

How New Models Can Rejuvenate Established Insights: Reaction to and Critique of Elke Winter's *Us, Them, and Others*

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Every few years, a book comes along that strikes a chord with readers because it tackles issues that are front and center in contemporary debates and it manages to offer new insights that allow scholars to return to long standing debates.¹ Elke Winter's *Us, them and others* has the potential to be such a book. It offers a model that draws on literatures of nationalism and those of race and ethnicity using a Weberian approach. It also looks at how different groups align with one another in some contexts, but exclude one another in others and as a result, the book offers insight on multiculturalism, the growing fear of ethnic and religious radicalization, and failed immigration.

In this short paper, I offer reaction to, and criticism of, Winter's model in an effort to trigger broader debate around the issues she identifies and the model she uses to understand them. Despite the many strengths of the book (see Ramos 2011), Winter's argument is open to a number of criticisms including an openness and inconsistency of key concepts and arguments, a narrow sample and timeframe of analysis, and missed opportunities for revisiting past luminaries in the area that identify underlying causal mechanisms rather than descriptive labels alone.

Looseness of Terms and Consistency of the Argument

The center piece of the book is Winter's model ($us + others_{1-n} = multicultural\ we \neq them_{1-n}$) which complicates binary distinctions among ethnic and national groups by looking at how they change in different situations. She, however, is inconsistent in her use of "us," "Others" (capitalized), "others," and "them." "Us" is almost continuously reserved for English-Canada, but "others", in both usages, and "them" are

¹I would like to thank Paul F. Armstrong his assistance with this paper and would like to thank Elke Winter for offering two opportunities to engage the ideas presented in this review in two Author-Meets-Critics sessions held at the Canadian Ethnic Studies Association and Canadian Sociological Association meetings. A longer version of this critique appears in the *Journal of Canadian Ethnic Studies* (Ramos 2011).

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interchangeably used for the US, Quebec, and immigrant ethnic groups. While the interchangeability and changing designation of national and ethnic groups as “others” and “them” results from the fluidity of the processes of social closure that she theorizes, Winter does not clearly articulate when and why groups are assigned different lesser statuses of others and them. The complexity of different designations is seen in Table 9.1 (Winter 2011, 184–185), which attempts to offer an overall taxonomy of the relations captured by her model. Interestingly, in the positioning of different national and ethnic groups against one another, Quebec is almost continuously excluded in the language of “pan-Canadian” and multicultural identity or the “us” and “we.” The consistent positioning of English-Canada as “us” and Quebec as “others” and “them” leads to the possible conclusion that a Canadian field of identity exists only in English-Canada. It is certainly a conclusion that Quebec separatists would embrace, but is likely one that misses the importance of Quebec and French-Canadians in the construction of the multicultural Canadian “us” and “we.”

Winter is also unclear on the epistemological and ontological underpinnings of distinguishing between “other” and “Other”. Those familiar with anti-colonial writing, like the work of Fanon (1967) or Said (1977)—for example, might interpret the capitalized term as absolute “Others”, those who can never become part of the common “we” (us + others). Winter seems to compare such a notion of the term against the practically observed “others” who at times become part of the “we.” In the early pages of her book, she suggests that this sort of distinction is indeed what is meant by “Others” (capitalized) which she links to “them” while “others” (uncapitalized) has the possibility of being a part of “we” (Winter 2011, 5). However, if “Others” is the same as “them”, it is unclear why discussion of the capitalized variant is needed. The interchangeable usage introduces unneeded complexity to the articulation of the overall model.

The looseness of terms at times works against the justification of what contribution Winter’s model makes to the study of national and ethnic relations and in turn the study of identity. Whereas her argument rests on breaking an analysis based on dualistic models such as self and other, in the end “us + others” as “we” is always situated against “them.” In other words, although Winter’s triangular model recognizes distinctions within the “we” group, when power is exercised it is continually illustrated as dichotomy of that group (the “we”) against “them” and thus resembles more commonly used dualistic understandings of power. This begs the question of why the model’s added complexity is needed, compared to already established understandings? A partial response might be that Winter’s model helps illustrate the creation of “we,” but once that is achieved one is left asking if the designation of “we” can escape the dichotomy of relations that signifies that all those who do not belong are in essence “them.”

A Narrow Sample and Timeframe of Analysis

Some of the conclusions with respect to English-Canadians consistently being treated as “us” and French-Québécois as “others” and “them” might be related to the narrow sample and timeframe used to illustrate Winter’s model. Although the critical discourse analysis used to generate and support her model are based on a keyword search related to multiculturalism that yielded a sample of 123 opinion pieces, it is unclear how many

authors or columnists were responsible for those articles. Both the *Toronto Star* and the *Globe and Mail*, the newspapers used in the keyword searches, have a select number of authors writing opinion pieces. The sample used in Winter's analysis might actually be a much smaller number of authors than the number 123 portrays. The proportion of articles written by the same authors is not engaged in the book. If we imagine that many opinion pieces were generated by the same people, then Winter may in fact have a sample of just a handful of authors.

