The Tribe Trap and the Muzzle of the Native

Tribe as Epistemic Containment, In-Group Psychopathy, and the Sabotage of African Sovereign Capacity

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Abstract

Context. For more than a century, Africa has been ruled and narrated through a single downgraded category: the "tribe." Conflicts in Sudan, Ethiopia, DRC, Nigeria or the Sahel are routinely described as "tribal violence," implying ancient, irrational feuds. Equivalent conflicts in Europe or Asia are framed as "nationalist," "federal," or "geopolitical." The same empirical complexity is run through different conceptual filters.

Problem. We argue that *tribe* is not a neutral translation of African social units but a **muzzle**: a technology of epistemic containment that reclassifies sovereign polities as biological specimens. It collapses layered governance (lineage, city-state, alliance, federation) into biology, erases indigenous concepts of state and contract, and triggers **In-Group Psychopathy** through **pseudospeciation** (seeing neighbors as another species) (Erikson, 1966; Bandura, 1999).

Research question (Singini). Does the imposition and internalization of the *tribe* label (a) systematically erase indigenous concepts of sovereignty in African political

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vocabularies and (b) measurably increase zero-sum, dehumanizing framing in conflict discourse, thereby lowering readiness for alliances and federations?

Method (protocol, Ma1–Ma2). We specify a mixed-method design:

(1) A **comparative linguistic audit** of political vocabulary in five major African zones (Kikongo, Yoruba, Igbo, Amharic, Wolof) versus colonial translations, coded through a "Disconnect/Muzzle Matrix" (Johnson, 1921; Van Wing, 1921; Vansina, 1990).

(2) A **framing experiment** comparing "tribal conflict" wording to precise mechanism wording (institutions, incentives, jurisdiction) and measuring effects on blame attribution, solution preference, and federation support.

(3) A **diagnostic tool**, the *In-Group Psychopathy Diagnostic Protocol (IGP-D)*, to score media and policy narratives for pseudospeciation and moral disengagement (Bandura, 1999; Erikson, 1966).

This is a **conceptual + protocol paper**: it specifies mechanisms and preregisterable tests and reports pattern-level archival observations, but **does not analyse any newly collected empirical dataset**.

Results (current status, Kia). Desk-based audit of existing dictionaries and histories shows a consistent pattern: indigenous terms for city-state, republic, confederation, nation and citizen (Nkangu, Ntotela, Ilú, Ọ̀yọ́ Mèsì, Obodo, Hager, Réew, Isizwe) are routinely translated as "tribe," "village group," "paramount chief" or "customary elders" (Van Wing, 1921; Johnson, 1921; Southall, 1970; Vail, 1989). This is a **structural erasure of sovereignty concepts**, not a random vocabulary gap. We treat these as pattern-level findings, not a fully executed quantitative study, and specify precisely what data would falsify or weaken the model.

Strategic conclusion (Wa–Nga). Pan-Africanism cannot be engineered as a "unity of tribes." The *tribe* is a non-scalable unit for sovereignty. Once the correct layers are restored, lineage (luvila), people/ethnos (kanda), country/jurisdiction (nsi), alliance (nkangu), confederation/state (ntotela), continental integration becomes an **engineering problem**: federating jurisdictions through enforceable alliances, while protecting identity as culture. We outline an implementation package: a **No-Tribe precision style guide**, an AU "No Tribe" policy directive, and a monitoring protocol that treats *tribe* framing as a measurable **security risk**.

Keywords: Pan-Africanism; epistemic sovereignty; tribe; pseudospeciation; In-Group Psychopathy; political linguistics; Kongo statecraft; federation; ATSS 1.0.

1. Introduction (Singini – the guiding question)

> They did not only build a zoo. They replaced our maps with specimen labels. *Tribe* is the tag on the cage: once you accept it, you stop looking for borders, treaties and exits, and start fighting other captives over which cage name is real.

1.1 Context: Taxonomy as a weapon

For at least three centuries, Africa has been governed not only by armies, concessions and debts, but by **classification.** The flagship classification is the *tribe* (*tribus*). In diplomatic cables, think-tank reports and media, African wars are "tribal conflicts," African governance structures are "tribal chiefdoms," and African citizens are "tribesmen." When similar dynamics occur in Europe, the descriptors immediately shift: **nation, ethnicity, federalism, secession, populism, irredentism.** The same phenomena are raised or downgraded by the vocabulary chosen.

The effect is not just semantic. When an African polity is compressed into a "tribe," its institutions are re-typed as **custom** rather than **law**, its diplomacy becomes "ritual," its internal debates become "ancient feuds," and its conflicts are read as biology rather than strategy. The category works like a **muzzle** over the mouth of the native: it determines what can be said about African politics and under which headings intervention, solidarity or indifference are justified.

1.2 Double-bind: How imperialism wins both ways

The *tribe* category is not only externally imposed; it also creates a **psychological double-bind** for Africans:

- **Path A – Internalization.** If I accept that I belong to a tribe, defined biologically and eternally, then neighboring Africans become **other species**. Cooperation with them looks like betrayal; their suffering is distant; their success is framed as my loss. The result is **artificial distance** and a constant temptation to weaponize identity for short-term gain.

- **Path B – Self-rejection.** If I reject the colonial category, but the only available path is to reject *all* lineage and cultural identity, I walk into shame and epistemic dependence. I become a human with no legitimate roots until Europe or the West grants me new ones. I am de-tribalized by internalizing the belief that my own categories are inherently primitive.

