

12-1-2018

Gunther Schlee and Alexander Horstmann. Difference and Sameness as Modes of Integration: Anthropological Perspectives on Ethnicity and Religion. New York: Berghahn, 2018.

Tarique Niazi Ph.D.

University of Wisconsin - Eau Claire, niazit@uwec.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.lindenwood.edu/jigs>



Part of the [Anthropology Commons](#), [Critical and Cultural Studies Commons](#), [Environmental Studies Commons](#), and the [Sociology Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Niazi, Tarique Ph.D. (2018) "Gunther Schlee and Alexander Horstmann. Difference and Sameness as Modes of Integration: Anthropological Perspectives on Ethnicity and Religion. New York: Berghahn, 2018.," *Journal of International and Global Studies*: Vol. 10: No. 1, Article 21.

DOI: 10.62608/2158-0669.1453

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.lindenwood.edu/jigs/vol10/iss1/21>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at Digital Commons@Lindenwood University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of International and Global Studies by an authorized editor of Digital Commons@Lindenwood University. For more information, please contact phuffman@lindenwood.edu.

Gunther Schlee and Alexander Horstmann. *Difference and Sameness as Modes of Integration: Anthropological Perspectives on Ethnicity and Religion*. New York: Berghahn, 2018.

Is nationalism state capture by dominant ethnic groups? Or is it the state's identification with dominant groups? Are there nation-states or only ethnic-nation-states? Modernization contrived nationalism to bind ethnically and religiously diverse nation-states into unity, or what Gunther Schlee and Alexander Horstmann, in *Difference and Sameness*, call 'sameness.' Such enforced nationalism often tends to trigger fragmentation of nations, rather than their integration. The world map is littered with states that were sacrificed to the battles for ethnic ascendance. The latest of these manifestations is present-day Syria, where the dominant Alawites have pushed the state into its death throes, and where the state has indistinguishably merged into the dominant ethno-religious group. Are dominant ethnic groups all about identity politics, i.e., establishing and preserving their ethnic and religious markers? Or their struggles have to do with 'interest' that accord their existence and identity material basis?

The debate about identity and interest in ethnic studies has long endured. Schlee and Horstmann have attempted to further it in their edited volume by synthesizing what they deem anthropological perspectives into a lens that is supposed to help amplify difference and sameness in diverse societies. They, however, rely on only one prong of the debate, 'identity,' and drop its twin, 'interest,' altogether. While concentrating on identity, they define it in two of its dimensions: 'difference and sameness.' As descriptors of diversity and unity respectively, difference and sameness are less well-used terms in ethnic studies literature, or in academic disciplines with scholarly stakes in the study of ethnicity and nationalism, such as Anthropology, Sociology or Political Science. In public discourses, these terms take on even more accessible metaphorical meanings. In the United States, for instance, difference is denoted by 'multiculturalism' (i.e., celebration of ethnic variation, or demonstrating strength in diversity, or unity in diversity). The contrasting term that appeals to conservatism in the United States is 'melting pot.' This metaphor presents an image of society in which all hyphenated identities (Latino-Americans, African-Americans, Anglo-Americans, Polish-Americans, or Asian-Americans) are dissolved into one overarching 'American identity.'

Schlee and Horstmann's weight of argument is in favor of 'difference' as a mode of social integration. This argument comes through more forcefully in Schlee's essay entitled 'Ruling over Ethnic and Religious Differences' (pp.191-224) which compares three imperial cases of Mughal, Ottoman and British Empires. The imperial ruling classes employed sameness as a mode of integration, while imperial subjects saw integration in difference. He observes patterns of de-tribalization and de-ethnicization in imperial rulers. For instance, he writes, 'Timur Leng forged a personal following out of individuals rather than tribes... The Ottomans, in turn, assimilated Greeks, Serbs, Lazis and others into the ruling stratum, the imperial class, where loyalties to one's benefactors within that class ... outweighed memories of diverse ethnic origins' (p. 219). The dominant mode of integration for the military and ruling classes, Schlee concludes, was 'amalgamation or assimilation' (p.219) which culminated in 'sameness.' The British Empire deployed both sameness and difference as an integrative strategy to rule over its imperial subjects in India and Africa. The British imperial rulers devised what Lord Lugard, in *The Dual Mandate*¹ calls 'direct and indirect rule.' Direct rule was premised on sameness, while indirect rule on difference. In the latter mode of administration, religious and ethnic groups were left to their own devices, and governed through their traditional and customary leaders, as in the

most of British India. This kind of administration kept difference intact as a mode of social integration.

