that intersectionality is a simplistic slogan, a synonym for race and class and gender, or a better form of feminism. Intersectionality is a frontier for sociologists to explore. Either of these guides will lead readers to unsettling new ideas and challenges to what one might think one already knows.

References

Rogers Brubaker is well known in the sociology of race and ethnicity for the critique of “groupist” tendencies in his now-classic *Ethnicity without Groups*. In *Grounds for Difference*, Brubaker extends his comparative and constructionist lens beyond ethnicity; he argues that in recent decades sociological theories of social difference have been challenged by the return to scholarly and popular prominence of three age-old social forces: inequality, biology, and religion. A word of warning—*Grounds for Difference* does not even attempt to integrate its separate efforts at synthesizing the three literatures on social stratification, social studies of science, and nationalism. However, Brubaker’s underlying position is clear: the idea of nation, especially the normative expectation of local homogeneity amid global plurality, pervades and motivates our understandings of social difference.

The introduction is where Brubaker connects or at least juxtaposes his discussions of inequality, genomics, and religion. A word of warning—*Grounds for Difference* does not even attempt to integrate its separate efforts at synthesizing the three literatures on social stratification, social studies of science, and nationalism. However, Brubaker’s underlying position is clear: the idea of nation, especially the normative expectation of local homogeneity amid global plurality, pervades and motivates our understandings of social difference.

The introduction is where Brubaker connects or at least juxtaposes his discussions of inequality, genomics, and religion. In turn, each chapter summary promises alternatives to a host of conceptual targets: cultural and discursive accounts of inequality, reflexive antibioligism, diaspora-talk, and criticisms of secularization theory and modernization theory. While his chapters on nationalism are revisions of published papers, his longer chapters on inequality

and genomics are original and worth reading alongside his writings on nationalism.

Brubaker opens his discussion of inequality by sketching a hypothetical difference-blind world where “who is what [is] independent of who gets what” (p. 11) in order to pose his core question of how inequality and difference are linked. His answer is to revisit Charles Tilly’s (1998) decidedly non-groupist theory of how organizations import external categories and match them to internal positions, that is, “discontinuous bundles of rewards and opportunities” (p. 55), and to then expand his answer in the direction of groupist accounts of inequality. Critiquing Tilly’s theory as both marginalizing and homogenizing different kinds of differences, Brubaker compares how citizenship, gender, and ethnicity are associated with inequality. In place of Tilly’s processes of exploitation and opportunity hoarding, he proposes three general processes supplemented with a fourth factor: the categorically unequal distribution of honor. This new framework allows him to claim that (1)
birthplace citizenship is the primary basis for the allocation of persons to positions; (2) gender essentialism is the primary principle for the social production of persons, that is, their self-understandings, dispositions, aspirations, skills, experience, human and cultural capital, and ways of thinking and acting; and (3) ethnic separation is a major principle, or even the primary principle, for both the structuring of positions and the distribution of honor.

Brubaker characterizes all four factors as contributing to each of the three bases of categorical inequality under consideration, but his willingness to “privilege” particular mechanisms as more central in the production of inequalities associated with particular differences distinguishes his analysis from the now-dominant approach of intersectionality. More precisely, his approach looks less like what Choo and Ferree (2010) term systemic intersectionality and more like Leslie McCall’s intercategorical intersectionality (2005), which controversially allows certain institutions and differences to have empirical primacy. Ultimately, Brubaker argues that Tilly unnecessarily associates categorical inequality in the “weak, statistical sense [with] categorical inequality in the strong, processual sense” (p. 45), thereby missing the cumulative influence of mechanisms other than categorical exclusion from local positions, especially the operation of categorically inflected selection processes that are not strictly categorical yet still skew outcomes.

In Chapter Two, Grounds for Difference turns to biology, charting the partial reversal of what Brubaker characterizes as the late-twentieth-century change in prevailing understandings of race and ethnicity from (1) objectivist understandings for which “race and ethnicity exist independently of people’s beliefs and practices” to (2) subjectivist understandings in which race and ethnicity “are generated by such beliefs and practices” (p. 48). Brubaker insightfully observes that this change in the social sciences was accompanied by a shift in biology from typological to populationist understandings of difference, which accommodated social scientists’ claims to exclusive jurisdiction over the phenomenon of race, at least until the recent rise of genomic research that has eroded the jurisdictional divide between the objectivist study of populations and the subjectivist study of race. This chapter reveals the new cultural authority of genomic science by carefully reviewing the science studies literature on its use and abuse in biomedicine, forensics, genealogy, and the politics of belonging.