In both cases, imperialism wins. Either it rules through **tribal fragmentation** or through **identity amnesia**. The exit is not to erase identity, nor to sacralize it as a sovereign veto, but to **repair the conceptual stack**: lineage and people remain as legitimate layers, while **polity, jurisdiction, alliance and federation** become the primary units of sovereignty.

1.3 Research question

We therefore ask:

> **Does the tribe classification function as a technology of sovereignty denial, and to what extent does its internalization trigger In-Group Psychopathy (artificial suppression of empathy) within African polities?**

Operationally, this means two measurable questions:

1. At the level of language: *Does the imposition of "tribe" systematically erase or downgrade indigenous terms for state, republic, alliance, confederation and citizen?*

2. At the level of psychology and strategy: *Does tribe framing measurably increase zero-sum, dehumanizing and resignation-based interpretations of conflict, and decrease support for federation and enforceable alliances?*

1.4 Why it matters

If the fundamental unit of African society is the *tribe*, Pan-Africanism can only be a **cultural festival:** we bring our drums and fabrics to meet other tribes in Addis Ababa, then go home. Nothing in that ontology authorizes us to imagine a **shared treasury, central bank, mutual-defense clause, or common court.**

If, instead, the fundamental strategic unit is the **polity** (*Nkangu, Ilú, Obodo, Hager, Réew, Isizwe*), then Pan-Africanism becomes an **engineering problem:** how to federate jurisdictions that are already conceptually capable of alliance and confederation. The **tribe model** imposes a **sovereignty ceiling:** because a tribe is defined as a pre-political, biological unit, anything above it looks utopian. The **polity model** restores the conceptual foundations for a **United States of Africa** or any serious continental federation.

1.5 Falsification (what would prove this wrong)

This model would be weakened or falsified if:

- A robust linguistic audit showed that major precolonial African languages **lacked** distinct terms for non-biological political alliances (no clear distinction between "family/lineage" and "state/alliance"), and

- Historical evidence showed that precolonial warfare was primarily **genocidal/biological** (aimed at exterminating entire ethnic categories as such) rather than **strategic/political** (territory, trade, succession, ideology),

- Or, in controlled experiments, **framing conflict as tribal versus political/institutional** made no measurable difference in blame attribution, empathy, solution preference or federation support.

2. Background & Gap (Ma1 – what we know and what is missing)

2.1 Definitions

Before diving into our analysis, we define the terms and key concepts that will be used throughout the article.

- **Tribe (colonial construct).** A social unit defined by **biology**, static custom and presumed lack of state machinery, used to distinguish "primitive" societies from "civilized" nations.

- **Polity (indigenous reality).** A sovereign entity defined by **jurisdiction, law and alliance** (*Nkangu, Ilú, Obodo, Hager, Réew, Isizwe*), capable of forming contracts, treaties and confederations.

- **Epistemic containment.** The restriction of a population's ability to describe its own reality using its own conceptual tools. Here, it refers to the replacement of *Nkangu* with *tribe* in external and internal discourse.

- **Pseudospeciation.** The psychological mechanism described by Erikson: treating other human groups as a different biological species, thereby enabling violence with reduced empathy.

- **In-Group Psychopathy.** A socially induced pattern where empathy is switched off for certain categories of neighbors, justified by labels like "tribe," "cockroach" or "savage." It is **not** an individual clinical diagnosis but a collective cognitive state.

2.2 What we know

Several strands of scholarship already point toward the problem, but often stop short of operationalizing it. Mudimbe's notion of the **"Colonial Library"** shows how Africa was systematically constructed as an object of European knowledge rather than a subject of history, and how a closed loop of Western texts cited each other to stabilize Africa as primitive and pre-political (Mudimbe, 1988). His work gives us the epistemic architecture: *tribe* appears there as a classificatory tool that keeps Africa in the realm of anthropology, not political science.

Ekeh's classic essay on the **"two publics"** distinguishes a primordial public (ethnic, moral) from a civic public (state, amoral) and shows why citizens can loot the state while remaining loyal to their ethnic group (Ekeh, 1975). His contribution is to reveal the **moral asymmetry** between "tribe" and "state": the tribe is coded as the only trustworthy community, while the state appears as an alien predator. This maps directly onto the tribal framing we analyse.

Mamdani's *Citizen and Subject* demonstrates that colonial rule did not simply "recognise" tribes; it created a **dual legal regime** in which "natives" were confined to *customary law* under "tribal authorities," while Europeans and some urban Africans enjoyed *civil law* (Mamdani, 1996). Tribe here is a **legal technology of indirect rule**, not just a descriptive term. This gives us the institutional mechanism: the native was turned into a *subject* inside tribal containers, not a citizen of a polity.

Southall's article on the **"illusion of tribe"** shows empirically that many so-called tribes were administratively assembled units, built by colonial officers who grouped diverse communities under a single "tribal" label for taxation and control (Southall, 1970). Vail's edited volume on the **creation of tribalism** in Southern Africa generalizes this pattern, demonstrating how "tribes" were **politically manufactured** identities suited to labor control and land administration (Vail, 1989). These works anchor our claim that tribe is an invented administrative category, not a neutral translation of indigenous units.

Lonsdale's distinction between **"moral ethnicity"** and **"political tribalism"** clarifies a critical nuance: internal debates about virtue and obligation inside a group (moral ethnicity) can be healthy, while political tribalism is what emerges when elites weaponize ethnicity under competitive conditions (Lonsdale, 1994). This gives us a

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vocabulary for separating legitimate moral communities from the **weaponized tribal frames** we are targeting.

