

Dipak K. Gupta: Clash of Identities.

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<http://www.trinstitute.org/ojpcr/guptarev.htm>

Speeches given to a general University audience in response to important scholastic accolades are often difficult balances between accurate description of one's work and ease of understanding for one's audience. Dipak K. Gupta shows that he can preform this balancing act well in *Clash of Identities*.

Gupta was chosen as the honored scholar to give the Eleventh Albert W. Johnson Research Lecture by the Graduate Division of San Diego State University, and this book is a transcript of that lecture, the colloquium that followed and an article previously published. Gupta is a Professor of Public Administration and Urban Studies and the co-director of the Institute for International Security and Conflict Resolution at San Diego State University.

The lecture, also titled "Clash of Identities" begins with a short, but interesting biographical sketch of Gupta and quickly moves to Gupta's own explanation of his theories of collective violence, which begin with the idea that individual self interest cannot explain the existence of group violence. He argues that individual motivation would preclude collective action, since the market would resolve all conflicts before violence is necessary.

From this, Gupta moves to explain the base of his research, what he calls the *Homo Collectivus*, who is at the core motivated by group desires. Violence is the result of these natural needs and the desire to distinguish "us" from "them", but occurs only when taken

to an extent labeled "collective madness".

Collective madness arises through a two step process. First, conditions (economic, political or otherwise) are such that the opportunity cost of acting collectively is small and people form groups. Second, political entrepreneurs capitalize on a increasing difference between expectation and result by encouraging a linear or binary view of the problem at hand. After this occurs, it is possible that collective violence will occur.

Gupta sees the lack of a strong collective movement within the African-American community in the US and the exceptional amount of collective violence in Africa as a difference in the extent to which individualism is stressed in each culture. In the US, where there is a much stronger emphasis on individual action, creating an identity based on the collective is much more difficult than in Africa, where societies are not based on free-market principles and where resources are as often divided along tribal lines as individual, collective identity comes simply.

The speech ends with a short discussion on the need for more accurate forecasting of humanitarian crises and the often-heard cry that foreign policy should be proactive instead of reactive. It is here that Gupta comes back to a more mainstream stance.

The speech contains much information and humor, in spite of being short (17 pages). It seems to be a good introduction to Gupta's work, but is also somewhat scattered and clearly condensed for his audience.

In the colloquium, Gupta considers the issue of humanitarian crisis prediction more carefully. He believes that it is impossible to find a single forecasting tool which will be clearly superior and that a simple tool is more likely to be useful. This leads to the conclusion that current forecasting is inadequate and new methods are needed.

Although he does not offer a new, successful forecasting tool, Gupta provides guidance for new attempts. First, forecasting should occur continuously and often. Second, expert opinion should be combined with quantifiable methods.

The colloquium leads directly to an article written by Gupta about forecasting which will appear in the book *Synergy and Early Warning Forecasts* (1997, Centre for Refugee Studies, York University). This article argues that forecasting should be thought of as a warning mechanism instead of forecasts, since the forecasts themselves often influence policy in such a way to prevent or mitigate the crises they describe.

*Clash of Identities* provides an interesting look at Gupta's work in a way which makes it seem both compelling and human. Gupta is clearly a talented professor in addition to being a competent researcher, and this is shown throughout this book.

*Derek Sweetman, editor.*