Consistent with this literature, Brubaker focuses on the social consequences of genomics, which he characterizes as “less a postracial than a neoracial science” (p. 53); nevertheless, he comes to a different conclusion: “The contemporary appeal to [genomic authority] does not simply reauthorize commonsense understandings and practices [but also] transforms them . . . undermining understandings of pure, internally homogeneous, externally bounded groups” (p. 54). The chapter concludes with a precisely worded response to the genomic challenge, recommending that sociologists (1) study genetically based ethno-racial objectivism as a vernacular rather than a scientific perspective, (2) develop a biosocial constructivism that does not “deny—in a self-marginalizing way—the relevance of biology to the social sciences” (p. 81), and (3) replace the eroding jurisdictional divide with a substantive divide, that is, that “the social reality of race and the biogeographic and biogenetic reality of ancestry are fundamentally different phenomena” (p. 83). Although Brubaker raises the conventional critiques of genomic clustering algorithms (c.f. Shiao 2014), he also makes a more rigorous point: “One can infer ancestry . . . from genotype, but one cannot infer a person’s genotype from their ancestry” (p. 82), at least not without resorting to biological essentialism.

In Chapters Three and Four, Brubaker turns to religion, setting its resurgent significance in historical context and arguing for a revival of secularization theory. Chapter Three focuses on religion and language as “the most politically consequential domains of cultural difference in the modern world” (p. 85). Brubaker assesses (1) their similarities and differences with ethnicity and nationalism, especially their shared association with claims for economic resources, symbolic recognition, equal representation, cultural reproduction, and political autonomy, and (2) the distinct challenges of religious pluralism and linguistic pluralism for
nation-states. Because language is an inescapable medium of social interaction, it is difficult both for states to accommodate minority languages and for their native speakers to reproduce them intergenerationally, whereas organized religion is easier both to accommodate and to transmit to subsequent generations and yet also presents greater challenges to state authority, especially for regulating gender, sexuality, and family life.

Chapter Four continues with the political implications of religious pluralism by reviewing the literature on religion and nationalism as divided between four approaches to studying their connection. Brubaker uses this review to argue against treating nationalism as either a successor to, or a mere vehicle for, organized religion in favor of conceptualizing nationalism as an outgrowth of secularization defined not as the decline or privatization of religion but instead as “the differentiation of various autonomous realms of human activity from religious institutions and norms” (p. 118).

Accordingly, albeit abruptly, Chapters Five and Six focus on what arose to accompany religion—that is, the nation-state—and to pose that its inherent contradictions are the root of the politics of belonging, or at least of the question of “who (really) belongs where” (p. 78). In Chapter Five, Brubaker swerves to review the diaspora, or the extension of the concept from (1) the Jewish experience after the destruction of the Second Temple to (2) any form of international migration and even beyond. He identifies three recurring criteria in the literature—dispersion, homeland orientation, and boundary maintenance—and shows how researchers have undermined each to the point of reducing the concept to a synonym for ancestry. Brubaker proposes that rather than treating diaspora as a category of postnational membership, sociologists should think of diaspora as a category of practice linked to normative aspirations for a transborder nationalism.

Chapter Six then “places transborder nationalism in the broader context of the politics of membership and belonging in the nation-state” (p. 8). Brubaker opens with the assertion that each nation-state has an idealized conception of itself as characterized by three congruences: between territory and imagined community, between territory and citizenship, and between citizenship and ethnocultural nationality. Building on this conceptual model, he argues that because no state has ever achieved perfect congruence, “demands to establish or restore congruence continue to inform the politics of belonging today” (p. 133). Brubaker distinguishes two dimensions of the politics of belonging (POB): the internal politics of belonging, concerning populations “durably situated within . . . yet who are not (fully) members,” and the external politics of belonging, concerning populations “durably situated outside . . . yet who claim or are claimed to belong” (p. 134). He discusses how these dimensions can be connected—for example, the reciprocal roles of Mexican migrants as immigrants in the internal POB of the United States and as emigrants in the external POB of Mexico. He also delineates four sources of the internal and external POB: the movement of people over borders (migration), the movement of borders over people, the absence of an external homeland, and the “persistent legacy of empire”—that is, incorporation through conquest—each of which “disturbs the congruencies central to the idealized model of the nation-state” (p. 136). In this framework, contemporary transnational populations that practice diaspora are not harbingers of an emerging postnational global order but rather transborder extensions of the nation-state model itself.

Grounds for Difference concludes with Chapter Seven, which argues that the global diffusion of a flexible yet singular “package” of modernity underlies, and makes unnecessary, the notion of multiple modernities. Brubaker accepts that mid-twentieth-century modernization theorists were incorrect in their predictions of a global convergence on specifically western institutional patterns and cultural and political programs. However, he raises the central question of what underlies the modernity of (1) the diverse patterns and programs now characterized as multiple modernities, as well as of (2) the anti-modern and neotraditional programs that researchers have shown to be in fact characteristically modern.

Brubaker answers this question by revisiting the works of three early modernization
theorists and contending that their arguments did not actually exhibit the teleology or belief in ethnic primordialism for which they had been criticized. Instead, their primary concern was for an increasingly fluid and mobile social order, to which a certain kind of state-building became a solution, specifically a state that invited the perception of itself as “a target, prize, and arena for action” (p. 151). As an alternative, Brubaker proposes a single-modernity perspective composed of (1) multiple global but not uniform processes that have generated nationalism and politicized ethnicity and (2) the diffusion of a flexible package with core institutional and cultural components, that is to say, a centralized territorial bureaucracy that is collectively owned by a “people” or nation.

