Elke Winter’s book, *Us, Them, and Others: Pluralism and National Identity in Diverse Societies*, was the winner of the 2012 John Porter Prize from the Canadian Sociological Association (CSA). The Porter Prize is awarded annually to the best non-fiction book published in Canadian sociology. It is widely regarded as the top recognition that can be received by a Canadian sociologist. The Prize is named in honour of the late John Porter, author of the influential *Vertical Mosaic*, and one of Canada’s most well-known sociologists.

I feel extremely fortunate to have the opportunity to respond to Catherine Frost’s and Howard Ramos’ sympathetic and probing comments on *Us, Them, and Others: Pluralism and National Identity in Diverse Societies*. Both scholars have written extensively on multiculturalism, national identity, immigration, and human rights in Canada. It is a privilege to exchange ideas with them about my book. A special thanks to the editors of this journal, as well as to the Association for Canadian Studies and to the Canadian Ethnic Studies Association for having included the Author Meets Critics session from which these contributions result in their joint conference entitled *Revisiting 40 Years of Multicultural Policy in Canada*.

My interlocutors raise a number of important issues, more than I can fully address in this short reply. In the interest of synthesizing, I will address four broad categories of questions raised: the first concerns the model of triangular relations and the issue of othering; the second relates to the issues of normativity, negotiation and intention; the third addresses the question of power and the dynamics between majority/minority relations; and the fourth deals with the sample and time frame. Proceeding this way permits reflections on themes arising across the comments. To set the stage, let me first briefly restate the central motivation for writing the book and its core themes.

Located at the intersection of sociology, political science, normative theory, and communication studies, *Us, Them and Others* deals with the formation of pluralist group identities. My main motivation for writing this book was to find answers to the following questions: How does a national majority come to view itself as “multicultural”? What brings it to integrate a positively connoted conception of diversity into its self-definition of who “we” are and want to be? Put yet in another way, under which conditions are binary us/them relations broken up to include the recognition of others within our midst? Concentrating on Canada, the book pays particular
attention to the complex relations between the national majority, historically recognized ethnocultural or “national” minorities, and immigration-related diversity. The empirical study incorporates the findings from an analysis of English-language newspaper discourses during the 1990s into a theoretical framework inspired by Weberian sociology. It was this combination of empirical findings and a dynamic theory of interethnic group relations that led me to develop a model that defines pluralism as changing sets of triangular social relations, where the compromise between unequal groups—“us” and “others”—is rendered meaningful through the confrontation with real or imagined outsiders (“them”). On the one hand, the analysis sheds a new light on the astonishing resilience of Canadian multiculturalism in the late 1990s—at a time when multicultural policies in other countries had come under heavy attack. On the other hand, it is my hope that the study—and the model of pluralism in particular—provide a template for analyzing the relations between different ethnocultural collectivities and their pluralist accommodations in other contexts and countries.

OTHERING AND THE MODEL OF TRIANGULAR RELATIONS

Overall, my interlocutors present three concerns with respect to my interpretation of the processes of othering and the model of triangular relations. First, there is the question of whether the model of triangular relations really transcends binary us/them relations or whether “we against ‘them’” remains the dominant boundary and the model thus “resembles more commonly used dualistic understandings of power” (Ramos 2011, 270; see also Frost 2011, 258). Second, there is a concern “that the triangular dynamics Winter identifies [could] actually deepen the experience of being othered” (Frost, 257). According to Frost, those outside of the pluralist group identity (“them”) are not only faced with an extended alliance between groups on the inside (“us” and “others”). They also find themselves at (at least) “two degrees of removal from the central player” (“us”). Third, there is the question of whether the “key concepts of ‘us’, ‘Others’ (capitalized), ‘others’, and ‘them’” (Ramos, 269) are employed inconsistently to designate English Canadians, Franco-Québecois, immigrants, Aboriginal Peoples, etcetera (see also Frost, 257-258).

In response to these questions and critiques, let me clarify where the model of triangular relations comes from, what it is, what it can do, and what it cannot do. As a sociological concept, born from empirical observation and not from normative reasoning, the model shifts our perspective to those processes that are deemed to be significant by the researcher. It neither changes these processes, nor does it provide the tools to make the world a better place. Both theoretically (Chapter 3) and empirically (Chapter 6), I am unhappy with, on the one hand, normative theories’ construction of a seemingly benevolent “we” that is comprised of power-depleted diversity and has
no concrete boundaries. On a personal level, I may agree with the “lofty pluralism” (Frost, 260) implied in this type of theorizing. As a sociologist, however, I hold that there is no inclusion without exclusion, and that each and every group identity/group formation relies on the factual or symbolic exclusion of “them.” In this sense, I agree with my interlocutors: the boundary between “us” and “them” continues to exist.