The *Toronto Star* and *Globe and Mail*, moreover, are treated as "central Canadian" representations, however, they really are just Toronto accounts. It is true that they boast Canada's widest newspaper circulation, ranked first and second in the country (The Bivings Report 2007; Newspapers Canada 2011) and are papers in the country's most populous city and most competitive newspaper market. They do not, however, represent the regional diversity that characterizes Canada. Although recent polling suggests much consensus among Canadians towards immigration (Trudeau Foundation 2011) and other polling shows a strong pride in multiculturalism (Reitz 2011), Winter's argument and her situating of Quebec as "others" and "them" against English and immigrant Canadian multiculturalism suggest that regional diversity matters. Accounting for regional differences may also help explain why some cities and regions have embraced immigration and multiculturalism, like Toronto and much of Southern Ontario, while others have retained an attitude of suspicion, like Quebec City and regions outside of Montreal, and yet others have largely sat silent or are considered outside of the debate altogether, such as Halifax and the rest of Atlantic Canada until only recently.

My concerns here are not with the critical content analysis of these papers, but rather with the attempt to broaden Winter's claims beyond the city of Toronto. In part, an endnote speaks to this concern, but it is buried in the back of the book and largely bypassed. The cost of extending the argument beyond the city risks presenting a Toronto-centric, incomplete view of the country. Admittedly, both the small number of writers drafting the opinion pieces and the papers in which they write are influential, but they are a far cry from representing a broad Canadian view of multiculturalism and national and ethnic relations.

The narrowness of the data used to illustrate her model can also be found in the 1992–2001 timeframe examined. In part, the period was chosen to include debate around the Charlottetown Accord, the Quebec referendum, and also capture the early effects of 9/11—all good reasons for looking at that 10-year window. The period, however, misses the important triggering events around the defeat of the Meech Lake Accord, which arguably sparked the Charlottetown process and a redirection of Aboriginal relations, and it also misses the full impact of how 9/11 changed North American attitudes around nation, ethnicity, and race. It also might account for why Winter observes high levels of support for multiculturalism in Canada (Winter 2011, p. 190) compared to other countries. The period of analysis certainly misses the post-9/11 dip in support for multiculturalism shown in other time-series data looking at the 2000s (Environics Institute 2010). It is a dip that did not last long, but likely accounts for some of the recent concerns around reasonable accommodation and the need for immigrants to adopt "Canadian" values (Trudeau Foundation 2011).

In a related point, although Winter shows that some 75 % of Canadians support multiculturalism, what does it mean that 25 % are less keen on it? When metrics of

“multiculturalism” in practice are examined, such as experiences of discrimination, the results can be shocking and counter some of Winter’s conclusions. For example, only 53 % of Canadians have a “good” opinion towards the Arab community, 92 % have witnessed racist behaviours, and 21 % admit to having uttered a racial slur (Sun Media 2007). In part, these findings come from data outside the period Winter analyses and in part they are found because they look beyond the discourse of authors of opinion pieces in Toronto newspapers. It is not my intention to argue that any of the critical comments on the narrowness of the sample and timeframe are detrimental to Winter’s model, but rather that each is a challenge to her and others to extend her model to a wider cross-section of situations to show the robustness of its possible implications.

Opportunities to Rejuvenate Established Insights for a New Generation of Social Scientists

Similar to concerns over terminology and sample is the question of whether or not Winter fully identifies how social closure works as a process to change different “us,” “them,” and “other” relations. To do so requires a broader engagement of political sociological perspectives on how groups negotiate power and a different methodological tact, one that searches for causal mechanisms of processes rather than descriptions of groups or situations.

To her credit, Winter draws on a wide range of theorists to support her arguments. Weber plays a focal role as do Pierre Bourdieu, Will Kymlika, and Charles Taylor. Each is used to describe a taxonomy of “us,” “them,” and “others”, as well as the notion of social closure. Additional theories by classic political sociologists dealing with the underlying processes of power, and in turn national and ethnic relations, however, could add an account of when and why groups fall under different stations of belonging.

Liberal theorist Albert Hirschman (1970), for instance, offered the notions of “exit,” “voice,” and “loyalty” to help explain how members of different groups respond to situations of diminishing returns to belonging. People can choose to abandon a group, launch grievances, or remain supportive. Hirschman’s model offers an approach that does not focus on describing the taxonomy of relations, but rather the actions that occur as result of changing situations, such as social closure, and in turn his account is one of the processes of power, rather than a description of it. Others focus on what instigates changing situations, such as Peter Eisinger (1973) or Charles Tilly (1978), with the theorization of political opportunity structures. These models provide an understanding of the sociopolitical contexts and situations that spark mobilization, both in terms of action and group solidarity. Again, the focus is not on describing the situation alone, but rather on how a situation triggers change. Yet another example can be found in the *Vertical Mosaic* by John Porter (1965). His work offered many similar observations to those by Winter but he also looked at time and change as well as unequal power relations head-on. His notion of “entrance status” and differences between “charter groups” and latecomers offers an explanation on how power is maintained. Porter’s analysis was especially striking because he looked at data over the 1931–1961 period, including censuses and a wide range of other sources of information. Although he was not a Weberian, Porter’s analysis looks at economic, social and cultural, and

institutional forms of power (similar to class, status, and party) and many of his observations pair well with Winter's notion of "us," "them," and "others." His work differs, however, by also accounting for why some groups wield more power in those relations than others and this would be a welcome extension of the model that Winter provides. Like many works that have the potential to spark broad intellectual debate, *Us, them, and others* opens opportunities to rejuvenate established political sociological insights and introduce them to a new generation of scholars. It is my hope that this brief review offers the first of many salvos toward such a pursuit.

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