Throughout the book, Brubaker shows a discerning eye for identifying key questions and distinctions with wide appeal, especially those that open Chapters One, Two, and Six on inequality, biology, and the nation-state. Unfortunately, the concluding chapter does not explicitly connect Brubaker’s answers and discussions across the various chapters or even revisit the blueprint provided in his introduction. In addition, despite the importance of gender essentialism in Chapter One, he turns his attention away from gender for the rest of the book.

Nevertheless, the juxtaposition of discussions can evoke significant questions for the reader willing to work harder to get at Brubaker’s implicit argument. Written before chapters on inequality and biology, Chapter Six seems to be the theoretical framework that motivates the entirety of *Grounds for Difference*: an expansive theory of the politics of belonging wherein the nation-state creates and sustains the basis for both nationalism and politicized ethnicity. In this light, Chapter Two is the most disconnected from the framework, though it provides a masterful review of science-studies critiques of genomic authority, serving as a worthy sequel, albeit a less optimistic one, to Hochschild, Weaver, and Burch’s (2012) similar review. On the other hand, Chapter Two may serve as a case study of whether and how the political salience of ethnic categories influences the cultural authority granted to science. For example, what biomedicine and forensics consider sufficient—that is, findings of probable continental-level ancestry—in their construction of a “usable past” (Nelson 2008) is regarded as grossly insufficient by both lay and organizational consumers of ancestry tests in their search for meaningful identification at smaller scales that approximate nations.

Similarly, Chapter One primarily succeeds as a uniquely assiduous theory of the many causes of different forms of categorical inequality, though this does connect with Chapter Six in that the categories are arguably downstream consequences of the nation-state itself. Also, this contribution answers a question lurking behind Chapter Two’s call to reconstruct sociology’s orientation to biology: with what should sociology replace its “usual mantra that there are no biologically significant differences between socially defined racial categories” (p. 55)? In other words, *Grounds for Difference* suggests that sociology already has the pieces of an answer, though this raises the science-studies question of how a sociologically sound theory of social stratification can overcome the higher cultural authority granted to genomics. More generally, what are the politics of authority among the natural and social sciences within the field of secular institutions whose autonomy from religion gave rise to the nation-state model and its consequence of politicized ethnicity, the secular understanding of which is at the very heart of intellectual debates over biology and its relationship to inequality?

Surprisingly, Brubaker does not provide an integrated chapter on religion that is parallel in structure to his discussions of inequality and genomics. Perhaps it is because, as he asserts, “few statements about nationalism per se or religion per se, or about the relation between the two, are likely to be tenable, interesting, or even meaningful” (p. 102). However, I believe it would have been more fruitful to begin with the question of why religion is resurgent now after decades of “secularization,” rather than to save it for the last pages of Chapter Four. To be clear, Chapters Three through Five each make important contributions—for example, Chapter Three’s comparison of religion and language provides an important counterbalance to boundary-only approaches to peoplehood that treat the content of culture as inconsequential.
Similarly, the otherwise thought-provoking chapter on diaspora proves to be an idiosyncratic introduction to Chapter Six’s grand theory of the politics of belonging. Despite its aforementioned strengths, this chapter falls short of Brubaker’s promise in the introduction to reveal how diaspora is, along with nation, ethnicity, race, religion, indigeneity, and minorityhood, part of the “categorical infrastructure of modernity” (p. 8). Perhaps his single-modernity perspective will prove to be the seed for this important theoretical work. Without it, however, *Grounds for Difference* partly succumbs to a more general shortcoming of the comparative ethnicity perspective: its anti-groupist impulse leads to an aversion to treating any particular nation or ethnicity as an analytically critical case and thereby also to a homogenization of different categories of peoplehood.

To be clear, *Grounds for Difference* is not as vulnerable to this criticism as other work. Indeed, Brubaker’s inclusion of certain group experiences—for example, those of African Americans and indigenous groups—enables them to serve as cardinal directions that keep *Grounds for Difference* from running afoul of normative assimilation theory, a criticism that has been made, mostly unfairly, of his fellow comparativist Andreas Wimmer (Valdez and Golash-Boza 2016; Winant 2015; c.f. Wimmer 2015). I suspect that a deeper and wider engagement with the “groupist” literature (e.g., Golash-Boza 2015; Jung 2015; Vasquez 2011) would help to bridge the comparativist desire for theoretical scope and precision with the critical race theory focus on systemic inequality and how it is experienced and resisted “from below.” In sum, *Grounds for Difference* is an ambitious mapping of the sociologies of social differences and provides an important rejoinder to the group-oriented or, rather, identity-oriented scholarship dominant in our discipline.

### References