On the other hand, I am equally dissatisfied with anti-foundationalist approaches that content themselves with revealing unequal us/them relations. While unpacking the numerous processes of othering is important, this type of analysis was unable to account for what was going on in my empirical material. Thus, I argue that opening the “lens” to include triangular relations (rather than binary oppositions) in the investigation and to shift the gaze away from processes of exclusion (constructions of “them”) towards processes of conditional inclusion (constructions of “others” next to “us”) allows for a more meaningful interpretation of the multicultural transformation of Canadian national identity in the second half of the 1990s. While the boundary between “us” and “them” continues to exist, the focus of investigation is now on a multi-layered process where some outsiders become part of a more inclusive “we.” As such, I agree with Frost’s observation that “Winter’s account does not ameliorate the dynamics of othering so much as it multiplies them” (257). And, we may add, it also changes the focal point of attention.

Frost’s critique, however, goes one step further. She fears that with multiple processes of othering, those situated outside the “we” may experience a heightened form of exclusion since they now face an alliance between “us” and “others.” While Frost is certainly right in pointing out that we are now viewing different degrees of exclusion, the analytical model does not create these differences; it merely accounts for existing processes and relations. By multiplying the categories deemed significant (to a minimum of three), the model allows for a more dynamic view of the social than a set of binaries. It asks: In which particular context(s), and for what periods of time does the dominant group assign the proxy “other” or “them” to a specific social category? What happens to its own self-definition due to this assignment? And which other social category becomes thereby included/excluded?

In response to the last question, I argue that the social categories that are assigned the proxies “others” and “them” vary frequently. Thus, what Ramos (270) wrongly perceives as “an inconsistent application of key concepts” is part and parcel of my theoretical approach. Depending on situation and discourse type, one and the same category (e.g., French-speaking Québécois) is sometimes included as “other,” sometimes excluded as “them”. To highlight this dynamic, as Ramos observes, I sometimes establish an analogy between “them” and “Others” (with a capital O). It is not my intention to introduce “unneeded complexity” (Ramos, 270), but rather to underline the fluidity of the assigned social positions.
With respect to the pluralist character of the emerging collective identity ("we"), I argue that it depends upon continuous dialectic negotiations of multicultural self-representations in relation to changing outsiders ("them") and their varying definitions. Once the constitutive ethno-political conflict is settled (and who is/what represents “them” is fixed over time and across discourses), “others” tend to become assimilated and the emerging “we” can no longer be characterized as truly “pluralist” (see Chapter 7). This is precisely what happened in the second half of the 1990s, when a seemingly separatist and ethnocentric Quebec was almost exclusively attributed the position of “them,” and this even in “liberal-pluralist” media discourses (Chapter 9) that previously underlined the importance of the “French fact” for the construction of a multi-national and multicultural Canada. Thus, the consistent positioning of English Canada as ‘us’ and Quebec as ‘others’ and ‘them’ (Ramos, 270) are part of my findings and not, as Ramos (270) suggests, the consequence of an inconsistent invocation of key concepts. This being said, the fact that “us’ is almost continuously reserved for English Canada” (Ramos, 270) is certainly a function of the examined empirical material: the English-speaking mainstream press. It would be interesting to study which groups are assigned the proxy “us” in French Canadian, Québécois or ethnic media productions.

**Negotiation, Normative Pluralism, and Intent**

Coming from a normative theory perspective, Frost raises intriguing questions about the status of negotiation, normative pluralism and intention in the book. Her concerns can be summarized as follows: First, Winter mistakenly assumes that pluralism as a negotiated compromise between “us and others” represents a moral middle-ground between the benevolence vs. struggle options as interpretive frameworks (258). The assumption that negotiation is morally superior is flawed as bargaining “reduces complex motivations down to questions of strategy” (258) and involves negotiations between unequal parties (259). Second, unlike moral theorists’ “lofty [normative] pluralism” (260), which captures abstract conceptions of fair terms of coexistence despite cultural differences, Winter’s sociological definition of “normative” pluralism refers to “social norms and practices [of ethnocultural pluralism that are] widely perceived as just and fair” (260). This is problematic, as this definition of normative pluralism would also apply to regimes of segregation and apartheid that were widely perceived as just and fair. Third, in Winter’s analysis, “Canadian pluralism is not intentional” (261). By eliminating intention from the picture, her “theory becomes a formula for passivity and disengagement” (261).

