
Us, Them and Others: Pluralism and National Identity in Diverse Societies, presents a theoretical model of multicultural transformation of national identity in Canada. The author, Elke Winter, takes an in-depth look at media discourses surrounding multiculturalism in Canada between 1992 and 2001. Winter frames her discussion to present an analysis of triangular relations among “us,” “them,” and “others.” She addresses Québec and English Canada relations, and explores the complexity of negotiating the intricacies of pluralist national identity formation within unequal power relations in diverse societies.

The book is divided into four parts beginning with introductory considerations, theoretical framework, empirical analysis, and ending with concluding thoughts. The first part presents a concise historical overview positioning Canada as an ethnically diverse country. It details events that set the grounds for the multicultural transformation of a Canadian national “we” with the presence of “two competing projects of nationhood within the same state” (p. 9). Winter notes the political emergence of Aboriginal people, immigration, and ethnonational diversity as factors contributing to the construction of multiculturalism as official policy in Canada. She also emphasizes the impact of the 1990s Québécois sovereignty movement and credits it for the implementation of multiculturalism “as a policy and government-promoted dimension of Canadian identity” (p. 22), and for facilitating the conditional inclusion of “others” into a multicultural Canadian “we.”

The second part combines a literature review of Pluralism Studies with a neo-Weberian framework. It reveals a trajectory of Pluralism Studies from the post-World War II era through the 1990s with different theoretical views. First, multiculturalism is seen as concession or containment: concession by majority groups to allow integration of minorities; or as a policy of containment of minority groups that essentializes group differences and develops economic inequality. Pluralism is then explained as an outcome of conflict among national groups: as neither concession nor containment but, rather, as negotiated middle ground that is affected by power relations. The literature draws on Weber’s sociology of ethnic relations and nation-building. Majority and minority group identity formation is “being constituted through processes of social closure and in relation to each other” (p. 53). Winter affirms that constructing a contrast with the “other” is a crucial element of collective identity formation.

With this theoretical framework, the author shifts in the third part to an empirical discussion. She uses Critical Discourse Analysis to trace power inequalities and analyze processes of “othering” in discourse. This approach is based on the assumption that “language and meaning are both reflections and reproducers of concrete power relations between social actors” (p. 106). Her data includes a selection of 350 articles, drawn from two Toronto-based English-language newspapers: The Globe and Mail and Toronto Star. Winter justifies her media choice
by presenting newspapers as means of production and reproduction of public discourses. To her credit, she acknowledges the fact that her selected articles are not sufficient to represent a broad public view of multiculturalism in Canada. The selected sample, however, enables the author to identify three distinct narratives of Canadian multicultural nationhood: republicanism, liberal-pluralism, and liberal-multiculturalism. Each narrative reveals the complexities of the multicultural discourse and provides an overview of the processes of negotiating national group identity in the Canadian context. The idea of Canada as a multicultural nation formed the “smallest common denominator” in these political discourses, thus attesting to the consolidation of multiculturalism as a social imaginary in the 1990s.

Winter explores how a Canadian multicultural “we” is constructed in a segment of public discourses, as well as who constitutes “we,” and how “we” becomes pluralist. Focusing on the relations between the English and French “dual majority,” she explains that changing ethnic and bi-national relations have catalyzed the multiculturalization of Canadian national identity. On the one hand, multiculturalism surfaced as a relative agreement between English and French groups. On the other, it refers to conflict between the two competing English and French Canadian nationhoods, a conflict that provided immigrants and ethnic minorities the opportunity to present themselves as unifiers of the pan-Canadian nation.

In the final part, the author elaborates on her model for understanding pluralism and affirms its advantages over “liberal-culturalist and anti-foundationalist approaches” (p. 196). Winter argues that the containment of Québec separatism unifies multiculturalism within a Canadian national identity. She asserts that for a multicultural Canada, national self-understanding must promote both collective authenticity and ethnocultural pluralism. Finally, she situates the Canadian multicultural experience in an international context, and draws points for analysis from current directions in immigrant integration and citizenship.

The triangular model borne out of this analysis seeks to address the triangular relations among national majorities, national minorities, and immigration-related diversity. For the most part, the model navigates dual power relations/understandings between French and English Canadians, presenting what would seem to be a binary analysis of the two dominant projects of nationhood. The author positions her model from an English Canadian angle. For instance, throughout the book, “them” and “Others” refer to ethnic and racial minority groups. In the process, the “Others” appear more othered, both in the discourse in the selected media, and in the analysis of national discourse. Winter points out gaps in the news articles and notes the absence of radical multicultural discourses, and the “avoidance of issues of ‘race’ and radicalization” (p. 158). However, overall, her analytical approach avoids the deep divisions that exist between Whites and non-Whites in Québec and in the rest of Canada, and it excludes the roles played by Aboriginal peoples in negotiating national identity.

This book contributes to interdisciplinary discussions of nation-building and multiculturalism, and enriches the literature on multiculturalism in the Canadian context. The author provides opportunities for scholars to expand on her analysis to include
triggering events/situations that may have an impact on multicultural transformation of Canadian national identity pre- and post-1990s. *Us, Them, and Others* is well-written and useful to scholars and graduate students who wish to familiarize themselves with different theoretical perspectives on ethnic/civic dichotomies, multiculturalism, group formation, and nationalism in the Canadian context.

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