

Robinson

The Political Logic of Cultural Revival

Ethnic Visibility, Linked Fate, and Electoral Politics in Africa

Since 2008, prominent members of the Lhomwe ethnic group - a large but politically marginalized community in Malawi - have waged an aggressive campaign to revive their lost cultural heritage, including their language, names, foods, and dances. Existing research has linked such processes of "inventing tradition" to the strategic actions of political elites who benefit from mobilizing members of marginalized ethnic communities for political ends. Yet, because existing research has focused primarily on elite incentives, we know less about how such elite-led efforts translate into lasting cultural change and active political support among regular people. The Political Logic of Cultural Revival, through an in-depth study of the Lhomwe revival, argues that political elites invest in such revivals when doing so will bear political returns via increased ethnic visibility. Ethnopolitical leaders benefit from having the identity of their group members easily visible to others, because such visibility ties those individuals' fate to that of the larger group. Elite-led cultural revivals serve as a powerful tool for reifying distinctive group characteristics and incentivizing the adoption of related ethnic markers by (1) engendering demand for cultural distinctiveness by stoking group-based pride and (2) supplying the means to achieve it through explicit cultural instruction. Using a plethora of original data sources, The Political Logic of Cultural Revival provides a deep description of the (re)invention of a lost culture, as well as a general theory about how ethnic visibility is related to the practice of ethnic politics. Oxford Studies in African Politics and International Relations is a series for scholars and students working on African politics and International Relations and related disciplines. Volumes concentrate on contemporary developments in African political science, political economy, and International Relations, such as electoral politics, democratization, decentralization, gender and political representation, the political impact of natural resources, the dynamics and consequences of conflict, comparative political thought, and the nature of the continent's engagement with the East and West. Comparative and mixed methods work is particularly encouraged, as is interdisciplinary research and work that considers ethical issues relating to the study of Africa. Case studies are welcomed but should demonstrate the broader theoretical and empirical implications of the study and its wider relevance to contemporary debates. The focus of the series is on sub-Saharan Africa, although proposals that explain how the region engages with North Africa and other parts of the world are of interest. Series Editors: Nic Cheeseman (University of Birmingham), Peace Medie (University of Bristol), and Ricardo Soares de Oliveira (University of Oxford).

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