While these are all very important concerns, I hope to show that some of them are not warranted. First, it is by no means my intention to claim that negotiation is
morally superior to any other form of instituting pluralism (based on faith, normative reasoning, decree, military might, etcetera). While I may have personal preferences, in *Us, Them, and Others*, I refrain from normative reasoning. I do, however, in a consequently Weberian way, disclose to the reader my initial normative viewpoint that inspires the sociological investigation: I cherish pluralism since I perceive it, as Frost (258) correctly notes, a “remedy against the effects of nationalist exclusion,” which favours the dominant group over ethnocultural minorities (Winter 2011, 196). Compared to the disadvantages incurred by subordinate groups due to nationalist exclusion, this remedy can be seen as “modest”. As Frost (259) correctly notes, the model of pluralism as a triangular relation does not eliminate the power inequalities of those negotiating. The Weberian perspective adopted in *Us, Them and Others* maintains that even pluralist societies will never be free from power relations. This is because the process of ethnicization, that is, the construction of ethnic categories and eventually the emergence of ethnic groups, are deeply informed with power. Furthermore, while the dominant group may indeed, for moral reasons (benevolence), give up some of its power and invite the equal (pluralist) participation of subordinate groups, it is unlikely to satisfy all minority demands and to do this without being asked or pressured. A group’s success in pluralist negotiations is, thus, indeed dependent on its material and symbolic power. While I personally feel that the outcome—pluralist compromise and conditional inclusion as observed in the Canadian case—is morally superior to outright exclusion or oppression, I am neither able to deduct pluralism’s moral worth from my empirical observations, nor does the model of pluralism as a triangular relations guarantee that those who I consider the most deserving groups will be situated on the right sight of the equation.

Second, Frost’s differentiation between moral theory’s definition of (lofty) normative pluralism and my sociological one is highly enlightening and deserves more attention that I can give it here. I will only address her most important concern, namely that “my” normative pluralism would also apply to regimes of segregation and apartheid. According to Richard A. Schermerhorn (1970, 122-125), normative pluralism responds to the questions of what kind of society is desirable; whether/how minority groups should be incorporated; and what role the state should take in order to foster the realization of this vision. As Frost cautions correctly, historical answers to these questions include segregation (in the United States), as well as apartheid (in South Africa) and ethnic exclusion (as arguably practiced before 1999 under Germany’s *ius sanguinis* citizenship regime, see Bader 1995). Some scholars therefore discredit the concept of pluralism altogether (Jenkins 1997, chap. 3). However, if we define normative pluralism, as Schermerhorn does, not only as what is “perceived as just and fair” (Frost, 260) by the dominant group, but also and predominantly by the subordinate groups, we preempt the possibility that normative
pluralism can be interpreted as an instrument of ethnic oppression. Louis Wirth, for example, defines “a pluralistic minority [as] one which seeks toleration for its differences on the part of the dominant group” (Wirth 1945, 354). Defined in this way, normative pluralism does not rely on abstract moral reasoning of justice and fairness. Rather, it involves accounting for the claims of ethnic minorities in a society’s definition of who “we” are and want to be. As such, a sociological definition of normative theory does not provide the absolute answers that moral theorists will give. While it suggests an egalitarian incorporation of ethnic minorities, it does not prescribe how much institutional variety and group-differentiated rights this notion implies. From a sociological perspective, these decisions are left open to constant renegotiation.

This renegotiation takes place not only between the dominant group and ethnocultural minorities, but also between the different factions within these entities. Thus, as Frost reminds us, there is no “common national genius working itself out through history” (Frost, 261 paraphrasing Herder). How, then, does some sort of widely shared national self-identification emerge? In Us, Them and Others, I identify three different perspectives on multiculturalism within the Canadian mainstream press. These perspectives exhibit very different conceptions of what/who constitutes multiculturalism and of its role for Canadian national identity. While otherwise divergent, in the second half of the 1990s, these perspectives “meet” in their opposition to Quebec’s seemingly “ethnic” nationalism and separatist aspirations. Thereby, multiculturalism emerges as these perspectives’ smallest common denominator of pan-Canadian identity (Chapter 9). Arguing that this is a “lukewarm compromise” which owes much of its existence to “lucky, unintended circumstances” (Winter 2011, 207), it is not my aim to deny that some of the actors involved and the discourses observed are driven by (good) intentions. In fact, a nuanced reading of the three discourses shows that the multicultural transformation of Canadian identity is indeed intended by some, but not by others. If we remove the coincidental, situational element from the equation, multiculturalism may not have become a dominant discourse, as Karim observes (2002). Would there be unanimous agreement that multiculturalism is the best way to promote national unity and equality in Canada and a clear intention, shared by all, to make this multiculturalism work, the controversial debates over ethnocultural and ethnoreligious diversity that Canadians experienced in the early 2000s would have been redundant (Winter, this journal, forthcoming).

