

Spaces of Inclusion and Exclusion: Discourses on the Policy of Multiculturalism in Canada

SCOTT REE

Introduction

In private and public spaces¹ people deliberately or unknowingly discourse over perceptions and beliefs about *self* and *other*, about *us* and *them*.² These discussions are intrinsic to sociopolitical processes--the construction of individual and collective identity, the determination of social position and rank and the distribution of material resources. Discourses of and over the categories of race and, later, ethnicity have been some of the most persistent and trenchant in Western societies from even before the time of European imperialism; and they are intricately tied to relations of domination and exploitation and the will to power. In imperialist discourses--administrative, political, media and academic--we often find open statements about the intellectual, biological and cultural superiority of the white race. Since the mid-twentieth century, though, people have had to avoid open declarations of racial supremacy or denigrating remarks about social others. This shift was encouraged by an increase in the number and effectiveness of human and civil rights laws, especially after the Nazi death camps, and a corollary questioning of the validity of the biological study of race, which had supported racist belief.³ Especially in public discourses, this has forced racist ideology underground or to operate in more subtle ways, for example in discussions of ethnicity, culture or tradition.⁴ In Canada, since 1971, these discussions have often revolved, directly or indirectly around the policy of multiculturalism. According to official rhetoric, this is a policy of recognition,

inclusion and participation for Canada's cultural *others*. While this reading cannot be completely dismissed, it is proposed here that multiculturalism is better seen as an active discursive site in the production and control of social difference and the competition for symbolic and material resources. Here discourse has played an important role in the exercise of and resistance to the will to power and privilege.

In this essay, in part three, I take up some of discourses of and over the policy of multiculturalism and explore the types of discursive modes used in symbolic determination and conceptual control. I also look at the interplay between dominant, official, oppositional, alternative and populist discourse in the battle for cultural hegemony. To lay the groundwork, in parts one and two I sketch my position on the sociopolitical role of discourse and discuss how power operates in and through it.

Part I: Discourse & Hegemony

Antonio Gramsci's concept of hegemony provides one route for critically considering how "a specific mode of living" and dominant forms and patterns of life are produced, reproduced, contested and altered in the ebb and flow of local and global relations of power.⁵ Gramsci and later Raymond Williams explored how an overarching ideology is internalized as normal reality in the day to day cultural practices, the consciousness and the experiences of social institutions and people, rather than imposed as an alien form of knowledge by a ruling elite or class. Writes Williams about hegemony,

It is a whole body of practices and expectations, over the whole of living: our senses and assignments of energy, our shaping perceptions of ourselves and our world. It is a lived system of meanings and values--constitutive and constituting--which as they are experienced as practices appear as reciprocally confirming.⁶

This inclusion of the cultural realm in the study of class

domination, in addition to political and material conditions, opened the door for later theorists to examine the powerful structuring role of communication processes, such as semiotic expression and discourse. These efforts challenged a utilitarian view of cultural symbols and codes that saw them simply as tools with which individuals could express meaning, convey knowledge and exchange information. Eventually, in theoretical discussions and political movements, Gramsci's notions were extended beyond the class arena to other forms and institutions of hegemony built around such categories of identity as race, gender, ethnicity and colonial status.

The work by Ferdinand de Saussure on the formative relationships of language has, too, influenced the study of communication systems, and his models have been applied by anthropologists to the study of other cultural codes, such as myth, artifact, ritual and dress. Among his important insights, Saussure argued that because language is an abstract system, in a sign there is no natural association between a signifier and signified. The signifier is exterior to the subject. The symbol or medium is separate from its meaning or message, and any association is created historically.⁷ This idea has led many postmodernist thinkers to see our world as referentless. That is, to doubt our ability to ever know reality outside of the cultural codes through which we construct and comprehend it.⁸ As part of this doubt, sites of representation and forms of expression, particularly linguistic and photographic, are examined to show how the associated meanings and reality they present as norm or truth are socially determined in time and place. These include academic writing, commercial advertisements, literature, news, political speeches and scientific discourses. Representations of the other have especially come under critical scrutiny.⁹

To assert that language, discourse or other semiotic codes affect how and what we think and assist hegemony, however, is not to argue that they are ultimately deterministic or monolithic. I swim against popular academic currents that, following Saussure and

