

Defining Allies and Enemies: Identity, Politics and Conflict

*Günther Schlee (Anthropology), Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology
(Germany)*

In popular perception cultural differences or ethnic affiliation are factors that cause conflict or political fragmentation although this is not borne out by historical evidence. This paper puts forward an alternative conflict theory. It develops a decision theory which explains the conditions under which differing types of identification are preferred. Group identification is linked to competition for resources like water, territory, oil, political charges, or other advantages. Rivalry for resources can cause conflicts but it does not explain who takes whose side in a conflict situation. Here considerations like plausibility, consistency, credibility and the sediments of past experience come in.