### Majority/Minority Relations and Questions of Power

According to Ramos, “in many places Winter’s argument engages issues of power, however, she rarely explicitly mentions it or the mechanisms that drive it” (269). He regrets that “Winter uses the language of ‘majority’ and ‘minority’ [rather than dom-
inant and subordinate group] to position different national and ethnic groups against one another” (Ramos, 268-269). Furthermore, he maintains that “a broader engagement of political sociological perspectives on how groups negotiate power and a different methodological tact” (272) are needed in order to “fully identify how social closure works as a process to change different ‘us’, ‘them’, and ‘other’ relations” (272).

Since I have already spoken to the question of power in one of my previous answers, let me quickly clarify Ramos’ second point, the terminology of majority/minority relations. In the sociological tradition of interethnic relations, these concepts are defined in terms of power and not in terms of demography (Chapter 4). Thus, I fully agree with Ramos’ that “within Quebec Anglophones are a [numeric] minority but [they] have traditionally held power” (269). As such, they constitute a sociological majority. I nevertheless accept Ramos’ suggestion that the language of dominant and subordinate groups may reduce the potential of confusion. Throughout this response, I have therefore employed this latter terminology. I also accept Ramos’ criticism that the empirical material examined in Us, Them and Others only allows for a partial analysis of the mechanisms and processes involved in negotiating the multicultural transformation of Canadian national identity. In order to answer my primary research question “How does a national majority come to view itself as ‘multicultural’?”, in the book, I make the conscious decision to focus on the changing self-representation of the dominant group; even with this limited focus, only a very specific segment of dominant discourses is examined. Minority voices are largely absent from the sample (with the exception of an emerging discourse in the Toronto Star in the second half of the 1990s). Their inclusion would be necessary to fully understand how “them” and “others” challenge dominant representations of the society “we” want to live in.

LIMITATIONS OF THE SAMPLE AND THE TIME FRAME

Additional limitations of the empirical study include, as Ramos points out, sample size and time frame (Ramos, 271). Rather than being “central Canadian” representations, the Toronto Star and the Globe and Mail “really are just Toronto representations” (Ramos, 271). According to Ramos, it is also “unclear how many authors or columnists were responsible for those articles” (271). Furthermore, the 1992-2001 timeframe “misses the important triggering events around the defeat of the Meech Lake Accord” (Ramos, 272) and also “misses the full impact of how 9/11 changed North American attitudes around nation, ethnicity and race” (Ramos, 272).

Let me start by saying, that grosso modo, I accept Ramos’ critique. The empirical study in Us, Them, and Others does not pretend to represent “a broad Canadian view of multiculturalism” (271). Accounting for regional diversity in media representations of multiculturalism would have been interesting, as would have been the
extension of the time frame. Furthermore, the media only represents a small segment of a society’s dominant discourse. I do not agree, however, with Ramos’ suggestion that it matters how many different journalists are responsible for writing the examined op-ed pieces. In the book, editorials, columns, and letters to the editor are treated as interconnected parts of a single media text. The articles identified by keyword search are those that dominate the *Globe and Mail*'s and the *Toronto Star*'s representations of Canadian multiculturalism and nationhood in the 1990s. As such, the study provides a window through which we can observe the complex group representations and proliferations of meaning involved in the multicultural transformation of Canadian national identity at a specific moment in time. I am pleased to read that, according to Ramos, “the narrowness of the sample and the timeframe are [not] detrimental to Winter’s model, but that each is a challenge to her and others to extend her model to wider cross-sections of situations and contexts” (Ramos, 272).

To conclude, let me underline the fruitfulness of my interlocutors’ comments in general and of this interdisciplinary discussion in particular. Multiculturalism, nation-building, and the study of inclusion/exclusion are situated at the heart of various disciplines. Far too often, historians, political scientists, geographers and sociologists, to name just a few, are talking past each other, and even within each discipline, there is a wide variety of approaches. I hope that this discussion of *Us, Them and Others* can make a small contribution in bridging these gaps.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**


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