Schlee synthesizes ‘anthropological perspectives’ on modes of integration (sameness, difference or both) in his extensive 32-page introduction of the volume. He assembles four kinds of intellectual traditions to assess the merits and demerits of difference and sameness as integrative strategies, and develops a four-part schema: (a) sameness as successful mode of integration; (b) difference as successful mode of integration; (c) difference as an obstacle to integration; and (d) sameness as an obstacle to integration. Employing sameness as a mode of integration, Schlee enlists sociological ideas of ‘assimilation’ and ‘acculturation,’ and theories of socialization to demonstrate its functional utility. To show difference at work, he draws on Sociologist Emile Durkheim’s ideas of ‘organic’ and ‘mechanical’ solidarity. The former, according to Durkheim, is the feature of more complex societies that have grown diverse. The latter, on the other hand, is the feature of sedentary societies that remain shielded from outward influences to keep their internal cohesion intact. What sets one off is Schlee’s monologue on difference that extends to seven pages (pp. 6-12) without citing one single author besides Durkheim (and even Durkheim’s citation is without any reference to his work or its chronology) or any ‘anthropological’ perspective for that matter.

To present difference as disruptive of state formation, Schlee sums up the literature on this issue, and writes ‘that diversity or cultural differences are assumed to be a force which is antagonistic to shared statehood and peaceful integration’ (p. 12). Here he distills from literature an insightful comment on class and ethnicity and their interactive relationship. ‘... authors ask whether class is the real issue, while ethnicity is simply ‘false consciousness’ (emphasis in original), or whether ethnicity is something real, which can aggravate class conflict’ (Brass 1985:20)². It is this disruptive potential of difference that led some authors to attribute the collapse of the Soviet Union and the dismemberment of Yugoslavia to violent ethnic variations. The idea of ‘ancient hatreds’ or primordialism³ further accentuate difference as destructive of integration.

Schlee’s fourth category is a case of sameness as an obstacle to integration. This is a fascinating category of thought that will make the reader sit up and ponder. Alas, here again Schlee launches himself into philosophical musings that lead him astray from the issue at hand: how homogeneous ethnicity or religion can work against social integration. He fails to offer one single concrete case, in which ethnic or religious homogeneity has been problematic for social or national integration. It would have been easier for him to argue to the contrary, and demolish the assumption that sameness hurdled integration. The reality, however, is that world history has never seen an entirely homogenous empire or a nation-state to begin with. Going down this path, nevertheless, would have rendered Schlee’s fourth category unjustified.

As well, the subtitle of the volume promises ‘anthropological’ perspectives on ethnicity and religion’ but Schlee delivers sociological insights – assimilation, acculturation, socialization, organic and mechanical solidarity, and modernization theories on social integration. Although sociology and anthropology both share the same subject matter (ancient cultures), does anthropology go beyond its subject matter to encompass sociology that claims to be a smorgasbord whose subject matter ranges far and wide to encompass all society? Similarly, Schlee provides thin theoretical evidence on difference, which he seems to have garnered largely from non-anthropological sources.

In all, the edited volume presents six case studies, one each on Nepal, Mauritania, Cote d’Ivoire and Burkina Faso, Benin, Thailand, and a comparative study of Ethiopia, Kenya and

Siberia. Also, it offers literature review on post-Soviet collective identity. In each of these cases, resounding emphasis is on the fluidity of identity, and how it drives identity formation and its processes. The second most important finding that these cases present has to do with the precedence of difference over sameness. In case after case, one observes difference is a better mode of social integration than sameness. From Nepal, Mauritania and Benin to Thailand, communities are capable of managing their ethnic and religious differences by peaceful means to secure peaceful coexistence. This volume further attests to the already mounting evidence against the primordial origin of ethnicities and the fixed notion of ever-festering 'ancient hatreds.' Where it comes close to breaking new ground is Schlee's memorable essay entitled 'Identification with the state and Identification by the state' (pp.78-91). Here ethnicity seems to be a social mobilizer in the struggle to claim the state and its resources (i.e., state capture). Following this line of inquiry, it is hard to say identity politics is separable from the politics of interest.

Overall, contributors and editors have done a stupendous job of addressing the twin impediment of ethnicity and religion to national and social integration. Their findings that difference is a better mode of social integration than sameness further attest to the already growing evidence to the ascendancy of multiculturalism or pluralism across societies. Their rejection of sameness as a mode of integration also confirms how often its coercive enforcement led to unnecessary human sufferings in history. Although the edited volume is about case studies selected from Africa, Asia and Eurasia, its authors and their perspectives remain European. By no means does this happenstance detract from the significant contribution the volume makes to our understanding of ethno-religious identities in the contemporary context. If anything, it furnishes readers a vantage point to observe ethno-religious identities, their politics, and how they contribute to social integration or hamper it.

Tarique Niazi PhD
University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire
NIAZIT@uwec.edu

Notes

¹ Lord (Frederick) Lugard. 1922. *The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa*. Abingdon, Oxon (England): Frank Cass & Co.

² Brass, Paul (ed.). 1985. *Ethnic Groups and the State*. London: Croom Helm.

³ That ethnicity is a perennial, unchanging feature of human communities or their individual members.