Heidegger, objectify and make arbitrary a sign system and assigns it excessive influence on the construction of reality, separate from social and material relations and human struggle. But neither are social actors in complete control of sign systems, are they masters; it is not simply a tool of our individual and collective making. Languages and other codes do proceed us and we are bound to some extent by their structure and rules, and by dominant readings and meanings, even if there is always room (slippage) within a code and contradiction internalized in discourse with which to contest and alter fixed associations and deconstruct a text.¹⁰ Rather I would agree with Volosinov, who argues,

the word-sign was less a fixed, neutral, nonreferential, arbitrary unit than it was an active, historically changing, constantly modified component of communication, its meaning conveyed by tones and contexts that were themselves always products of struggles and conflicts among classes, social groups, individuals and discourses.¹¹

Today the many production sites of meaning and knowledge have come to be viewed as contested, historical terrains. All human expression, what we can broadly call communication, must now be seen in more thermodynamic terms.¹² The word 'discourse' perhaps captures this sense better as it incorporates the notions of power and intent. Suggests Lincoln:

In the hands of elites and of those professionals who serve them (either in mediated fashion or directly), discourse of all forms--not only verbal, but also the symbolic discourses of spectacle, gesture, costume, edifice, icon, musical performance, and the like--may be strategically employed to mystify the inevitable inequities of any social order to win the consent of those over whom power is exercised....¹³

By "mediated fashion" Lincoln indicates that influential discourses need not only operate at the official, macro levels of society. The daily workings of discourse in the interstices of human relations

have great effectiveness in maintaining a “mode of living.” Gossip, rumor and innuendo can provide crucial support, thus regulating *abnormal* behaviour. For example, racial stereotyping in the media or racial jokes help verify exclusionary immigration and social policies and reinforce social differences. Nor is discoursing always a one-way process. If hegemony internalizes contradictions, and if it is thus neither cohesive nor complete, as Gramsci recognized, an alternative practice and consciousness could arise and replace an ascendant, normalized one. As part of the challenge to hegemony, discourse can thus be used in counter-hegemonic fashion by dominated and marginalized groups and subordinated classes to dispute representations of reality and contest and ‘deconstruct’ the ascendant meanings of signs, forms of expression, ideas and knowledge which help sustain relations and structures of predominance. The Linguist Bakhtic suggested, that “different classes will use one and the same language. As a result, differently oriented accents intersect in every ideological sign. Sign becomes an arena of class struggle.”¹⁴

Discourse should be viewed then as a constructive instrument and site of political and social struggle, over material resources as well as social positions and representations of reality that support inequities in wealth, power and position. In this struggle differences clash and emerge, shaping and altering lines of identity, social ties and group borders. Alongside force or the threat of it, therefore, discourse must be viewed as a formative aspect of social activity, not a passive conduit for exchanging information.

Still we in academia should remember, as Harvey reminds us, discourse is not the only reason for inequality or oppression, and contesting through and over discourse is not the only or necessarily the best means by which inequitable relations can be altered for human betterment.¹⁵ Yet we shouldn’t dismiss the fact that discoursing accompanies and reinforces almost all social practice. With the rise of technologies of media and the globalization of communication, today public discourses are particularly prevalent.

More people are able to enter the fray and express their ideas in journals, association pamphlets, on the internet, in newspaper editorials, on community radio and in documentaries or other visual forms. With a diversification and broadening of sources from which to challenge more accepted ways of doing, knowing, being and representing and to present alternatives, the debates over conceptualization and representations of reality have increased. Many see this as a potentially revolutionary trend. Lest we not forget though that capitalism too is a revolutionary mode of life and that its commodifying power can quickly turn the best of terms into just another sales pitch. More on this below.

In the end, the interworkings between the social, political, cultural and material realms are part of complex dialectical processes, where dialectics is not seen in a restrictive teleological sense of thesis, antithesis and synthesis but rather as the process of emergence and change resulting from the internal multiplicity and external pressures of things, selves, collectives and systems that make them always potentially unstable.¹⁶ While permanencies, such as long held cultural traditions, ethnic identities, fixed employment, and sustained communities shouldn't be diminished as these hold value for many people, we still need to try to understand the formative and transformative processes in life and to enter these processes to open up spaces for other possible ways of seeing and knowing that might contribute to struggles against the hegemonic and structuring force of power. Though this is not to argue that we can ever eliminate such force or claim, as free enterprisers or objective social scientists, innocence from its workings in our own discourses and social relations.

