

Ethnicity and Nationalism

Thomas Hylland Eriksen

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Thomas Hylland Eriksen's second edition of *Ethnicity and Nationalism* comes over 10 years after the first. In light of a decade's worth of historical and political changes, this new edition has been expanded to cover transnationalism, hybridity, and globalization, and includes a new chapter on multiculturalism, culture, and rights. The book, which is presented as a

core text for social anthropology students and a leading introduction to the field, takes its theoretical standpoint from social anthropology but also draws on studies from anthropology and sociology. Its main themes remain the same as the first edition: reflexive identity and social change, identity politics, social complexity, and group dynamics.

Chapter 1 explores the term ethnicity and its relationship to race, nation, class, and culture, highlighting its ambiguity and social construction in various contexts. Eriksen then identifies different kinds of ethnic relations (e.g., urban ethnic minorities, indigenous peoples, proto-nations, plural societies, and post-slavery societies) to illustrate the variations within groups. Chapter 2 looks at ethnic classifications and how group distinctions arise through processes of social contact. Stereotyping, the melting pot metaphor, and ethnic stigmas are some of the concepts Eriksen discusses to illustrate commonalities and differences between categories of people.

In the following chapter, the author examines the social organization of cultural distinctiveness by asking how ethnic groups develop, which ends they serve, and how they are reproduced through time. Relying upon the works of anthropologist Fredrik Barth, Eriksen discusses boundaries as well as their maintenance and transcendence, all of which play a large role in the development of an ethnic identity. He continues to look at ethnicity's potential for organizing group interests, particularly in the case of group competition.

Moving from a behaviorist point of view to an examination of individual perspectives of ethnic identity, chapter 4 focuses on how attachment and loyalty to ethnic groups are created and maintained through ideology. Chapter 5 chronicles the sociohistorical development of ethnic groups and identities. Here, the author focuses on four processes of change: slavery and capitalism, labor migration, the significance of naming (classification) and language, and the consequences of social change for identity formation and group organization.

Chapter 6, entitled "Nationalism," looks at various aspects of the nation: cultural symbols, the impact of industrialism, and communications technology, as well as nationalism against the state. The next two chapters examine two types of minority situations: aboriginal or indigenous groups and urban minorities. Chapter 7 elaborates on stages of indigenous ethnogenesis and introduces the situation of urban minorities in Europe and the United States. Chapter 8 presents anthropological and philosophical debates on issues of cultural and ethnic pluralism, multiculturalism, and individual rights and liberalism. Eriksen notes that "the simplifications of

identity politics are countered by the complexities of experience” (p. 160). The final chapter, “The Non-Ethnic,” deals with what he describes as “that which is not ethnic” (p. 161), which includes current tensions in social theory, the trend of globalization and localization, multiple identities and loyalties, and the saliency of gender on identity.

As a whole, this book is a comprehensive survey of the cultural, historical, and political landscape of ethnicity and nationalism, one that uses both classic and recent studies to make its points. The author does an excellent job of drawing upon research and examples from many nations, including Australia, Canada, France, India, Kenya, and Malaysia. In addition, he utilizes examples from his own research in Mauritius and Trinidad. This usage of global contexts to conceptualize ethnicity's multiple perspectives helps the reader understand its relationships to culture, politics, history, and the state itself. Eriksen also gives a well-balanced and thorough examination of the theories that underlie ethnic identity, nationalism, and identity politics, at times providing useful figures to diagram concepts. In addition, there are helpful annotated bibliographical references for further reading at the end of each chapter.

While Eriksen's writing is relatively clear and concise, as a text for students the often ambiguous sub-headings within the chapters could be organizationally confusing. For example, he begins the first chapter asking “What Is Ethnicity?” and then proceeds to explain “The Term Itself.” Five sub-headings later, the section is entitled “What Is Ethnicity?” again. Perhaps highlighted key concepts in each chapter would have produced a smoother flow.

In addition, while the author does describe the social construction of race and racism, the linkage between racism and the dynamics of power and oppression in various forms could be more strongly made. The minoritization of groups (as juxtaposed to the “politically non-dominant” [p. 121] minority groups) and the saliency of anti-racism and anti-colonial efforts throughout history deserve a stronger emphasis in discourses on the politics of identity.

As to contribution or relevance to Islamic thought, the book contains scant references, mostly as examples and pertaining to Mauritian Muslims in particular. In chapter 5, “Ethnicity and History,” the author relies heavily on American anthropologist Jay O'Brien, arguing that the ethnic categorization of some Muslim groups in Sudan's Gezira area came about through local characteristics and interaction, as well as the introduction of the capitalist system of production.

In chapter 8, “Identity Politics, Culture and Rights,” Eriksen illustrates ethnic diversity within groups by citing examples of Muslim disagreements (e.g., domestic matters as settled by Muslim law and wearing of headscarves in schools). Elsewhere in chapter 8, the mention of a Muslim identity is presented merely as an opposite of Hindu identity. Given that this new edition was to have taken into account changing global dynamics and identity politics, the omission of Islamic thought’s growing significance in social/political analyses is disappointing.

Overall, *Ethnicity and Nationalism* gives readers a far-reaching view of group identity, ethnicity, and the effects that culture, politics, and the nation have on these identities. It effectively prompts the reader to probe further into the important questions it raises about the shifting relationships of ethnic groups in our global society.

Kayleen U. Oka
Ph.D. Candidate, Departments of Sociology and Equity Studies
and Comparative, International, and Development Education
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education/University of Toronto
Toronto, Ontario, Canada