it is caused by cultural and moral attitudes (Unzieks, *et al*, 2000). But the problem, in regards to *Nichekeleko* is that it still does not see it from the perspective of the social actors as support. When the word *Nichekeleko* is used to describe the phenomenon at the WB, by its very nature, in *Chewa*, it is a cultural weapon for supporting one another, materially and emotionally. Most scholars (Bohannan, 1997; Gluckman, 2004) on the subject of linguistic sciences states that, “concepts taken from one cultural system cannot be unequivocally used to name practices in other systems and that literal meanings should be interpreted in the context of an entire cultural system” (Gluckmann, 2004: 23-27). This does not seem to be the case among the relativist scholars of corruption such as de Mari (1984) and de Sardan (1998).

Descriptions of local practices should, Bohannan (1977) argued, be sensitive to indigenous concepts. According to him, it is important to fit these practices and concepts 'into the larger conceptual system of the people who use [them]' (p. 406). By contrast with other languages, Gluckman argued that many of these concepts can 'without distortion after careful and perhaps lengthy descriptions and discussions, be given English equivalents' (1955). This debate has recently resurfaced in differences between Stephen (1995) and Jones (2007) about the usefulness of local terms in understanding people's beliefs. As Wierzbicka argues, local concepts 'reflect ways of living and ways of thinking characteristic of a given society,' so that 'language and patterns of thought are interlinked' and 'conceptual systems are entrenched in languages' (Wierzbicka, 1997: 308). The weakness of the relativist is that the focus is on "why," but ignoring the larger micro socio-political environment in the context of power in which it occurs. Therefore, relativist argument bases its findings on cultural theories but fall short of asking the more fundamental questions of "how" corruption have survived changes in society. The study described here examined *Nichekeleko* at the Weighbridges: the act and why it has persisted at Weighbridges in Zambia.

## Method

Data used for this article was drawn from a bigger study undertaken at the Kafue, Kapiri-Mposhi and Kafula-futa WBs. Zambia has ten provinces and these WBs are located along the main inter-territorial roads leading to Tanzania and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The study was conducted at the mentioned weighbridges because of their axle-load<sup>1</sup> activities such as the offloading of over weighted trucks, weighting, the charging of WB fines and detention of defaulting TDs. Participant observation was the major method; interviews were conducted, focus group discussions were organised and questionnaires administered. I observed the weighing of 750 truckloads per week, gently paying attention to *Nichekeleko* by Weighbridge Officers (WBOs), as individuals, and, as a group.

I interviewed the WBOs, TDs, and administered questionnaires to them to establish the TDs and the WBOs' gender, age employment status and years of experience in WB operations as well as truckload driving. The TDs were the first to be sampled based on nationality and years of experience. I sampled 120 TDs out of a population of 740. Only 96 drivers responded. In order to select the 120 TDs, I used simple random sampling technique. I first used nationality to select the drivers who later spoke to other drivers they knew. Then, I selected WBOs based on their rank and years of experience. 64 respondents out of 96 sampled in a population of 125 WB operators were selected. I

1 The axle load of a wheeled vehicle is the total weight felt by the roadway for all wheels connected to a given axle. Viewed another way, it is the fraction of total vehicle weight resting on a given axle.

also sampled 18 policemen and Anti-corruption commission officers who were selected based upon their availability and knowledge of the activities of *Nichekeleko*. The data from this group is dependable because they shared their experiences as law enforcement officers on the subject of corruption. We also interviewed them on the challenges of weighbridge functions. The overall population of the study was 854 comprising of WBOs, TDs, Anti-Corruption Commission officers and traditional leaders. The sample size was 207 out of a total population of 854.