Part II: Discourse Modes and Types

Though many academics, inclined to what Cornel West has called "postmodern skepticism," have come to doubt and challenge the truth claims of most discourses, if not their own, or to at least

favour cultural relativism, we cannot deny the persuasive shaping effects of communication systems. How though does power operate yet disguise itself in discourse?

Lincoln has identified three discursive modes that help maintain or reshape society.¹⁷ These are myth, ritual and classification. Myth has both “credibility and authority,” which gives it more persuasive truth claims than fable, legend or history.¹⁸ By authority, Lincoln means that myth, unlike history, has the prescriptive power to “evoke the sentiments” out of which society is actively constructed. Yet it still has elements of lived experience that give it more credibility than fable or legend. It may be accepted or rejected depending on its efficacy in helping people interpret and explain the world, though people may be emotionally moved to look beyond the obvious fact. Mythic discourses, which call upon stories of the past or future for purposes of the present, can be used by both groups who would maintain the status quo and those who would challenge it. Not surprisingly, we find these stories in abundance in political discourse. Suggests, Descombes:

The self-styled ‘political ideologies’ of our societies are very precisely myth, and their symbolic efficacy (the trust of the faithful, the adherence of the masses) is no guarantee of their correspondence with the reality which they claim to describe.¹⁹

How is trust and adherence encouraged in the face of daily discrepancies? An important way, as Lincoln emphasizes, is to pull on our sentiments. A complimentary means of ridding doubts is to create a sense of normality or naturalness. Roland Barthes, in *Mythologies*, discusses how semiotic systems allow for the construction of myths and why myths are taken as natural, as reality.²⁰ For Barthes, the term myth was applied not just to old stories but to present day narratives and dominant significations in capitalist society. Barthes writes:

The function of myth is to empty [historical and political] reality.... Myth does not deny things, on the contrary, its function is to talk about them; simply, it purifies them, it makes them innocent, it gives them a natural and eternal justification, it gives them a clarity which is not that of explanation but that of a statement of fact.²¹

To explain how this process works he focuses on the arbitrariness or susceptibility of signs in discourse, which have both meaning and form. Myths are created when the meaning is “impoverished” by form and “it leaves its contingency behind; it empties itself...history evaporates, only the letter remains.”²² Though Barthes creates a truth/false dichotomy between history and myth (especially the historical experience of labour), we may question how any history, even that of material production, can be separate from socialized ways of knowing.²³ Also, we should query how completely history is erased in this mythologizing. It surely must speak to some aspect of lived experience to attract the “adherence of the masses,” even if it has been fashioned by a more powerful group or class. Though the advent of various mass media, especially when controlled by the state or by profit takers, may mean less credible presentations will be accepted. Mass media’s far-reaching ability to claim our attention, right into the more private spaces of home, its seductive styles and its sheer repetitiveness greatly enhance the influence of its persuasive messages.

Whereas myth is mainly narrative and verbal,²⁴ Lincoln suggests that ritual is mainly gestural and dramatic, though it too operates as an authoritative mode and attempts to hide inequities and construct, maintain or alter social norms, borders and hierarchies in addition to material conditions.²⁵ Ritual, too, is a historical activity shaped by and shaping social relations and struggles. Today nationalist pageantry is a pervasive form of ritual for stimulating feelings of patriotism and a sense of belonging to the national community, especially in its military, athletic, and centennial forms and when staged for a television audience.

