

## **Guillaume, Xavier. 2011. *International Relations and Identity: A Dialogical Approach*. Routledge, 192 pp.**

The political and social theory of international relations has received a significant contribution from Xavier Guillaume, associate professor at the University of Groningen, with his book *International Relations and Identity: Dialogical Approach*, published in 2011. The author deals with the issue of forming a collective political identity in international relations through an innovative dialogical approach to the international.

The book is divided into an introduction and five chapters: 1) Toward processual identity: identity/alterity and IR theory, 2) A dialogical approach to the international, 3) From orthodoxy to normalcy: narrative matrices in modern Japan, 4.) Between homogeneity and heterogeneity: the question of multiculturalism in modern Japan and 5) Conclusion: Unveiling the international.

In his introduction, the author introduces two key issues. The first issue is theoretical and seeks to explain how the process becomes a form of a collective political identity. The second issue is empirical and tries to explain how the West has historically influenced the formation of collective political identity in Japan. The author chose the case study of Japan primarily because it is a non-Western country that has fully experienced modernization and postmodernization. In addition to the open question of relations with the alterity, the issue of multiculturalism opens up. In this context, Japan is viewed from different concepts. The first one describes Japan as a homogeneous society that prides itself on the “pure Yamato blood”, while the second concept seeks to describe Japan as a heterogeneous society, multinational state which was result of a mix between different populations.

The first chapter introduces us to mapping the relationship of the identity/alterity nexus in the theory of international relations, from the perspective of social and political theory. Most authors consider that the concept of identity in IR theory is marginalized and/or of secondary importance. It seems, this fact may have led the author to go further and answer the question of how international theory relates to the relation of the identity/alterity nexus. This book seeks to explain what liberals and realists ignored, which is that collective political identity can only be understood in their relation to the specific mechanism of othering. Namely the othering is a central normative dimension, a criterion for ethics and a possible mechanism of participation in the general process of identity formation. This book attempts to come up with a form of dialogical approach in determining the relationship of identity and alterity in the theory of international relations. We can see

„identity as something both stable in time (it continues through time) and changing (it is an ever ongoing event that might simply reproduce itself or might evolve in one way or another according to this “direction of change”) (Guillaume 2011, 31). Three dimensions are relevant to the process, and they are: the context (where and when the identity is expressed), the expression (how identity is expressed) and the relationality (to whom it is performed or not).

The second chapter provides a processual understanding of the identity/alterity nexus through a dialogical approach. In this chapter the author uses the theory of the Russian philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin who draws our attention to a modern sense of alterity, a “humanism of alterity”.<sup>1</sup> Bakhtin explains that “human beings have an absolute need for the other, for the other’s seeing, remembering, gathering, and unifying self-activity—the only self-activity capable of producing his outwardly finished personality” (Bakhtin 1900 (1920-1923), 35–36). Bakhtin argues that all identities are formed in relation to othering (national, religious, social identity etc.). He also holds that identities are specific, and that we need tools and mechanisms to transform the process to politics. The author lists two mechanisms for forming a collective political identity: narrative matrices and politics of alterity.

The third chapter presents us two key narrative matrices in Japan: *shinkoku* (Land of Gods-Kami) and *kokutai* (national polity essence). Narrative matrices are important in determining the Japanese national identity as well as in determining its relation to the othering, and especially towards the West. Narrative matrix *shinkokushiso* was reactivated during the Tokugawa regime in the 16th and early 17th centuries, with the goal of homogenizing and imperializing Japan. It was this reactivation that was carried out in order to eliminate the danger from the various religious orders that existed in Japan, such as Christianity from the West. A special danger was represented by the Jesuits, who were marked by the category of impurity. In addition to the politics of alterity that was directed mainly towards the West, the next significant other in the Japanese eyes was China. However, in his study, Guillaume focusses mainly on the West as the most important other in relation to Japan. In addition to the *shinkoku* narrative matrix, *kokutai*, as a narrative matrix, came into focus from the Japanese politics of the 19th and early 20th centuries, to substantially influence the change of the policy of alterity to the West, primarily influenced by Aizawa Seishisai’s work and The New Theses<sup>2</sup>. The aim of this change was to create a strong Japan as a competition to the West. In order for an independent, sovereign and powerful Japan to be created, Japan must emulate the West and be recognized by it. In that period, Japan begins to learn from the West how to achieve modernization, accept

