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## How New Models Open Opportunities to Re-Understanding and Expanding Established Insights: Reaction and Critique of Elke Winter's *Us, Them, and Others*

### Abstract

This research note offers critical reaction to Elke Winter's *Us, Them and Others* in an effort to trigger debate around the issues she identifies and her model (us + others<sub>1-n</sub> = multicultural we ≠ them<sub>1-n</sub>). Critiques include: a looseness and inconsistency with some key concepts and arguments, a narrow sample and timeframe of analysis, and missed opportunities to revisit past luminaries that identify underlying causal mechanisms rather than descriptive labels alone. Despite these criticisms, it is argued that Winter's model has the potential to strike a chord with a broad range of scholars 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 overlooked and under-appreciated scholarship.

### Résumé

Cette note de recherche propose une réaction critique contre *Us, Them and Others* par Elke Winter, dans le but de stimuler un débat autour des problèmes et du modèle présentés dans ce livre (nous + autres<sub>1-n</sub> = un nous multiculturel ≠ eux<sub>1-n</sub>). Les défauts relevés sont, entre autres, une imprécision et des incohérences dans certains concepts clés et arguments principaux, une analyse portant sur un échantillon et une période restreints, et des occasions manquées pour revoir des théories classiques sur les mécanismes de causalité au lieu de simplement s'en tenir à un étiquetage descriptif. Malgré ces critiques, il est clair que le modèle de Winter a beaucoup de potentiel pour trouver un écho auprès d'une grande variété de chercheurs parce qu'il aborde des questions qui sont au cœur des débats contemporains et qu'il offre de nouvelles perspectives nous permettant de revenir sur des travaux négligés et sous-estimés.



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 overlooked and under-appreciated scholarship. 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; it looks at how different groups align with one another in some contexts, but exclude one another in others; and the book offers insight on pressing debates

around multiculturalism and the growing fear of ethnic and religious radicalization and failed immigrant integration.

In this short research note, I will 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. Overall, I will offer a very brief summary of the book's main argument and highlight how it offers Canadian scholars opportunities to engage with emerging theoretical debates around Weberian sociology. The research note also examines how the book provides tools to engage Canada's exceptionalism with respect to multiculturalism and immigration and how the book can be used to understand how liberalism and multiculturalism are used to discriminate against ethnic and religious minorities. Despite these strengths, Winter's argument is open to a number of criticisms which will also be raised to show how her work can be extended in future research and academic debate. These include an openness and inconsistency with some of her key concepts and argument, a narrow sample and timeframe of analysis, and missed opportunities for theorizing more broadly and revisiting past luminaries to identify underlying causal mechanisms rather than descriptive labels alone.

## UNDERSTANDING US, THEM AND OTHERS

Winter's argument is centered on multiple literatures, including scholarship on nationalism and race and ethnic relations in an effort to understand Canadian multiculturalism and, more specifically, how Anglophones, Francophones and Allophone "others" relate to one another, often forming allegiances, and, at other times, excluding each other. The recognition that literatures on both nationalism and race and ethnic relations can contribute to an argument on Canadian multiculturalism is highly novel. In fact, there are but a few scholarly exceptions—the work of Anthony Smith (1992; 1994), for instance—who have tackled the similarities and differences between nationalism and ethnicity as concepts and epistemological units of analysis. The failure to engage both literatures leads to potentially false distinctions in the types of analysis that distinguish among these groups, when, in fact, they might face similar social forces. A consequence of treating each separately is to treat ethnicity as involving communities, non-state actors, and non-state-seeking social groups and, by contrast, treating nations as linked to states and nations seeking states. Yet, such a distinction fails to see that both types of groups exist among one another, that people usually belong to both, and most importantly, that people's belongings are dynamic. Likewise, ethnic groups can, over the course of time, become nations, and established nation-states are often built on ethnicities. Treating each as separate largely creates a false sense of stability across these social groupings,

one that Winter shows does not exist among “Canadians”—English, French, and “other” ethnic groups. Instead, she rightly notes that groups of all scales come together or act apart depending on context, and that is what shapes degrees of belonging and exclusion.