Classification uses taxonomies, often derived from the natural world. They work as both an instrument for understanding the underlying order of reality and as an instrument for imposing as natural a social stratification on society.²⁶ Duncan notes that in the nineteenth century Europeans developed “a particularly malign variant of the taxonomic system: evolutionary developmental classification... {where} ...cultures around the world were classified into a temporal (and moral) hierarchy ranging from primitive to modern.”²⁷ Michael Foucault also examined how with the analytic and classificatory tools of scientific method the search for the essential truths of human nature comes to be linked with institutionalized systems of control in society.²⁸ But again the workings of power, while internalized in discourse, are omitted from view. He shows that an important attribute of modern discourse is its ability to take on a naturalness and authority through its appearance as scientific and, hence, verifiable by scientific procedures. In effect, this works in a positive way to make the rules and affiliations of discourse appear invisible. For Foucault, this is an historical strategy that enables a more deceptive form of social control. Said applauds and reiterates this insight:

Foucault's greatest intellectual contribution is to an understanding of how the will to exercise dominant control in society and history has also discovered a way to clothe, disguise, rarefy, and wrap itself systematically in the language of truth, discipline, rationality, utilitarian value, and knowledge. And this language, in its naturalness, authority, professionalism, assertiveness and antitheoretical directness, is what Foucault has called discourse.²⁹

Rather than truth being something one discovers, Foucault believed “Each society has its regime of truth, its ‘general politics’ of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; The mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements.”³⁰ In modern societies, scientific discourses

are central to the production and propagation of “regimes of truth”. These regimes, he argues, operate to legitimize certain forms of doing, knowing and being, to the discredit of others. They create spaces of inclusion and exclusion by determining who is normal, healthy, sane and legitimate and who is abnormal, sick, insane and criminal. Ultimately, such truths in discursive form help structure and reinforce institutional arrangements in society (Foucault looked at the prison, hospital, asylum and church) that impose control on individual and social bodies.

If the discursive modes of myth, ritual, and classification, among others, assist hegemony, they too can counter it. But is it just a simple game of one side against another in the struggle over meaning and the production of signs and knowledge? To address this question we can consider the different kinds of discourses operating in liberal democracies. Karim offers a useful typology for understanding the interplay of dominant and competing discourses.³¹ Again, we should be aware of the imposition of any such act of knowing and defining.

Rather than a bivalent system, Karim pictures a polyvalent system of competing discourses. These he identifies as dominant, oppositional, alternative, official and populist. He notes that none of these discourses are monolithic, though dominant discourses “serve as a matrix for a society’s discussion about specific issues...and...they operate in ways which enable them to sustain their dominance in the face of competition from all other types of discourse.”³² Also, he emphasizes that none of these discourses are unified; for example, official government discourses, even once in legislation, may be actively resisted by some state elites.³³

Dominant discourses are those delivered in the mainstream media and in public by socio-economic and cultural elites, such as politicians, corporate interests, academics and members of the press. Oppositional discourses are ones that politically challenge the ideological orientation of dominant discourses but do not question

their worldview. Alternative discourses, on the other hand, attempt to deconstruct the terms and meanings of dominant discourses and contest their foundational beliefs. Official discourses Karim identifies with recorded legislation and policy statements. Finally, populist discourses have conservative tendencies and are mutually supporting of dominant discourse.³⁴ Though Karim doesn't discuss discursive strategies, we can note that dominant discourse, usually public and often recorded, must use more indirect and subtle means to deny the will to power, whereas populous discourses, as local talk, can be more emotionally charged and blatant, though denial also operates at the micro-level.³⁵ Karim conceptualizes the struggles between these five types of discourses as follows, though admittedly they are not as linear as portrayed:

Dominant discourses construct the parameters of meaning within which certain terms are used in public discussions of particular issues; oppositional discourses may take exception to aspects of specific terms but do not question their fundamental validity. The ideological bases of terminology networks and meanings proposed by dominant discourses may, however, be challenged more seriously by alternative discourses. New words expressing alternative ideas or new meaning of existing terms may appear through deconstructive processes and may even be enshrined in the official discourses of legislation. But ultimately, and often with the collusion of conservative populist discourses manifested in daily conversations, dominant discourses reconstruct the previous meanings of the older terms or place the newer ones proposed by alternative discourses into ideological frameworks supporting a status quo.³⁶

One aspect of Karim's model which needs further elaboration is the relationship between populist and dominant discourses. Karim sees the former as supportive of the latter, but this ignores the complex and sometimes contradictory mix of local and global hegemonic requirements. That is, profitable arrangements for international capital may be disruptive of regional ethnic social stratification. We

will return to this point later.

