

Lonsdale, John; “Construction of Ethnic Patriotisms in Africa: The Role of Integration with Market Economy”

(abstract)

This paper uses the economic and social history of three regions of the continent to illustrate the many contrasting relationships between ethnicity and market economy. It examines the social and cultural effects of the fundamental changes in Africa's markets from pre-colonial times until today.

It concludes that there is no predetermined relationship between market and group identity or behavior. In the past, ethnic diaspora as well as ethnic differences have provided vehicles of commercial trust and trade protection. Markets also bring about new inequalities.

The paper uses two terms to describe the internal and external behavior of people within and between ethnic groups in Africa. *Moral Ethnicity* describes the civic obligation between people of unequal social status but who conceive of themselves as sharing the same moral community. Changing markets cause patriotic argument about how such obligation can be reinterpreted. *Political Tribalism*, a form of external patriotism, describes the behaviors of a people standing behind their 'big man' political patron as one people, despite the disputes that may occur within the group. Once political tribalism, like xenophobic nationalism, is firmly established in a polity, it cannot be eradicated from any body politic without a long and costly peace process.

One cannot consider in isolation the relationship between ethnic patriotism and market economy. African ethnic identity has itself never been a root cause of any particular historical process, whether that be relative economic decline in recent years, poor governance, or even genocide. Furthermore changing markets cannot be considered to be the sole mover of events. Inequalities in political power must also be taken into account.