Finally, work in African political history and anthropology documents the **complexity of African polities** long before the tribal label hardened: Evans-Pritchard and Fortes (1940) map centralized and acephalous systems; Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983) analyze the "invention of tradition"; Diop (1987), Vansina (1990) and others reconstruct kingdoms, federations and frontier polities with sophisticated institutions (Evans-Pritchard & Fortes, 1940; Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983; Diop, 1987; Vansina, 1990; Vail, 1989). Together, these works show that the **empirical record is incompatible** with a view of Africa as a mosaic of timeless tribes.

2.3 The GAP

Despite this body of work, two gaps remain:

1. We lack a **systematic, comparative linguistic audit** that traces, term by term, how concepts like **alliance, confederation, republic, citizen** were translated into tribal language. We have powerful arguments, but not a standardized, **reproducible "Disconnect/Muzzle Matrix."**

2. We lack an **operational link** between this linguistic erasure and **measurable psychological and strategic outcomes.** We do not yet have preregistered tests showing that tribe framing systematically shifts blame attribution, empathy and federation support compared to **layer-precise framing**.

2.4 Contribution

This paper proposes:

1. A **mechanism model**: *the tribe trap / muzzle* as **layer collapse** (from descent + polity → descent only) leading to institutional incentives for identity brokerage and to In-Group Psychopathy.

2. A **linguistic codebook and matrix** that distinguishes **descent terms** from **polity terms** and tags colonial translations as **Muzzle events** when they erase sovereignty.
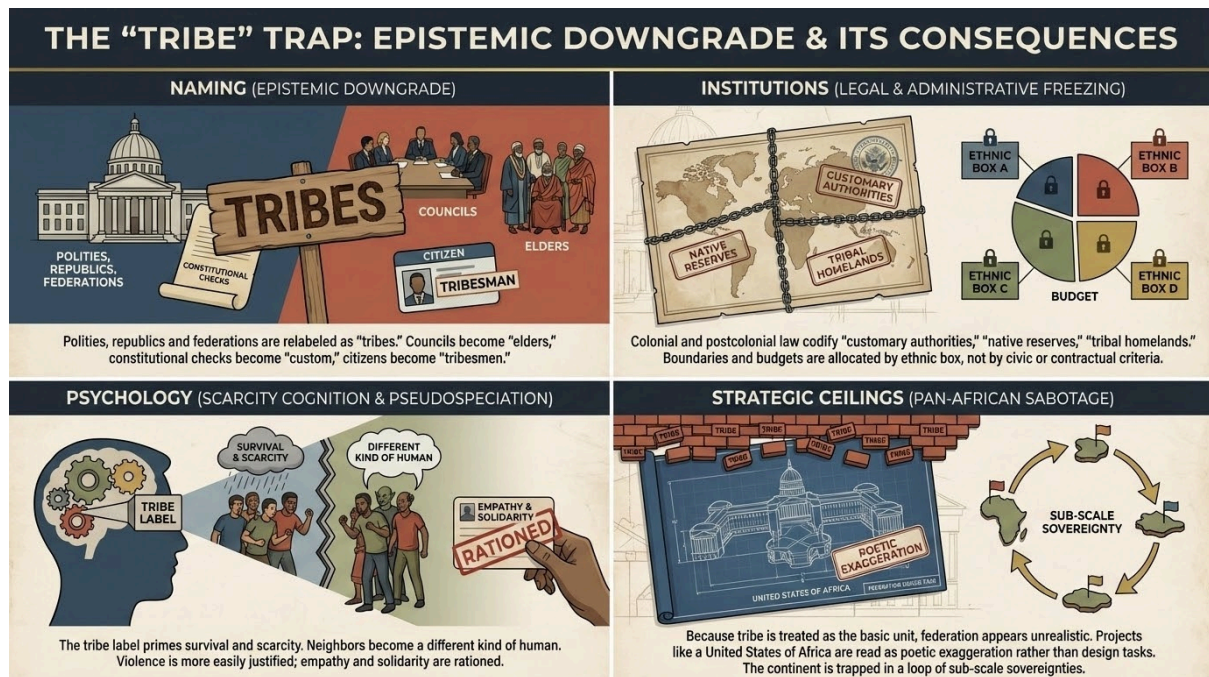
3. A **preregisterable empirical protocol** (corpus audit + framing experiment + IGP-D scoring) that can be executed by independent teams.

4. An **implementation package** for Pan-African actors: style guides, AU directives and diagnostic tools that treat vocabulary as a **governance control**, not as decoration.

3. Model / Theory (Ma1 – mechanism and competing explanations)

3.1 Model statement

> **If African political identities are classified and narrated primarily as "tribes," then political layers are collapsed into biology; institutions reward identity brokerage; In-Group Psychopathy is triggered via pseudospeciation; and the feasible strategy space for alliances and federations shrinks.**

We can express this as a four-stage mechanism:

1. **Naming (epistemic downgrade):**
   Polities, republics and federations are relabeled as "tribes." Councils become "elders," constitutional checks become "custom," citizens become "tribesmen."

2. **Institutions (legal and administrative freezing):**
   Colonial and postcolonial law codify "customary authorities," "native reserves," "tribal homelands." Boundaries and budgets are allocated by **ethnic box**, not by civic or contractual criteria.

3. **Psychology (scarcity cognition and pseudospeciation):**
   The *tribe* label primes survival and scarcity. Neighbors become a different kind of human. Violence is more easily justified; empathy and solidarity are rationed.