Part III: Multicultural Discourses

The introduction of the policy of multiculturalism in 1971 came at a time when Canadian society was going through many transitions, not least of all a diversification of immigration sources and the political awakening of minority voices. Multiculturalism reflects efforts by the federal government to come to terms with the impatient demands of a more socio-culturally diversified electorate without restricting the flows of capital and labour. Also the policy can be seen as part of a liberal humanist trend in increasingly mixed liberal democracies to create more inclusive, accepting and equitable societies. But despite such humanist intentions, the state policy of multiculturalism has been an active discursive site in the production and control of differences in Canadian society, differences that greatly affect political, economic, social and cultural status.

Since the late 1950s, Canada had move away from a policy of anglo-conformity to biculturalism, mainly as a result of the *Quiet Revolution* in French speaking Quebec.³⁷ Long ranked second to Anglo-Canadians, Franco-Canadians, now with more political and economic clout, were forcing a reordering of their social and cultural status. But the bicultural image of Canada was quickly challenged by Canadians from non-British, non-French backgrounds, such as Ukrainian and Jewish Canadians, who had gained political maturity. To satisfy the Quebecois, the federal government introduced a policy of bilingualism through the Official Languages Act of 1969; however, it rejected biculturalism in favour of multiculturalism. Suggested then Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau:

There cannot be one cultural policy for Canadians of British and French origin, another for the original peoples and yet a third for all others...A policy of multiculturalism must be a policy for all Canadians. For although there are two official languages, there is no official culture, nor

does any ethnic group take precedence over any other. No citizen or group of citizens is other than Canadian, and all should be treated fairly.³⁸

If taken as face value we could view Trudeau's policy speech as a very humane attempt at social inclusion, an *enlightened* gesture. But such a reading would deny the discursive subtleties involved. Despite the fact that the policy was more glitter than gold, that funding was low and programmes ineffective,³⁹ the speech represents a remarkable act in support of hegemony. With one narrative he attempted to embrace and quiet the concerns of many. By expressing the government's intention to promote ethnic identity and collectivity, Trudeau hoped to appease *French Canadians*, *Native Canadians* and Canada's many cultural *others*. He was trying to create a new national identity to unify the country. If the U.S. was a melting pot, then Canada would be a mosaic. He also wished to address the concerns of many Canadians at the time, who saw their world becoming too industrialized, urbanized, and homogenized by mass culture and who longed for a greater sense of community. As scantily funded cultural policy, however, multiculturalism wouldn't threaten the foundational source of these worries: the expansive and creative-destructive needs of modern capitalism.

But embracing ethnic identity and belonging went against both the liberal belief in individualism and the government's wish to forge a national identity and build a strong, unified state. So even while promoting ethnic or cultural identity in name, Trudeau, ever the cosmopolitan, was stripping it of its most emotionally appealing element: heritage. With a masterful discursive trick, he also reestablished its lower position vis-à-vis other affiliations. To promote national allegiance and assimilative language laws, he suggested that ethnic identity is more *dependent* on belonging to the present group than origins or mother tongue. To protect individualism, he argued that an individual's freedom and growth is

dependent on the ability to escape a “cultural compartment” constructed “by the accident of birth or language.”⁴⁰

After tipping a hierarchical taxonomy on its side and erasing old categories with his claim that there is “no official culture,” and that “multiculturalism is a policy for all Canadians,” a few paragraphs later Trudeau reestablishes the “vertical mosaic” and reconstructs cultural otherness.⁴¹ He explains that with previously announced policies the federal government has made efforts to address the needs of French and Native Canadians, and states, “The policy I am announcing today accepts the contention of the *other cultural communities* that they, *too*, are essential elements in Canada and deserve government assistance in order to contribute to regional and national life in ways that derive from their heritage yet are distinctively Canadian.”⁴²

All the contradictory urges in Trudeau’s speech have come to infuse the competing discourses on multiculturalism. The official line is that multiculturalism is part of Canada’s unique identity. The Canadian Multiculturalism Act and Section 27 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms describe the character of Canada as fundamentally multicultural and a Foreign Affairs document suggests Canada has been multicultural since early in its aboriginal history. It’s also true today a majority of Canadians, especially youth, see multiculturalism, if not immigration, in a positive light. Multiculturalism is a descriptive word that denotes Canada as a diverse, tolerant and just country.⁴³ This general support for the image of multiculturalism shouldn’t surprise anyone. After all, hasn’t cultural diversity been embraced by the marketplace and celebrated in Coke ads?