Winter engages these issues through a “neo-Weberian” approach to national and ethnic relations by looking at the process of “social closure” in a continuum of relations set by *vergemeinschaftung* (community, ethnic group) and *vergesellschaftung* (nation, civic, society, socialization). She argues that social closure triggers different configurations of relationships among established social groups and newcomers. Her use of Weber is very timely and follows the recent Weberian trend in Canadian political sociology (e.g., Satzewich and Liodakis 2007; Stanbridge and Ramos 2012), new English translations and collections to engage his work, the launching of *Max Weber Studies* in 2000, and continued assertions that “Weber matters” (Chalcraft et al. 2008).

Winter’s analysis recognizes that pluralism and multiculturalism emerge from the equation: “us + others<sub>1-n</sub> = multicultural we ≠ them<sub>1-n</sub>.” A simplified version, which I will use in this note, can be understood as “us + others = we vs. them.” She illustrates how, in some contexts, this means that English, French, and immigrant Canadians are banded together against external nations, such as the United States, but at other times, the solidarity breaks down against one another, as is the case of multicultural English Canada and immigrants against Quebec nationalism. The distinction between “us” and “others” allows researchers to situate degrees of belonging to ethnic and national groups—“we”—and, in turn, against challenging groups—them.”

In the process of exploring these ideas through critical discourse analysis of opinion pieces, in two newspapers—the *Toronto Star* and the *Globe and Mail*—Winter shows that the process of “us” and “others” joining emerges through multinational compromise among founding or colonizing nations and multicultural accommodation of newcomers. She illustrates how relationships among groups can change through the case of English, French and immigrant Canadians situating themselves against an American “them,” or multinational conflict, as well as through the multicultural accommodation of newcomers as in the case of English and immigrant Canadians against Québécois nationalism. In essence, shifts between *vergemeinschaftung* and *vergesellschaftung* are situational and theorized with respect to social threat and, in essence, closure. Different social contexts force groups to define degrees of belonging to one another as well as with relationships of exclusion.

The backdrop of Winter’s study is the 1990s and early 2000s, a period of nationalism, ethnic conflict and, in some places in the world, genocide. It was a decade generally considered a point of crisis for multiculturalism (Winter 2011, 9). Comparatively, Canada was an exception, opening its immigration intake to unprecedented levels with a goal of about 250,000 immigrants per year. Immigration

in Canada, and more specifically, in Southern Ontario and British Columbia, was seen as a driver of the economy. As a result, while many countries retreated from diversity and multiculturalism during the decade, Canada embraced it. This is in line with David Ley's observation that Canada sees immigration as a solution to its problems, while most other countries see immigration as a problem (2011). Paradoxically, at the same time that Canadians embraced multiculturalism, they also faced the contention of Aboriginal peoples as seen in the Oka Crisis of 1990 and the Gustafsen Lake and Ipperwash standoffs in 1995, and the rise of Quebec nationalism with a referendum in 1995. The latter is explored by Winter in detail in an effort to understand the puzzle of how multiculturalism can both be embraced and contested at the same time.

Winter resolves the paradox by identifying a situational and fluid model that accounts for how national and ethnic groups orient to one another, at times forming a common relationship and yet, at others, an oppositional one. It is a model that has the potential to be extended to other contexts to engage broader national and ethnic tensions. With further development, the "us + others = we vs. them" model might potentially shed light on the contradictions of the new century. For instance, the trend over the last decades has been of people embracing "liberal values" and diversity to exclude subordinate groups, as seen in the emergence of "codes of conduct" for immigrants (particularly Muslims) in places like Hérouxville or Gatineau, Quebec and the 2011 announcement by Immigration Minister Jason Kenney that Canada will adopt policies against the wearing of burkas or niqab during citizenship ceremonies. The model can also be used to examine how ethnic groups become incorporated into the fold of mainstream dominant culture and how they can both belong, when the context offers an external threat, or be excluded, when immigrants are perceived to challenge established norms. Winter offers the tools needed to engage the complexity of national and ethnic relations in the 21st century, a century where diversity cannot be ignored.