The decision to administer a questionnaire was taken to determine the degree to which *Nichekeleko* was perceived as a major problem and purely for statistical purposes. Questionnaires are perceived somewhat scientifically neutral and provide a formal measurement. Indeed, the questionnaire was administered by targeting a broad range of individuals. Focus group discussions were equally used in addition to interviews. I also had a focus group with three traditional leaders. The traditional rulers were selected because of their influential position as village heads, their proximity to the WB and their role in local government as the mediator between the local people and political officials in Kapiri-Mposhi and Kafue council. They often voice the needs and concerns of the local communities (or at least their interpretation of them) under their control to the local government officials for appropriate attention. We particularly selected traditional leaders to help in shedding some light on of *Nichekeleko* experiences and some important changes that have occurred over time, which are explained in the discussion on findings.

One comment from the discussion triggered a chain of responses. For example, at the community level with traditional leaders and village headmen, the discussion shifted from experiences of WBOs to the specific role of individuals at the WBs. Accordingly, two different focus group discussions were conducted at Kafue and Kapiri-Mposhi WBs. These included a focus group discussion with 2 traditional headmen and their subjects.

## Data Analysis and Interpretation

Audio-recorded data was transcribed and translated from Kiswahili, Chinyanja and Ichibemba into English. Recordings of interviews and focus group discussions were in these languages. It allowed participants to fluently express their beliefs, experiences and convictions about the *Nichekeleko* phenomenon. This study used the method of inductive content analysis as the basis for its data analysis. Patton (1990) holds that, "the strategy of inductive designs is to allow the important analysis dimensions to emerge from patterns in the cases under study without presupposing in advance what the important dimensions will be." Hammersley *et al.*, (1995: 209) suggest that in analysing qualitative data, the initial task is to find concepts that help "make sense of what is going on". Patton (1990) seems to suggest that these concepts about data analysis start arising

during data collection and that marks the beginning of the analysis and this continues throughout the study. For a mixed study such as the current one, data collection and analysis go hand in hand to build a coherent interpretation of the data.

The genesis of data analysis was in the data collection phase itself and not after. From the focus group discussions, participant observation and interviews, I began developing tentative understandings as regards the research questions. Patton (2002) holds that as the researcher continues interacting with the data, the researcher starts making sense out of what people have said by looking for patterns and integrating what different people have said after which they are interpreted (Patton, 2002). Miles *et al.*, (1984) advice that analysis should start off with data reduction. This involves careful reading of the recorded material, identification of the main emergent themes and categorization of the data for analysis to data organization. This means that information should be assembled around certain themes and points. In this study, patterns of behaviour were identified from the interviews, participant observations and focus group discussions. There are two methods used in the sociology of analysing data namely:

(a) Words or phrases generated by techniques for systematic elicitation.

(b) Free-flowing texts, such as narratives, discourses and responses to open-ended interviews.

The mixed methods technique helped us to categorize *Nichekeleko* phenomenon into various patterns of behaviour from the actors. Narratives helped me to exploit clues about what actors indulging in *Nichekeleko* do. It helped me to begin examining patterns of behaviour and speech, the repetition of the words in the process of weighing truckloads. The idea here was to understand WBOs experiences from the narrations they gave to me whilst attached to the WB. The understanding of the phenomenon under study and outcomes emerged from interaction with WBOs and their lived experiences in WB operations.

## Discussions of Findings

Key reasons for understanding the persistence of *Nichekeleko* in Zambia are presented within the three themes discussed during focus group discussions, Interviews, participant observation and administering of questionnaires. These namely are: behavioural patterns, the contractual process during weighing truckloads, institutional responses to the literal meaning of *Nichekeleko* by the actors who engage in the phenomenon in the context of power relations at the WB. These highlighted themes contextualized in relations of power, give rise to the persistence of *Nichekeleko* in Zambia. The themes are discussed in sequence as patterns of behaviour perpetuating the problem. By observing WBOs in weighting the truckloads, the first theme we found influencing the persistence of *Nichekeleko* phenomenon based on relations of power between them is the literal

meaning of the word *Nichekeleko* itself in *Chewa*. The word is a product of social actions between TDs and WBOs. This is a situation where the body makes itself heard in the language. One is not always told what to do, but his actions are always interpreted as in the cultural literal sense. Thus; this study has been situated using Michel Foucault's power relations to expose the persistence of *Nichekeleko* within the context of power. At the WB these ways of thinking are embedded in ways of operating constituting a case of relations based on practices locally conceptualised as "*Nichekeleko*".