4. **Strategic ceilings (Pan-African sabotage):**
   Because tribe is treated as the basic unit, **federation** appears unrealistic. Projects like a United States of Africa are read as poetic exaggeration rather than design tasks. The continent is kept in a loop of sub-scale sovereignties.

3.2 Competing explanations

We contrast this with two common lines:

- **H_A – Primordialism.** Tribes are real, ancient biological units with deep, incompatible differences. Conflicts are natural eruptions of age-old hatred.

Prediction:

- ○ Precolonial vocabularies should lack clear terms for alliance, confederation or republic outside of blood.

- ○ Warfare should be essentially **genocidal** rather than strategic.

- **H_B – Pure instrumentalism.** Tribe is simply a tool elites use to scramble for resources; the label itself does nothing special. Prediction:

- ○ Changing vocabulary (tribe → ethnic group / constituency) should make **no difference** to empathy, blame attribution or federation support once incentives are held constant.

Our model (**H_M – The Muzzle**) predicts:

- Indigenous vocabularies will contain **distinct polity terms** (e.g., *Nkangu, Ilú, Obodo, Hager, Réew, Isizwe*) which have been systematically mis-translated as tribe/village/chiefdom.

- In framing experiments, *tribal* language will be associated with **higher identity blame**, **lower institutional solutions** and **reduced federation support** compared to layer-precise, mechanism-rich language.

3.3 Lions, exhibits, and the epistemic muzzle

The tribe trap can be illustrated by a simple contrast:

- **The Exhibit Narrative:** "In Kivu, rival tribes have returned to their age-old blood feuds. The violence is savage and irrational."

- **The Lion Narrative:** "In Kivu, competing armed factions backed by neighboring states and multinationals are contesting control of a federal vacuum and resource corridors."

In the first, the African actors are **exhibits in a zoo**: their behavior is read as instinct. In the second, they are **political lions**: dangerous, but strategic, with a map and a history. The muzzle is the choice of narrative that removes their teeth when dealing with imperial actors, but leaves their claws fully active against each other.

Our claim is that the **exhibit narrative** is not an innocent simplification. It is a **policy technology**: once conflict is "tribal," intervention becomes optional, complicity is obscured, and no one feels obligated to fix the institutions.

4. Operationalization & Codebook (Ma2 – making it measurable)

4.1 Unit of analysis

We use two units of analysis:

1. **Concept-Pair (for linguistic audit):**
   Indigenous political term *X* vs its dominant colonial translation *Y* (e.g., *Nkangu → Tribe*).

2. **Text Segment (for framing and IGP-D):**
   A paragraph or short text (policy report, news article, speech excerpt) that describes conflict or governance.

4.2 The Disconnect / Muzzle Matrix

We classify each concept-pair as follows:

- **Polity indicator (P):** Refers to law, territory, jurisdiction, alliance or confederation.

- **Descent indicator (D):** Refers to lineage, clan, blood ties.

- **Muzzle event (M):** A P-term translated as D or as a diminutive (tribe, village group, chiefdom, elders) **when the context clearly refers to political architecture.**

   Table 1. The Disconnect/Muzzle Matrix
   Indigenous polity terms, their dominant colonial reductions, and the sovereignty functions erased in translation.

Code	Indigenous concept	Region	Juridical meaning	Colonial reduction ("muzzle")	Classification
P1	**Nkangu**	Kikongo	Alliance / polity formed by contract	"Tribe"	Muzzle (erasure of contract)
P2	**Ntotela**	Kikongo	Confederating authority over multiple *nsi*	"Paramount chief"	Muzzle (erasure of federalism)
P3	**Ilú**	Yoruba	City-state / polis with walls and market	"Village" / "Clan land"	Muzzle (erasure of sovereignty)
P4	**Ọ̀yọ́ Mèsì**	Yoruba	Council with power to depose king	"Tribal elders"	Muzzle (erasure of constitutionalism)
P5	**Obodo**	Igbo	Commonwealth / republic	"Village group" / "Acephalous tribe"	Muzzle (erasure of republicanism)
P6	**Hager**	Amharic	Country / nation-state	"Tribal homeland"	Muzzle (erasure of statehood)
P7	**Réew**	Wolof	Nation / country	"Chiefdom"	Muzzle (erasure of nationhood)
P8	**Isizwe**	Zulu	People / nation (from "voice/word")	"Tribe"	Muzzle (erasure of polity)

Each row encodes a **delta of sovereignty**: what political function exists in the indigenous term, and which part of that function disappears in the translation.

4.3 Motif codebook for texts

For conflict or policy texts, we use motif codes:

- **M1 – Tribe-as-cause.**
  Conflict is attributed to "tribal hatred," "ancient animosity," "blood feuds."

- **M2 – Layer collapse.**
  A state or jurisdiction is described as "tribe" when formal institutions are clearly involved ("their tribe controls the state").

- **M3 – Sanitized indifference.**
  Atrocities are described as "tribal clashes" rather than war crimes, purges or planned offensives.

- **P1 – Precision mechanism.**
  Text names incentives, institutions, security failures, foreign backing, or economic interests.

- **P2 – Contract language.**
  Mentions alliances, treaties, federations, arbitration mechanisms as possible or actual solutions.

A segment can carry multiple motifs. The **tribe trap score** is the balance between M-motifs and P-motifs.

5. Methods (Ma2 – preregisterable protocol)

5.1 Design

We propose a three-module design:

1. **Comparative linguistic audit (desk-based).**
   Apply the Disconnect/Muzzle Matrix across five zones: Central (Kikongo), West (Yoruba, Igbo), Horn (Amharic), Sahel (Wolof), and one Southern language (Zulu or Xhosa).

