ETHNOS OBLIGE

THEORY AND EVIDENCE

BANIYELME D. ZOOGAH

Ethnos Oblige

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Ethnos Oblige: Theory and Evidence

BY

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Dedicated to my spouse (Aleshia S. Zoogah) and
children (Coniah A. Zoogah and Jalen Baniyelme Cloud Zoogah).
Their love shielded me from life's thorns.

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List of Abbreviations

ADUM	Acquisition, Development, Utilization, and Maintenance
CAB	Cognitive, Affective, Behavioral system
KNUST	Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology
KSAOs	Knowledge, Skills, Abilities and Other characteristics
NDC	National Democratic Congress
UCC	University of Cape Coast
UEP	Understand, Explain, and Predict functions of science
UHAS	University of Health and Allied Sciences

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About the Authors

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Foreword

Social psychological research has demonstrated that the answer to the question, "Who am I?" is strongly influenced by the social groups one belongs to in a society. Pioneering social psychologist Henri Tajfel (1974)[1] captured this phenomenon in his theory of social identity. Social identity refers to an individual's knowledge of belonging to certain social groups that hold some emotional and value significance for him or her. Most interpretations of social identity theory dwell on its prediction of negative in-group/out-group dynamics while overlooking its positive effects. Belonging to and identifying with a social group enhances one's self-esteem and contributes to a positive identity. It can also provide collective solidarity among members of a social group.

Research has also shown that the ethnic group one belongs can significantly affect how one answers the question. Tribes are a major social identity group for people in Africa because of the size and diversity of ethnic groups. However, the answer to "Who am I?" is particularly complicated for people in Africa because of the long history of the denigration of the continent and negative portrayal of African ethnic groups as savage, uneducated tribes hopelessly mired in tribal conflict. The default conclusion is that belonging to an ethnic group or tribe is not desirable or beneficial. *Ethnos Oblige: Theory and Evidence* challenges this conclusion by making a convincing case of the benefits of tribal or ethnic identity in Africa. Zoogah achieves this goal by introducing the concept of ethnic obligation. Ethnic obligation is a cultural norm that regulates the interactions of ethnic group members with one another and with outsiders. A core element is the mutual obligation of members to be benevolent and agentic in their dealings with one another.

Ethnos Oblige: Theory and Evidence systematically builds a case for the benefits of tribes by first drawing upon history to understand the ontology of tribes and the effects of colonialism on the tribal structure of the continent. According to Zoogah, what seems to be missed by those who hold negative views about tribes is that precolonial Africa was thriving economically and socially, well on its way to modernity before the brutal intrusion of colonialism. Colonizers disrupted Africa's development, reconfigured tribal micro-nations (tribes) replacing them with arbitrary macro-nations, discouraged tribal affiliations, and fueled

[1]Tajfel, H. (1974). Social identity and intergroup behaviour. *Social Science Information, 13*(2), 65–93.

tribal conflict to achieve their goals. Thus, much of the contemporary ethnic conflict in Africa today has its roots in colonial practices. Zoogah also points to the survival of tribal identities among Africans despite postindependence efforts to suppress them in the pursuit of nation-building. In fact, many have argued that tribes hinder nation-building in Africa and contribute to interethnic conflict and economic stagnation. It is this negativity about tribes and ethnic groups in Africa that *Ethnos Oblige*: *Theory and Evidence* tackles head-on.

Building upon the ontological and colonial history of tribes in Africa, Zoogah then shares the results of empirical research that tests the effects of tribes on individuals and organizations. What makes his empirical work so convincing is that he does not posit a simple linear relationship between tribes and positive outcomes. Instead, he explores the antecedents, contingencies, and dynamics of the relationship. This careful empirical work lays the foundation for recommendations on how obligations of individuals to their tribes or ethnic groups determine positive (and negative) outcomes for themselves, others, organizations, and ultimately society.

Ethnos Oblige: Theory and Evidence makes an original and influential contribution to building the insufficient knowledge about ethnic group behavior in Africa and its importance to employee behavior and building effective organizations in Africa. This book is foundational reading for anyone interested in making contributions to building management theory relevant to Africa. However, ethnic obligation is also relevant to other parts of the world where ethnic groups are salient. Thus, this book is an invaluable resource for understanding how leaders and managers can leverage strong ethnic affiliations to enhance individual, group, organizational, and national performance beyond the default assumption of adverse effects. It also provides a research agenda for further exploration of ethnicity in Africa and the world.

Stella M. Nkomo
Pretoria, South Africa

Preface

The extant view of the concept of tribe and ethnicity is negative. It has been devalued so much that it is used derogatively and in an ascribed manner. One reason is the increasing drive to promote the macro-nation (i.e., state) over the micro-nation (i.e., tribe or ethnic group). Another reason or disguise is the so-called enlightenment which advocates for fair treatment toward all others rather than specifically toward ethnic group members. I believe the denigration of the concept of tribe is wrong, ill-informed, and misunderstood. My belief fits with others who have advocated a positive view of ethnicity and the right of micro-nations. It is wrong because the negative attributes are by individuals who lack the ecological validity (they have either not lived in tribes or being members of tribes). They are ill-informed because their views are etic. They are outsiders who observe the tribe and make attributions that have no validity. They are misunderstood because their views are not based on nomological essence. The writers seem not to have clear conception of what being a tribal member entails or means. To disparage, denigrate, or ask for its abolishment is to ask a Brit not to be a Brit or Chinese not to be a Chinese or a Jew not to be a Jew or a Japanese not to be a Japanese. Being a Brit, Chinese, Jew, Japanese, etc. is ontological. It comes with obligations.

The purpose of this book therefore is to help improve that understanding. I am discussing how obligations of individuals to their tribes or ethnic groups determine positive (and negative) outcomes to those individuals, their peers, departments, organizations, and even society. One of the functions of science is to explain phenomena. In that regard, explaining ethnic obligation helps us to understand the phenomena particularly in contexts with salient ethnicities. When scholars study the drivers, antecedents, and explanatory factors undergirding ethnic obligations, they generate insight for managers to establish mechanisms that either magnify the positive effects or control the negative effects. Insight from studies of the dynamics of ethnic obligation is also helpful to organizations. Last, effect studies enable managers to sustain the factors or mechanisms that led to the positive outcomes or muffled the negative ones.

So, my goal for this book is twofold. First, I want to encourage more research in ethnic obligation. Scholars in societies with salient ethnicities have a responsibility to improve their societies by examining phenomena operating therein. Through scientific studies, they can uncover insight that helps them to defend, promote, uphold, or support their ontology. It becomes an opportunity for them to rebuff destructive criticisms particularly by those who do not understand

tribes or ethnic groups. Second, I want to argue that managers in contexts with salient ethnicities have to dive into the deepest recesses of their creative genius to device operational and strategic mechanisms that make ethnicity beneficial. The ability of managers to understand, explain, and predict ethnic obligation enables them to effectively manage the behaviors of their employees. Both goals are functional. For both scholars and managers, tribal affiliation should not be "the elephant in the room" or the "hundred-pound gorilla." There is nothing to be ashamed about being a member of a tribe. And there is nothing wrong with being a member of a tribe. What is wrong is weaponizing the tribe to do evil. This book is not intended to be a poison-spear in the quiver of scholars or managers of the latter category. Instead, it is to be a recipe for progress; a means to lock in the benefits of tribal affiliation.

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[2]The First President of Kenya. See his book, *Facing Mount Kenya* (p. 306), for this admonishment.