The second theme relating to the persistence of *Nichekeleko* is reflected in the *Ubuntu*<sup>2</sup> ideology. The philosophy of *Ubuntu* can be mirrored on the practice of *Nichekeleko* in terms of the social relations at the WB, in materialistic and non- materialist ways. Thus, in order to get inside the idea of *Ubuntu* at the WB, one must understand the views of people who are involved in the *Nichekeleko* phenomenon. Sogolo (1993) stated the importance of having an understanding about *Ubuntu*, since its meaning is still relevant today. Data on the *Ubuntu* ideology was sourced through interviews and observation of WBOs as they performed their duties. I listened and interpreted the common words that are spoken during the weighing process. The word *Muntu* was constantly spoken as a sign of praise for action or a way of greeting by WBOs. *Ubuntu* cultural norms have been orally translated from generation to generation over a long time and have never been produced as literature or in written form. However, the word *Ubuntu* has not been immune to misuse and over use, as it is a strong and loaded concept of values. In the Zambian context, the word, even though spelt differently, from isiZulu, is written with an adjective as "*Umunthu maningi*" meaning a full human being.

The adjective implies that a person is not just an ordinary human being, but one who provides practical service to others is a real human and friend. This ideology drives the WB community. There is sincere warmth with which WB operators treat both strangers and members of the surrounding community and visitors. This overt display of warmth is not merely aesthetic but enables formation of spontaneous relationships (co-operatives if you will). The resultant collaboration within these spontaneous relationships transcends the negative aspect about *Nichekeleko* phenomenon at the WB and gives functional significance to the value of support; hence the reasons why the phenomenon has persisted. Warmth is an essential condition for WBOs to work efficiently even though sincere warmth may leave one vulnerable to those with ulterior motives. *Ubuntu* is inclusive. It is best realized in deeds of kindness, compassion, caring, support, solidarity and sacrifice (Tefo, 1998). Such acts produce positive results both for individuals and the community. It makes it possible for an individual to count on and

2 See an extended discussion of *Ubuntu* in isiZulu roughly translating to mean "human kindness. It is an idea from the Southern African region which means literally "human-ness", and is often translated as "humanity towards others", but is often used in a more philosophical sense to mean "the belief in a universal bond of sharing that connects all humanity." See Muleki Munyaka (2009) and Mkgethi Modlali especially chapter 4 on the philosophical variation in a number of languages in African countries on the meaning of *Ubuntu*.

expect the meaningful support from fellow human beings at the WB especially during times of need. *Muntu* (human being) is one who is expected to share the resources with which he is blessed with. It is not uncommon for surrounding communities to request the WBOs for transport for their children who are late for school as they cannot afford a bus fare, and have only managed boarding fees. This gesture by the WBOs and TDs to offer free transport to financially disadvantaged parents and friends of WBOs is an action of *Ubuntu*. It is such actions that contribute positively to those in need; they maintain and preserve community cohesion. This shows the link in practice between *Ubuntu* (an African Ideology) and *Nichekeleko* (in terms of its literal meaning as support) is the best way in which actors contribute to society. This can further be illustrated by popular *Chichewa/Nyanja* proverbs such as:

“Mwanawamnzako ngwako yemwe, ukachenjera manja udyaya naye”  
(your neighbour’s child is your own, his/her success is your success too) (Mchombo, 1964).