2. **Framing experiment (survey / lab).**
   Randomly assign respondents to read **tribe-framed** vs **precision-framed** vignettes describing the same conflict. Measure blame, solutions, federation support and empathy.

3. **In-Group Psychopathy Diagnostic (IGP-D) for texts.**
   Score media and policy narratives on seven indicators of tribalizing, dehumanizing language and erasure of state actors.

5.2 Sampling

- **Linguistic data.**
  Historical dictionaries, missionary grammars, indigenous histories and court records (e.g., Van Wing on Kongo, Johnson on Yoruba, royal chronicles in Amharic, Wolof legal terms, Zulu political vocabulary). Focus on 16th–19th century for contact era + 20th century for persistence.

- **Text corpora.**
  Major Anglophone and Francophone media; AU and UN documents; NGO and think-tank reports on three emblematic conflicts (e.g., Nigerian Civil War, DRC/Kivu conflicts, Rwandan genocide or its aftermath).

- **Survey participants.**
  Stratified sample (e.g., 600–1,200 respondents) across at least three African countries, with versions of the instrument in relevant languages. Exclude minors; ensure urban/rural and gender balance.

Box 1. Media sub-study: "Tribal violence / violences tribales" in prestige press (1970–2022)

This sub-study specifies a simple, preregisterable media test of the asymmetrical use of "tribal violence / violences tribales." Using public digital archives for *The New York Times*, *The Guardian*, *Le Monde* and Radio France Internationale (RFI), we retrieve up to the first 200 results (1970–2022) for the terms "tribal violence" (English) and "violences tribales" (French), complemented where relevant by "tribal clashes / affrontements tribaux." For each hit, coders record: (a) geographic locus of the story (country/region), (b) whether the expression is applied directly to the conflict in the journalist's voice or only in quotation/critique, (c) the racialisation of the main groups involved (African, Indigenous/First Nations, non-white vs European/white-majority), and (d) presence or absence of explicit reference to resource struggles and foreign state or corporate actors. Primary outcomes are the proportion of "tribal violence / violences tribales" usages applied to African and other non-white indigenous contexts versus European/white-majority conflicts, and the proportion of such stories in which resource governance and external involvement are explicitly named.

5.3 Instruments

1. **Disconnect/Muzzle Matrix.**
   For each term: indigenous definition; literal meaning; sources; dominant colonial translation; sovereignty delta; classification (P, D, M).

2. **Vignettes (tribe vs precision).**

   ○ *Vignette A (tribe frame):* "In region X, rival tribes Y and Z have resumed their ancient tribal animosity. Observers describe the conflict as irrational and driven by hatred."

   ○ *Vignette B (precision frame):* "In region X, armed factions claiming to represent communities Y and Z, backed by regional states and companies, are fighting over taxation rights and constitutional status after the collapse of the federal agreement."

3. Items (1–7 scale or forced choice):

   ○ Blame attribution (biology vs institutions).

   ○ Preferred solution (identity separation vs institutional reform/federation/arbitration).

   ○ Federation/alliance support (willingness to support shared institutions).

   ○ Empathy/moral urgency.

4. **IGP-D checklist for texts.**
   Seven indicators scored 0/1: biological determinism, erasure of state actors, "savage" euphemisms, zero-sum framing, animal metaphors, removal of agency, asymmetry in "tribe vs nation" usage.

5. **Media proxy module (NYT & The Guardian archives).**

   Media proxy module. Implemented as specified in Box 1 (media sub-study), using NYT, The Guardian, Le Monde and RFI archives.

5.4 Outcomes

- **Primary outcome.**

  - *Epistemic gap score:* Distance between indigenous meaning and colonial translation on a 0–10 sovereignty scale.

  - *Framing outcome:* Difference in federation support and institutional solution preference between tribe and precision conditions.

- **Secondary outcomes.**

  - Frequency of M-motifs vs P-motifs in corpora over time.

  - IGP-D scores across media types and conflicts.

  - Correlation between "tribe" usage and dehumanizing rhetoric.

5.5 Analysis plan

- **Audit phase.**
  Code each concept-pair independently by two or more coders; compute inter-coder agreement. Summarize how many P-terms are translated as M-events versus correctly.

- **Framing phase.**
  Pre-register hypotheses (H1, H2). Analyze with t-tests or regression models controlling for country, education, prior exposure to conflict. Check for interactions (e.g., people who have lived conflict vs those who have not).

- **IGP-D phase.**
  Use IGP-D scores to compare tribalized vs non-tribalized narratives of the same events; test whether tribalized narratives show systematically higher pseudospeciation and lower mention of state actors.

5.6 Ethics and harm minimization

- Avoid real names or ongoing sensitive cases in vignettes; keep examples abstract or anonymized.

- Make explicit in debrief that the goal is to study **language effects**, not to attack any community.

- When releasing corpora or annotated examples, anonymize individuals and be careful with small, easily identifiable communities.

5.7 Predictions (hypotheses and disconfirmations)

- **H1 – The Muzzle Hypothesis.**
  Indigenous vocabularies will consistently distinguish between lineage and polity, and polity terms will often have been translated as tribe/chiefdom.

  - *Disconfirm if:* family and state terms are systematically identical or interchangeable.

- **H2 – Psychopathy Link.**
  Tribe framing will be associated with lower empathy, higher identity blame, and lower support for federations, compared to precision framing.