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1 This is Augusto Ponzio’s term and means „an individuation of alterity in the sphere of the self“(Ponzio 1994, 79–88)

2 The first use of *Kokutai* in modern Japan is to be found in Aizawa Seishisai’s Shinron (New Theses). Aizawa was impressed by some achievements of the West and thought that Christianity gave strength to the West. Aizawa also thought that Japan needed a spiritual community that would represent “the unity of religion and government” (*saisei itchi*). The Imperial institution had a central place in New Theses. Aizawa also saw the importance of creating a strong political community with military and economic growth.

certain attitudes and teachings of the West in order to industrialize and civilize. In this period, the issue of multiculturalism arises because of the various cultural communities that were present in Japan, as well as the issue of moving the vertically organized political community towards a horizontal one. What should be noted is the fact that *kokutai* shaped the Japanese identity in the 19th and 20th centuries, but was also identified with a militaristic propaganda that led to war.

The fourth chapter deals with the issue of multiculturalism in Japan during the 19th and early 20th centuries as well as the desire to form a horizontal political community in order to integrate cultural differences of peripheral communities into Japan after its colonial expansion. This chapter raises the question: Is Japan homogeneous or heterogeneous? Both concepts are determined by their attitude towards the West and the East and represent different interpretations of Japanese identity. However, Japan is generally regarded as a homogeneous and monocultural society. In spite of these understandings, there is also the understanding of Japan as a “mixed nation”. The proponents of mixed nation theory think that “the blessing” for Japan is precisely the fact that Japan is a mixed nation like Great Britain<sup>3</sup> and the United States. These two countries are standard of civilization and modernity. The West is thus crucial to the articulation of the Japanese national identity towards civilization and modernization.

Chapter five concludes with the example of the French “veil affair” as a procedural approach to the international: an approach that is relatively new to the theory of international relations. Namely, the author concludes that the international sphere should not be limited to the territory because such an understanding may be incomplete. It is an international process that happens outside of states, i.e. it is transnational. The French and Japanese examples give us the need for a possible study of the international as a process.

Undoubtedly Guillaume’s study provides a significant contribution both to IR theory and to the exploration of Japanese identity. After the Japanese parliamentary elections held in 2017, the political party Komeito (the political party with a very strong national agenda) became the fourth political party in the parliamentary composition. This party is very important in Japan because of its connection to the organization Soka Gakkai, which promotes the importance of the Japanese nation. The statement of the Japanese Prime Minister, Shinzō Abe, “Japan is back” leaves us the space to think about Japan and thank Guillaume for this study. His analysis will benefit other researchers who are interested in the topics mentioned. Although Guillaume, in his study predominantly focuses on the influence of the West as the key other in shaping Japanese identity, the shortcoming of his research is that he has not provided enough space to analyze the influence of Asia (China) on the formation of Japanese identity. Asia (China) has shaped Japanese identity as much as the West. Guillaume, in his study, presents a mixed nation theory comparing Japan to

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3 Professor at the University of Tokyo, Tsuboi Shōgorō, “used the example of the Great Britain, which he considered the most advanced country of its time, to show that its successes in economy and foreign policy were a function of the intercourse between several nations (Angles, Saxons, Danes among other) that consituted it.” (Guillaume 2011, 127)

Great Britain and the United States, two states that represent a mixed nation like Japan. Japan is also a country where we find a mix of religions, the syncretic unity of the three religions-Shintoism, Buddhism and Confucianism that makes Japan unique compared to the West, and this fact can be to Japan's advantage. All three religions are present in Japan, but the Shintoism primarily shaped the identity of Japanese. According to the Shintoism, the Japanese Emperor is the descendant of the Sun goddess Amaterasu, and this fact makes Japan a „divine nation“. Guillaume should have paid more attention to the institution of the Emperor. The institution of the Emperor (ceremonial type) is present today only in Japan and that makes Japan special. Today, the West remains an important other in relation to Japan, while Asia (China) has always been, because of its territorial position in relation to Japan, due to the culture that influenced the formation of Japanese identity (the Japanese script was based on the Chinese script, Confucianism – Chinese political and social learning, and for some religion, is one of the three major religious denominations in Japan and shapes its society, Buddhism has arrived in Japan from China in the sixth century). If Guillaume had paid more attention to the Japanese view of Asia, this study would be more complete.

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