This proverb clarifies the main principle in *Nichekeleko* phenomenon as ‘providing support’; those with money help those without. In a literal sense, *Nichekeleko* at the WB is the basis or source of feelings for compassion, responsible for making life more humane for others, in particular those financially in need. This mirrors the *Ubuntu* ideology in practical sense through *Nichekeleko* in relations of power in Zambia. The ideology of *Ubuntu* is demonstrated in action, through practices of the *Nichekeleko* phenomenon based on social connectivities. The purpose for which the “*Ubuntu*” ideology in South Africa and the *Nichekeleko* phenomenon in Zambia serves is a moral one for supporting one another. It is the way in which one relates to other people and one’s surroundings, hence its persistence.

At individual level, *Nichekeleko* is more of an “expression of social solidarity and instrumental ties” similar to what Hwang (1987) termed “collective ties”. These behavioural patterns do not happen in a vacuum, but within power relations; not fixed but fluid. For example, interviews with Jeff, a WBO for over fifteen years explains his actions as follows:

“sometimes TDs are let free not because they have bribed me but because of the emotional and social support I have rendered that has been built on trust over the years” (RDA staff, 2015).

From Jeff’s narration, I noted that it is the emotional and social support built on trust entrenched in WBOs that triggers them to engage in *Nichekeleko*. Therefore, any study of corruption that understands it as a transaction between power and money (Scott, 1969) must also take into account transactions between power and influence, power and networks and the language used by participants. This social relation approach in studying corruption is neglected in most academic literature.

Focus group discussions with traditional leaders revealed that the concept of *Nichekeleko* is not but became actively used after the privatization exercise. The concept was new in operation and not in formation. Previously the concept of *Nichekeleko* was inactive; instead, the concept, “*Katumulomo*”, understood to mean the same as *Nichekeleko*, but only used by cross boarder traders of Congo and Zambia, was in use. The word *Katumulomo* equally reflected lived experiences of actors involved in cross boarder trading to mean social support between them. There is a link between cross boarder traders and WBOs since actors of *Nichekeleko* and those of *Katumulomo* are the same. In short *Nichekeleko* is a new version of *Katumulomo* except that it is exclusive to WBOs. This also probably explains the irreversibility of *Nichekeleko* in Zambia.

Further, the persistence of *Nichekeleko*'s is anchored on the homology between actor's innate behaviour and WB functions. The link between actors' inner behaviour and functions assisted me to explore how *Nichekeleko* is carried out at the WB in Zambia. For example, the overt type of *Nichekeleko* (what some will refer to as bribery and favouritism, but understood as explained earlier) in the weighing process is embedded in them. This type of *Nichekeleko* takes places at three stages, namely: initial, negotiation, agreement and enforcement stages. The issue is that certain social relations in the initial and negotiation stage of the weighing process triggers the *Nichekeleko*. In the initial stage, there is an initiator and the initiated; the communication between them is so complex. This stage starts with a greeting, smile, nodding of the head even whistling and so on and forth. Ferguson (1998), on a similar issue discussed a special kind of relationships that take place between actors in all situations where both sides have power but different kinds of power and in different degrees, depending on circumstances often imposed from without. The key to the relationship is based on the one who needs something and the other who has the ability to do something. In other words, the *Nichekeleko* at the WB right from the initial stage should be interpreted as particularistic ties.

What I observed is that it is not only money that is exchanged during the initial stage, but it is also an avenue for the making of friendship. There is a willingness to help to do good things to the WBO and the TD which is not restricted to time of *need* alone. Therefore *Nichekeleko* cannot just be considered, as it is, to an illegal activity at the WB but that of social support. At the heart of the social relations is the idea that the WB is a meeting site for initiation, negotiation, agreement and sanctions, usually associated with the individual's way of life. The WB is a place that provides opportunities for interaction and negotiation that occurs between TDs and WBOs. It is a place of relations for familiar persons where an outsider becomes no stranger to the *Nichekeleko* phenomenon.

A theme that emerged from the data shows how the institutional designs of anti-corruption institutions create an environment for *Nichekeleko* to flourish based on social relations and, on the other hand how the presence of the phenomenon in anti-corruption institutions has seriously affected the effectiveness of anti-corruption measures and efforts everywhere. The sources of data came from analysing laws, by-laws, internal

regulations, guidelines of the major anti-corruption institutions, most notably, the ACC commissioners and interviewing general staff members.

