

THE GRACE UZOMA OKONKWO FOUNDATION

In collaboration with

Department of English and Literary Studies,
University of Nigeria, Nsukka

&

Department of English Language and Literature,
Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, Igbariam

Keynote speaker:



Prof. Chinedu Nebo, Vice
Chancellor, University of Nigeria,
Nsukka, Anambra State

Guest speaker:



Prof. Jacob K. Olupona,
Chair and Professor of
African and African American
Studies, Harvard University

Lead paper presenter:



Professor Saša Božić,
Department of Sociology,
University of Zadar, Croatia

Invites scholars and the public to the

hybrid international conference:

Theme:

ETHNICITY, TRIBE AND THE QUEST FOR COHESION IN AFRICAN STATES: MULTIDISCIPLINARY REFLECTIONS

19-21 February 2025

Princess Alexandra Auditorium,
University of Nigeria, Nsukka

The meaning, scope, and implications of ethnicity and tribe are the subjects of scholarly debates. In the African experience, they are sometimes interchanged with words like “race” and “nation,” and used to refer to a group identity based on one or several of the following indices: a common history, culture, language, and so on. Despite their loose applications in everyday contexts, scholars try to maintain the distinctions between these slippery concepts, showing their evolution and scope. For instance, “while one formerly spoke of ‘tribes’, the term ‘ethnic group’ is nowadays much more common” and ethnicity seems “a wider concept” (Eriksen, 2010). Because these two concepts are ambiguous, we welcome critical attempts to understand them better in relation to African peculiarities.

Whatever the case, ethnic and tribal identities appear to be subjects of constant (re)negotiations informed by various motivations. Colonial and political factors transformed ethnic and identarian relations amongst African peoples in many ways: close “tribal” groups bonding under one ethnic identity or declaring themselves distinct from the rest, or new colonial/political boundaries separating

Lead paper presenter:



Comrade Hamzat B. Lawal,
Chief Executive Officer,
Connected Development
(CODE), Abuja, FCT

Special Guest of Honour:

Prof. Aloysius-Michaels Okolie, Vice Chancellor,
Enugu State University of
Science and Technology
(ESUT), Agbani, Enugu
State

Chief Hosts:

Prof. Polycarp E. Chigbu,
Acting Vice Chancellor,
University of Nigeria,
Nsukka.

Prof. Kate Omenugha,
Acting Vice Chancellor,
Chukwuemeka Odumegwu
Ojukwu University, Igbariam,
Anambra State

Host and Convener of Conference:

Prof. Florence O. Orabueze, Director, Institute
of Maritime Studies,
University of Nigeria, Enugu
Campus, and Chairman of
Board of Trustees, The
Grace Uzoma Okonkwo
Foundation

ethnic kins from each other. Again, with the new socio-economic structures introduced via colonialism, “the localized, broad-based, low-risk, self-sustaining subsistence activities [of African groups] gave way to high-risk, stratifying competition for state power and scarce resources, a zero-sum conflict of identities based on tribalism or ethnicity” (Deng, 1997). After colonialism, the efforts of African states to maintain inherited colonial boundaries have exacerbated ethnic conflict and tribal animosities, rendering the so-called unity in these countries fragile and precarious. From the Nigerian Civil War of 1967-70, the Rwanda genocide of 1994, the Darfur crises in Sudan, and some recent crises in Africa, “the primary fault line of confrontation is one of ethnic distinctions” (Cordell and Wolff, 2010). However, despite these ethnically inflected dark events in African history, 21st-century Africa is still challenged by ethnicism and tribalism. 21st-century political rhetoric in Africa shows that “ethnicity is clearly a resource for political manipulation and entrepreneurship” (Deng, 1997), and desperate politicians milk it for selfish reasons. Because of people's passionate connection to their tribe or ethnicity, appeal to either is a powerful way of mobilizing groups for various reasons and setting up a we-versus-them binary that resultantly chafes the threads of national cohesion. For instance, a country like Nigeria is still suffering from the ethnic and tribal rhetoric/violence that dotted its 2023 presidential elections.

Because of their immanence in 21st-century conversations around social cohesion in African states, an all-level interrogation of the concepts in relation to African realities is necessary at this time. We invite scholars to reflect on tribe and ethnicity in Africa from their peculiar disciplinary lenses, positionalities, and methodologies. What is the texture of tribe and ethnicity in Africa today? Should African countries deemphasize tribe and ethnicity in socio-political organizations? How can we repurpose the galvanizing power of tribal appeal and ethnic loyalty to serve useful national objectives? For instance, Gloria Anzaldúa proposes the term “new tribalism” which means a “social identity that could motivate subordinated communities to work together in coalition” (2012). Are there examples of these *new tribalisms* in Africa? What challenges have confronted them? Are there instances of the inversion of new tribalism's goal, like oppressive groups forming a coalition to keep subordinated communities repressed and oppressed? What can the fields of sociology, anthropology, archeology, mass/new media, languages, philosophy, education, performing arts/representational discourses, etc teach us about Africa's experience with ethnicity and tribe? How can their engagements with these concepts “help create tolerance and understanding between citizens, thereby leading to social cohesion” (Holm, Jarrick, and Scott, 2015)? Our questions are not limited to the above, and so we invite scholars and stakeholders to submit abstracts that fall within the subthemes below or the overarching theme above.

Subthemes

- Politics, tribe, and ethnicity in Africa
- Ethnic diversity and social cohesion in Africa
- Tribal rationality, philosophy, and ethnicity
- Language, and the discourse of tribe and ethnicity
- New/mass media and the discourse/representation of tribe and ethnicity
- The economics of tribal and ethnic conflicts in Africa
- Tribal and ethnic conflicts in numbers: insights from statistics

Co-Hosts:

Prof. Stella Okoye-Ugwu,
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Ethnicity and tribe in African literature, music, and film
Pedagogy, tribe, and ethnicity in Africa
The sociology of tribe and ethnicity in contemporary Africa
The geography of tribe and ethnicity: boundary maintenance and transcendence
Historicizing tribe and ethnicity in Africa: from past to present
Domination, erasure, invisibility, and other anxieties in African minority discourse
Land and water rights in ethnic conflicts in Africa
The markers of tribe and ethnicity: the politics of material and visual cultures
Social justice issues in tribal and ethnic tensions/conflicts in Africa
Tribe, ethnicity, and the fine/applied arts
Ethnic Supremacy, inclusivity, & marginalization Ethnicism, nepotism, laws and policies in Africa
Nationalism, tribe, and ethnicity in Africa
Ethnicity, ethnic conflicts and migration
Ethnicity, coastal states and resource control
Science, tribal cosmology, and herbal medicine

PARTICIPATION

To participate, send an abstract of not more than 250 words, with at least four keywords, in Microsoft Word format, to graceuzomaokonkwofoundation@unn.edu.ng The submission should include your full name, institutional affiliation, e-mail and telephone contacts, and should be sent as an e-mail attachment, not later than the absolute deadline, 9 February 2025.

It is a hybrid conference and links for virtual presentations will be sent near the time. The opening ceremony takes place Wednesday, 19 February 2025, at Princess Alexandra Auditorium, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, at 10:00am prompt. Parallel Paper presentations take place on Thursday, 20 February 2025.

Well-researched papers will be considered for publication in the foundation's peer-reviewed journal, *Ogbazuluobodo: University of Nigeria Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies*

Conference Fee: Participants within Nigeria: **N15,000**;
Foreign Participants: **\$50**; to be paid into:

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