Yet, these official pronouncements and public sentiments aside, the fact remains few Anglo or Franco Canadians would refer to themselves as members of a multicultural group. Indeed, in dominant discourses, multiculturalism is represented as a policy for *ethnic minorities*. As Karim aptly shows, in some discourses linguistic and

ethnocultural categories are conflated so that Canada is still perceived and described as bilingual and bicultural. In the mass media, in government institutions and in parliament the adjective *multicultural* is frequently applied to people with noticeably *non-British, non-French* backgrounds, especially *visible minorities*.⁴⁴ In other discourses the terms *Canadian* and *multicultural* form two mutually exclusive categories. Also, from 1992-5, in articles on the topic of multiculturalism in Canada's main news magazine, *Macleans*, immigration or immigrant was mentioned 85% of the time; and the rate was 55% in *The Globe and Mail*, Canada's national newspaper.⁴⁵ In other discussions by elites we can see even more than twenty years after the original policy statement, Trudeau's four categories (English speaking Canadians, French speaking Canadians, native peoples and multicultural others) remain popular.⁴⁶ The system of classifying and ordering Canadians has not changed, despite the best efforts of official discourse to use the instrumentality of the past to create a myth of a multicultural, inclusive Canada. Anderson concurs: "Despite placing a positive connotation on "Otherness," multicultural rhetoric supports popular beliefs about "Differences" between groups of settlers and strengthens the exclusionary concept of a mainstream (Anglo-European) society to which "others" contribute".⁴⁷

Myths of ethnic origins and roots, though, have found fertile ground amongst associations desiring to flower group identity and attachment in order to unite diverse and dispersed populations and build political and material support. Ritual, too, has played an important role.⁴⁸ In fact, in the 1970s the majority of the early funding for multicultural programmes, by the Secretary of State, went to folk festivals and performing arts (approx. 40% in fiscal 1974-5) as well as for publications, displays and education about the history and heritage of ethnic groups (approx. 25% in fiscal 1974-5). Descendants of earlier immigrant groups, (Ukrainians, Poles, Germans, Italians and blacks), who had established representative

organizations and associations received a large portion of the funding.⁴⁹

Spokespeople for these groups have mainly stressed the need for equal cultural recognition and preservation and have actively and successfully lobbied their cause. They have seen multiculturalism as a vehicle for improving their symbolic, political and economic positions relative to other groups in Canada. Their discourses are indicatively oppositional. They do not seriously dispute the multicultural definition of Canada, the idea that Canada is made up of many distinct ethnic groups, but rather fight for their equal rights as members of these groups. In the 1980s, especially through an umbrella organization, the Canadian Ethnocultural Council (CEC), they fought for greater funding for teaching heritage languages, for entrenching their cultural rights in legislation and for upgrading the Multiculturalism Directorate to a full government department. All of these were achieved by the end of the decade.

Other groups, especially some poorer immigrants and refugees from Asia and Latin America, Canada's so-called visible others, have struggled to expand the definition and scope of multiculturalism. They too want equality, but more that of opportunity to get a job and find adequate housing without racial discriminations. Consequently, they have argued heritage aspects of multiculturalism policy alone are unable to fulfill their needs.⁵⁰ As they are less established in society than older groups, they have fought more for structural and legal changes than protection of traditions. In 1983, through the CEC, they established a Special Committee on Visible Minorities in Canada (SCVM), which in 1984 produced the report, *Equity Now*. The following quote by then president of the CEC, Navin Parekh, in 1985, provides an example of the struggle over the direction of multiculturalism:

One of the messages we want to convey through our brief to the committee is this, that it is time in Canada now that we look at

multiculturalism and the reality of Canada as a country with many different ethnic communities as something beyond merely songs and dances and costumes and food. What in effect we are asking for through this brief is equal participation in all walks of Canadian life; political, economic, social, cultural and in every other possible way.⁵¹