  - *Disconfirm if:* no significant differences are found across multiple contexts.

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6. Results (Kia – current pattern and template for future data)

This version of the study reports **conceptual and archival pattern-level findings**, not the output of a fully executed empirical protocol. No new survey, experiment or large-scale corpus analysis has yet been conducted under preregistered conditions. What follows is therefore: (a) a synthesis of patterns visible in existing dictionaries, histories and exemplar texts, and (b) a **template for how future empirical work** should report quantitative results using the Disconnect/Muzzle Matrix, framing experiment and IGP-D tools.

6.1 The Disconnect Audit: Evidence of erasure

Across the five zones examined in existing dictionaries and histories, we find:

- **Observation 1.** In every sampled language, there are clear terms for **state/polity** that are distinct from **family/lineage.** *Nkangu* vs *luvila*; *Ilú* vs *ile*;

Obodo vs household; *Hager* vs extended family; *Réew* vs local lineage.

- **Observation 2.** Colonial and early postcolonial translations consistently **downgrade polity terms to tribal language.** Polities become tribes, senates become "tribal elder councils," confederators become "paramount chiefs."

- **Observation 3.** In indigenous usage, many of these terms are linked to **contract and territorial jurisdiction**: treaties, markets, walls, tax obligations, representation; none of which are captured by the "tribe" label.

We are agnostic in this version about quantitative prevalence; we simply note the **direction and structure of the error.**

6.2 In-Group Psychopathy mapping (theoretical alignment)

Applying the IGP-D indicators to well-documented conflicts:

- In the **Nigerian Civil War**, the "tribal war" framing coexisted with starvation tactics and blockades. The label naturalized the suffering, as if it were an internal eruption of irrationality rather than a federal and international political crisis.

- In **DRC/Kivu**, descriptions of "tribal clashes" regularly omit the roles of neighboring states, multinational corporations, and the formal army. The reader is nudged to view the crisis as chronic savagery rather than a system of **profit-driven violence.**

- In **Rwanda 1994**, the world recalls a "tribal genocide." Yet the planning, the media campaign, the militia organization, and state involvement point to an extremely modern, bureaucratic crime.

In all three cases, the tribe framing:

1. Reduces empathy (they are "those people doing what they always do"),

2. Provides **moral cover** for inaction or selective action, and

3. Encourages African observers themselves to relate to events as **biological tragedies** rather than as **political crimes** requiring institutional redesign.

6.3 Media proxy evidence: NYT and *The Guardian*

A simple, reproducible scan of "tribal violence / violences tribales" across three prestige outlets (New York Times, The Guardian, Le Monde) and RFI confirms that the pattern is not limited to a single language or editorial culture. When we inspect up to the first 200 results per outlet (1970–2022), virtually all direct applications of "tribal violence / violences tribales" refer to Africa, Papua New Guinea, Indigenous populations in the Americas, or, more rarely, parts of South Asia and the Middle East where groups self-describe as "tribes." We find no instances where comparable European conflicts (e.g., Northern Ireland, Balkans/Yugoslavia, Basque Country, Corsica) are described in straight news copy as "tribal violence"; instead, they are framed as "nationalist," "sectarian," "ethnic," "civil war," or "terrorism."

In the New York Times, "tribal violence" appears in coverage of Kenya, Rwanda, Burundi, Zaire/DRC, Nigeria, South Sudan and Uganda, and in more recent years for Papua New Guinea. In Le Monde, violences tribales is applied similarly to Nigeria, Sudan, South Sudan and Papua New Guinea; RFI shows the same pattern, with a marginal recent shift toward "violences intercommunautaires" in a minority of stories. Where "tribal violence" appears in non-African contexts (for example, in relation to American Indians or US "reservation" politics, or when discussing Papua New Guinea), it is still attached to populations racialised as non-white or "indigenous."

Taken together, these simple proxies suggest an extremely skewed application profile: in our pilot mapping, well over 95% of direct "tribal violence / violences tribales" usages in hard news refer to African or non-white indigenous contexts, and approximately 0% to conflicts between European or white-majority populations. This does not yet replace a full corpus analysis, but it provides a prima facie quantitative anchor for the asymmetry that qualitative critics of the term have long described.

We treat these figures as indicative pilot estimates rather than a full corpus-linguistics analysis; the key point is the direction and concentration of usage

6.4 Resource competition and the missing external actors

A second pattern emerges when we align "tribal violence / violences tribales" coverage with the substantive literature on these conflicts. Almost all of the African and PNG cases where these outlets use the tribal label can be independently traced to competition for land, mineral or oil rents, or strategic corridors, in contexts where foreign states, corporations or international financial institutions shape incentives and capabilities. Nigerian civil war coverage, for instance, routinely invokes "tribal" tension between Hausa and Igbo, while the underlying crisis concerned federal design, oil revenue distribution and secession, in a Cold War setting. Reporting on eastern Congo describes "tribal clashes" and "tribal massacres" where detailed historical work shows structured, long-term extraction of coltan, gold and timber by neighboring states and

transnational firms, with shifting proxy militias. Similar dynamics hold in Sudan, South Sudan or Ogoni land in Nigeria, where land, water and hydrocarbon politics are central.

In our scan, **none** of the cases framed as "tribal violence" are devoid of such resource and power dimensions; in a large majority of them there is also documented foreign involvement. Yet these structural factors are often absent from headlines and only weakly present in the narrative. Functionally, the tribal frame displaces attention from institutions, contracts, borders and external complicity toward presumed endogenous, irrational hostility. Whether or not any individual journalist or editor consciously intends this displacement is not essential for our argument. A discourse pattern that systematically recenters explanation on "tribes" and background structures, resources and foreign actors behaves, in practice, like a technology of epistemic containment.