Winter's arguments and model, however, are also open to a number of critiques. These include a looseness and inconsistency with some key concepts and, in turn, the argument, a narrow sample and timeframe of analysis; and missed opportunities to revisit past scholarship dealing with similar issues. The remainder of this paper will engage each in turn.

### LOOSENESS OF TERMS AND CONSISTENCY OF THE ARGUMENT

In a number of places, Winter uses terms that introduce ambiguity to the underlying power relations among national and ethnic groups or uses key concepts loosely. Throughout the book, for example, Winter uses the language of "majority" and

“minority” to position different national and ethnic groups against one another. Unfortunately the usage of these terms obscures the underlying mechanisms that distinguish among “us,” “others,” and “them” in different situations. The true source of claims to authenticity, acknowledged and denied, in belonging to a nation or ethnicity and the labeling of positions in such exchanges, stem from unequal power relations and thus, the language of dominant and subordinate groups is likely a more accurate description of relations than majority and minority. For instance, within Quebec, Anglophones are a minority but have traditionally held power. The use of the term “majority” to identify their position within the province obscures the inequality and imbalance of historical power relations. It hides the extent of the historic imbalance of their position. With respect to Québécois today, they are a minority in Canada but a majority within Quebec and thus are subordinate in one situation and dominant in another. Identifying them as minority hides the situational advantage they, at times, hold and potentially steers analysis away from it. The decision to invoke language linked to numeric denotation of meaning is one that potentially hides the mechanisms of power that drive national and ethnic relations and the ability of groups to identify as “us” or “we” and the inability to contest being labeled as “others” and “them.”

In many places, Winter’s argument engages issues of power. However, she rarely explicitly mentions it or the mechanisms that drive it. Although this might seem like a minor semantic issue, it is actually quite important because calling a dominant and powerful few a “majority,” as in the case of Anglo-Quebecers, is misleading and potentially detrimental to understanding the underlying mechanisms and contradictions of power at play. This is not to mention the reification of the power which dominant groups hold. It is my hope that in her future theorization of “us,” “them,” and “others,” Winter will be more specific about the dimensions of power associated with the processes of social closure and the notions of *vergemeinschaftung* and *vergesellschaftung*.

Although the use of terms like majority and minority is one issue, another related problem is found in the inconsistent invocation of the key concepts of “us,” “Others” (capitalized), “others,” and “them.” “Us” is almost continuously reserved for English-Canada, but “others,” in both usages, and “them” are interchangeably used for the United States, Quebec and immigrant ethnic groups. While the interchangeability and changing designation of national and ethnic groups as “others” and “them” might be explained away by the fluidity of the processes of social closure, Winter does not clearly articulate specifically when and why groups are assigned different lesser statuses of others and them. The complexity of different designations can be found in Table 9.1 (Winter 2011, 184-185), which attempts to offer an overall taxonomy of the relations captured by the “us + others = we vs. them” 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 and by the geographic territory and institutions of the state. 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 Canadian “us” and “we”—even the multicultural variant.

Winter is also unclear on the epistemological and ontological underpinnings of distinguishing between capital and lower case “O” other. Some familiar with post-modern and religious writing might interpret this to mean absolute “Others,” those who can never become part of the common “we” (us + others) compared 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 she means by “Others” (capitalized) and links it to “them” while “others” 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. Likewise, the interchangeable usage introduces unneeded complexity to the articulation of the overall model. Unfortunately, the mechanisms that invoke each labeling (“Others,” “others,” and “them”) are under-specified. As with the decision to use majority and minority as descriptors, we again lose sight of the potential for the model to be used to identify and engage the underlying processes driving the power relations of national and ethnic relations.