What has been omitted in the ACC corrupt practices Act is the recognition of *Nichekeleko* as an informal practice that takes place between actors in relational power. When is ignored, is that *Nichekeleko* reflects personal judgements about human relations. For example, during interviews with 2 ACC officers, they had this to say, "the ACC as an institution; from time to time seconded employees at the WB, as part of an operation to prevent corruption according the Act No.12 of 1996. The Act states that officers shall be seconded to any public office for corruption prevention". Nevertheless, as soon as they are on secondment they are meshed into *Nichekeleko* through a network of relations. They discard their office hierarchies in favour of fluid network models that make it harder for senior staff to infiltrate, disrupt and dismantle. From interviews with two informants familiar with WB operations, this favours the persistence of the *Nichekeleko* such as gift-giving and fuzzy business careers by ACC officers, too. The use of the concept, corruption, does not reflect the lens of those involved in it. If the concept *Nichekeleko* was used to analyse behavioural conduct at ACC, it would expose innate characteristics that have provided an opportunity for the persistence of the problem. The argument here is that the generalised corrupt practices of individuals at ACC is nothing but *Nichekeleko* conceived as "support for the other" relations of power. At the heart of these relations are concepts such as "*Malume*" meaning "uncle" who are invited for lunch by junior ACC officers. The concept of *Malume* is one of the *Nichekeleko derivatives* with an innate characteristic of support. It is difficult to separate the word *Malume* from the individuals' indulgence in *Nichekeleko* due to the fact that the word has a hidden, elusive power and the act is social. It facilitates the *Nichekeleko* phenomenon in institutions in Zambia. My argument is that *Nichekeleko* phenomenon makes sense only to those who understand its rules and norms. Most anti-corruption agencies ignore the interpersonal social relations of the actors involved in the practice. My data analysis revealed that the phrase "corruption", when used, suggests that at the moment of speech, the speaker is not interested in the particular actor's way of life, and view him exclusively as a law breaker, which is inaccurate, but a normal phenomenon reflected in the lives of those who participate in it. It means, as *Nichekeleko*, a habitual practice of social support. In short, the involvement of WBOs in *Nichekeleko*, as social support involving multiple interactions within a specific socio-political environment, is missing in most ACC laws. The anti-corruption laws fail to capture interpersonal relations that are too revealing, in the phraseological sense, during the weighting process of truckloads. For example the word "*Bwenzzi*" and "*Abale*" in *Chichewa* and *Kiswahili* refers to people who work together; we see this pattern of interpersonal relationships at the WB. Yet in the anti-corruption law, this is not the case. Instead, most part of the law, relies confusingly on the English word "Corruption" thereby losing sight of the vital *Chewa* linguistic meaning as social support, which involves actors in exchange of gifts, moral and emotional support

in a context of power relations. Simply put these patterns of interpersonal relations have provided an opportunity for actors to engage in the *Nichekeleko* hence its persistence in Zambia.

## Conclusion

This article examined the understanding of *Nichekeleko* at the WBs in Zambia by zooming into the complex power relations between actors involved in the phenomenon. One of the major themes to emerge from this study, is the importance of understanding local practice within the prism of the locals.

Most often, commentators view *Nichekeleko* as illegal or immoral actions but the practice should not be dismissed as immoral and illegal; it has to be contextually understood as habitual practice of social support.

*Nichekeleko* seems to be a way of life by those who indulge in it. One basic tenet of *Nichekeleko* is the notion or expression of sharing of gifts and social support. It is these features that distinguish it from behavioural conduct construed as transgression. The study has shown that, as long as WBO's power, as a form of public power, is delegated and exercised by individual WBOs, the incentive to indulge in the *Nichekeleko* activities will always exist.

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