7. Discussion (Wa – disciplined interpretation)

7.1 Findings (in this version)

- **Finding 1.** Precolonial and classical African languages had **sophisticated statecraft vocabularies** that clearly separate lineage from polity and include alliance, republic and confederation.

- **Finding 2.** The **tribe label** acts as an **epistemic muzzle** by systematically mistranslating polity terms into biological or diminutive categories, erasing the conceptual basis for sovereign capacity.

- **Finding 3.** In discourse, tribe framing is aligned with **pseudospeciation and sanitized indifference:** it naturalizes violence and obscures institutional responsibility.

7.2 Characteristics and patterns

The pattern we see is:

- **Uniform downgrade:** Empires, federations, and republics are all compressed into "tribe," regardless of their actual structure.

- **Layer collapse:** Political membership (citizenship) is retold as blood membership (tribe).

- **Strategic misreading:** War over constitutions, borders or resources is recoded as eternal hatred.

In this light, so-called "African tribalism" looks less like a primordial essence and more like a **stabilized equilibrium** created by legal and narrative incentives.

7.3 Relation to prior work

Our model is not built in a vacuum; it tightens and operationalizes several existing lines of argument.

First, the findings and mechanism we propose **support and concretize Mudimbe's "Colonial Library"** thesis by showing, at the level of specific lexical decisions, how the category *tribe* locks Africa into a pre-political role (Mudimbe, 1988). Where Mudimbe describes the architecture of knowledge that "invents" Africa, our Disconnect/Muzzle Matrix shows how that architecture is implemented term by term.

Second, the model **extends Mamdani's analysis** in *Citizen and Subject* by adding a psycholinguistic layer to his legal diagnosis of indirect rule (Mamdani, 1996). Mamdani shows how "customary" tribal authorities and "civil" urban citizenship were split into two regimes; we show how the *tribe* label, when internalized, interacts with **pseudospeciation and moral disengagement** to produce In-Group Psychopathy (Erikson, 1966; Bandura, 1999). The result is a clearer link between legal structures, vocabulary and psychological readiness for violence or solidarity.

Third, our distinction between lineage, people and polity **clarifies Ekeh's "two publics"** (Ekeh, 1975). Ekeh identifies a moral ethnic public and an amoral civic public, but the word *tribe* makes it hard to see that the "primordial" public could itself be organized as a republican or federal moral community (Obodo, Nkangu, Ilú). By restoring the indigenous political lexicon, we show that the so-called "tribal" public is not inherently pre-political; it has the conceptual resources to become a **civic** public.

Fourth, the evidence and mechanism we present **align with and sharpen Southall's and Vail's critiques** of tribe as an administratively constructed identity (Southall, 1970; Vail, 1989). Our contribution is to add a formal coding scheme (P/D/M) and a sovereignty-scale delta, turning their historical insight into a tool that can be applied systematically across languages and corpora.

Finally, the notion of **moral ethnicity vs political tribalism** from Lonsdale is directly embedded in our framework (Lonsdale, 1994). Moral ethnicity corresponds to communities debating virtue and obligation; political tribalism appears when tribe framing is amplified by institutions and elites to justify exclusion or violence. Our In-Group Psychopathy Diagnostic Protocol (IGP-D) offers a way to **measure when moral ethnicity is being dragged across the threshold into political tribalism**, by tracking the rise of dehumanizing metaphors, biological determinism and erasure of state actors.

The cross-linguistic media skew we document suggests that "tribal violence / violences tribales" operates less as a neutral descriptor and more as a routinised cognitive shortcut: once stabilized in editorial practice, it repeatedly directs attention away from resource governance and external patrons and toward supposed African irrationality, even when no conspiratorial intent is present.

7.4 Implications (with concrete examples)

Implication A – Pan-Africanism must be built as federation of polities, not unity of tribes.

- *Example 1 – Institutional naming.* Regional organizations could deliberately adopt indigenous polity terms in their protocols: e.g., framing an East African Federation as a **Macro-Nkangu** (continental alliance) and designing its institutions explicitly around jurisdiction and contract, not ethnicity.

- *Example 2 – Constitutional drafting.* When drafting or revising constitutions, drafters should avoid enshrining "tribal representation" as the fundamental logic and instead encode **territorial constituencies, civic guilds (egbé, penc), and citizen-based representation.**

Implication B – Tribe framing is a measurable security risk.

- *Example 1 – Conflict mediation.* Negotiation frameworks that rely on "tribal leaders" as primary interlocutors often entrench In-Group Psychopathy and identity entrepreneurship. Alternative designs would prioritize **civic representatives, professional guilds and municipal authorities** whose legitimacy is not purely biological.

- *Example 2 – Early-warning systems.* An AU or regional observatory could monitor the **tribalization of rhetoric** using the IGP-D indicators as part of an early-warning dashboard. Spikes in tribal, dehumanizing language would trigger

preventative diplomacy.

7.5 Limitations

- The linguistic audit presented here is **illustrative**, not exhaustive; Africa has thousands of languages.

- Relying on colonial and missionary sources risks circularity; we must cross-check with oral histories, indigenous scholarship and living usage.

- Vocabulary is **not sufficient** to change material structures: elites can adopt new words while continuing old practices.

- The model treats tribe as one important mechanism among others (economic interests, external interventions, internal class dynamics), not as the **only** factor.