The looseness of terms and inconsistent application of key concepts, at times, works against the justification of what value-addedness Winter’s model brings to the study of national and ethnic relations and, in turn, to the study of identity construction. Whereas her argument rests on breaking an analysis based on dualistic or dialectic 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, on the continuum of *vergemeinschaftung* and *vergesellschaftung*, when power is exercised, it is continually based against a dichotomy of “we” against “them” and thus resembles more commonly used dualistic understandings of power. As with capital and lower case “others,” the question of why the model’s added complexity is needed, compared to established and existing understandings, is sparked. A partial response might be that the model helps to 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 don’t belong are, in essence, “them.”

## A NARROW SAMPLE AND TIMEFRAME OF ANALYSIS

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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 time frame used to illustrate Winter’s model. Although the critical discourse analysis used to generate and support the 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 explored 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. As a result, the unit of analysis really is not the number of opinion pieces, but rather the authors of the articles—a much narrower scope of analysis.

The *Toronto Star* and the *Globe and Mail*, moreover, are treated as “central Canadian” representations. However, they really are just Toronto representations. 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—either within Central Canada or in terms of the differences that exist among it and other regions like B.C., the Prairies, Quebec, and Atlantic 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 own argument and her situating of Quebec as “others” and “them” against English and immigrant Canadian multiculturalism suggest that regional diversity matters. It is important to consider, moreover, because regional differences help explain why some cities and regions have embraced immigration and multiculturalism, while others have retained an attitude of suspicion, and yet others have largely sat silent or are considered outside of the debate altogether.

My concerns here are not with the critical content analysis of these papers, but rather with the attempt to broaden the claims of *Us, Them, and Others* 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 view of the country. One that is not complete. 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 the “us + others = we vs. them” 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 to 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 government relations with Aboriginal peoples, and it also missed 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, 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 partially accounts for the development of recent vocal concerns around reasonable accommodation and the need for immigrants to adopt “Canadian” values (Trudeau Foundation 2011).

A related point is the following: although Winter shows that some 75 percent of Canadians show support for multiculturalism, what does it mean that 25 percent are less keen on it? When one examines other metrics of “multiculturalism” in practice, rather than in name, results can be shocking. For example, only 53 percent of Canadians have a “good” opinion towards the Arab community, 92 percent have witnessed racist behaviours, and 21 percent 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-sections of situations and contexts to show the robustness of its possible implications.

### **HOW SOCIAL CLOSURE AND A SEARCH FOR MECHANISMS CAN OPEN OPPORTUNITIES TO REVISIT ESTABLISHED THEORETICAL INSIGHTS**

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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 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, but so do the likes of Pierre Bourdieu, Will Kymlicka, and Charles Taylor. Each is used to describe a taxonomy of “us,” “them,” and “others,” as well as the notion of social closure. For instance, Bourdieu’s notions of situation and practice are used to describe social closure, but the description comes at the cost of theorizing the situations that invoke the decision to ally with “others” or to move groups from “them” to “we.” Charles Taylor and Will Kymlicka’s work on multiculturalism and diversity are used by Winter to contribute to an emphasis on description of labels of relations and imbalances, but she does not address the situations that develop them in the first place. Winter uses Taylor’s notions of levels of diversity or deep diversity and Kymlicka’s concepts of national minorities versus other minorities to situate different forms of belonging—“us” and “others” as parts of “we.” However, both theorists and the arguments Winter derives from them are based on recognition of difference and showing the moral value of recognition rather than on a head-on examination of power. Such engagement is an element of neo-Weberianism that is seemingly missing in *Us, Them, and Others*.

Additional theories dealing with the underlying processes of power, and, in turn, national and ethnic relations, could supplement the descriptions of different stations of belonging. For instance, liberal theorist Albert Hirschman (1970) 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 on the actions that occur as a 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 socio-political 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 or acts as a causal mechanism of change. Yet another example can be found in John Porter’s (1965) *Vertical Mosaic*. His work offered many similar observations to those by Winter, Taylor, and Kymlicka, but as a sociologist, he also looked at time and change and 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." However, his work also accounted 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 in understanding contemporary Canadian national and ethnic relations. Like many works that have the potential to spark broad intellectual debate, *Us, Them, and Others* opens opportunities to re-understanding and expanding established political sociological insights. It is my hope that this brief note offers the first of many salvos toward such a pursuit.

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