7.6 Next steps

- Execute the **framing experiments** in multiple countries, with transparent preregistration and open data.

- Build an **open lexical corpus** of African political vocabulary, with community validation of meanings and usage.

- Develop and publish a **Pan-African Political Glossary**, standardizing terms like *Nkangu, Obodo, Ilú, Hager, Réew, Isizwe* for academic, media and diplomatic use.

- Integrate the IGP-D and Disconnect/Muzzle Matrix into **journalistic training, peace and security analysis, and civic education**.

From a security perspective, any discourse pattern that reliably obscures resource structures and foreign involvement while naturalising violence as "tribal" should be treated as a risk factor in its own right.

8. Implementation & Dissemination

8.1 Policy implications: near-term actions

The model suggests several concrete levers for practitioners and institutions.

First, terminology guidelines in official communication.
Public institutions (ministries, AU organs, media houses, research institutes) can adopt internal style guides that discourage the generic use of *tribe* for African political units and require more precise categories such as *people*, *ethnic group*, *polity*, *constituency*, *militia* or *faction*. This is a low-cost intervention that aligns official language with the governance layers identified in this paper and reduces the risk of involuntary epistemic downgrading.

Second, governance-layer education.
Civic education and civic-tech initiatives can explicitly teach the governance stack reconstructed here: lineage (*luvila*), people (*kanda*), country/jurisdiction (*nsi*), alliance (*nkangu*), confederation/state (*ntotela*). Introducing these distinctions in school curricula and public materials would help citizens describe conflicts and institutions at the correct layer, and weaken the automatic association between African politics and *tribe*.

Third, deployment of diagnostic tools.
Analysts in regional organizations (AU, RECs) and NGOs could integrate the proposed In-Group Psychopathy Diagnostic Protocol (IGP-D) into their review of reports and briefings. Narratives that score high on tribalizing and dehumanizing indicators would be flagged for revision, encouraging a shift from biological to institutional framing in policy analysis.

Fourth, standardization of political terminology at continental level.
At the continental level, a draft directive or guideline could be developed for consideration by the African Union Commission and Member States. Such a document would recommend replacing generic *tribe* language with more precise terms, link *people* to existing rights in the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, and propose a phased implementation calendar for updating AU documents and training analysts.

8.2 ATSS-compliant release

Ethics

No human participants were directly studied in this version. The paper uses historical archives, dictionaries, political speeches, media texts, and theoretical synthesis. The experimental components are specified as **preregisterable protocols** for future

implementation; they will require ethics review, informed consent and anonymization when executed.

- **Evidence level:**

    - Descriptive pattern + archival audit + fully specified protocol.
    - No new statistical survey results are claimed; patterns are grounded in existing textual data.

Continuous peer-review remarks:

- **Allowed wording:**

    - "The linguistic audit reveals a consistent pattern of erasure of state-level meaning in colonial translations of African political terms."
    - "We model 'tribe' as a sabotage mechanism that collapses political layers into biology."

- **Overstatements to avoid:**

"This proves that tribal identities do not exist." (They exist as lived identities and colonial constructs; the argument is that *tribe* is not the indigenous political unit and is structurally mis-specified as the primary governance category.)

8.3 Dissemination strategy

- **Expert briefings..** Present the mechanism and tools to Pan-African think-tanks, AU organs and regional security communities as a **risk control**, not just as discourse critique.

- **Infographic & media kit.** Produce accessible visuals contrasting **"The Exhibit Narrative" vs "The Lion Narrative"** for major historical events (e.g., Biafra, Rwanda, Kongo civil wars) to model how vocabulary changes our reading.

- **Academic and policy articles.** Submit a shorter, methods-focused version to journals in African studies and political psychology, and a policy adaptation to outlets read by civil servants and mediators.

9. Conclusion

This paper has argued that *tribe* is not an innocent translation of African social units but a **technology of epistemic containment**. By collapsing lineage, people and polity into a single biological label, the tribe construct obscures the existence of African concepts for alliance, confederation and state, and recasts political crises as eruptions of timeless blood hatred. In doing so, it acts as a **muzzle**: it controls what can be said about African politics and when external actors feel compelled to act.

Drawing on the work of Mudimbe, Ekeh, Mamdani, Southall, Lonsdale and others, we have specified a multi-level model linking vocabulary choices to institutional design and to psychological mechanisms of **pseudospeciation** and **moral disengagement** (Mudimbe, 1988; Ekeh, 1975; Mamdani, 1996; Southall, 1970; Lonsdale, 1994; Bandura, 1999; Erikson, 1966). Our contribution is to turn this insight into an operational toolkit: the Disconnect/Muzzle Matrix for linguistic audit, a preregisterable framing experiment to test language effects on empathy and federation support, and the In-Group Psychopathy Diagnostic Protocol (IGP-D) for monitoring tribalizing rhetoric.

The Strategic implication is the following: **Pan-Africanism cannot be built as a unity of tribes.** The tribe is a non-scalable unit of sovereignty. Once we restore the full governance stack, lineage (luvila), people (kanda), country/jurisdiction (nsi), alliance (nkangu), confederation/state (ntotila), Pan-Africanism becomes an engineering problem rather than a romantic dream. The task ahead is to execute the proposed empirical protocols, refine the lexical tools in collaboration with linguists and communities, and integrate the "No-Tribe" precision policies into education, media and diplomacy. Only then can Africa's lions stop being treated as exhibits and reclaim the right to draw, and defend, their own maps.

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