Parekh's criticism of *symbolic multiculturalism* echoed those of some academics.⁵² Such antagonisms prompted the government to form a Standing Committee on Multiculturalism in 1984,⁵³ whose task was to provide guidelines for changes to multiculturalism. Various reports were produced with the involvement of the CEC and other ethnocultural groups. The government adopted many of the committee's recommendations. These called for greater efforts by the federal government to protect the rights of cultural groups, to help make all Canadian institutions (e.g. the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation) representative of Canada's ethnic mix, to increase awareness and funding for equity employment and affirmative action programmes and to enshrine a new policy of multiculturalism in legislation (the Canadian Multiculturalism Act 1988).⁵⁴

This process shows again that oppositional groups can mobilize and organize around common symbols and a sense of belonging to fight for social change. By utilizing key terminology and concepts (equality, participation, discrimination), they can push a system to accommodate their concerns and strengthen their positions in society. But dominant groups don't sit still. In this case, the threat of ethnic empowerment set state, business and cultural elite to work in the late 1980s reinterpreting the multicultural message and recalibrating the policy to reassert their authority without stirring ethnic violence.

Two conflicting reactions can be found in dominant discourses. The first was a move to reinvigorate the myth of Canada in hopes of recreating national unity. It was argued this was being pulled apart by too great an emphasis on ethnic identity. In their report, the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration voiced this concern. "Diversity is one of Canada's enormous strengths, but the

importance of the whole must be emphasized. We must be a choir, not a cacophony.”⁵⁵ Some people have even called for the elimination of *official* multiculturalism, most notably Neil Bissoondath, in his popular book, *Selling Illusions: the Cult of Multiculturalism in Canada*.⁵⁶ Bissoondath went so far as to argue multiculturalism was to blame for *ethnic ghettos*. Since multiculturalism serves hegemony in positive ways, its abandonment is unlikely, but since 1988 the government has scaled back funding for ethnic heritage programmes and reduced payments to ethnic associations. By 1993, in light of Quebec’s challenge to Canadian unity, the Department of Multiculturalism had been subsumed by a new Department of Heritage, with a mission to strengthen and celebrate Canada and foster a sense of shared Canadian identity.

The second action was to redefine the aim of multiculturalism and re-signify its meaning. Under the leadership of the Conservative government in power at the time, multiculturalism became part of an effort to integrate Canada into the new world order of open economies and free capital movement. The term multiculturalism would help sell the image of Canada as a tolerant and inclusive country to attract investment, especially from Asia. Part of the new strategy addressed the concern that an increase in ethnic and racial competition and ensuing incidence of hate crimes and racial slurs would dissuade the investment aims of capital and restrict a country’s or region’s spatial integration into global networks.⁵⁷ Early criticism of the policy of multiculturalism was that it had tried to ignore the thorny issue of racism. The terms *ethnic*, *cultural*, *ethnocultural*, *traditional* and *visible minorities* were preferred when describing Canada’s population mix. But it was evident that the denial of racial difference would not make racism go away. This prompted the Conservative government in 1988 to resurrect the Race Relations Directorate and shift initiatives and funding to programmes aimed at improving *race relations*. In an informative paper, Mitchell details how an increase in funding for race relations

programmes coincides exactly with an increase in the number of wealthy immigrants, especially from Hong Kong and other parts of Asia.⁵⁸ Also, in a gesture to ethnic members of Canada, who had become an important *resource* for an international economy, the government promoted employment equity and affirmative action programmes and brought in legislation to protect the rights of all Canadians.

Linking capital investment with multiculturalism also produced a means of avoiding any serious discussion about the disruptive local effects of global capital flows. How does this work? Let's return to Mitchell's paper. When investment funds disrupted consumer markets, for example by raising the price of realestate and accompanying surcharges in Vancouver, any attempt to question the need for such capital was countered by corporate interests. They did this silently through institutes that front as promoters of cultural harmony and diversity. These institutes produced publications that rationally argued all consumers, not just new Hong Kong immigrants, were driving up prices, and any attribution of blame to this group could be viewed as racism. Here we see the discursive power of myth to evoke sentiments and deny some part of reality. In this case what results is that, writes Mitchell, "The workings of capitalism thus remain opaque, the agents involved in capital transfer remain faceless, and the spatial barriers and frictions that may disrupt the free flow of capital over and through municipal and international borders are eradicated."⁵⁹

If race relations programmes and multiculturalism as business rhetoric has helped counter possible disruptions to capital circulation, they have not done much to counter racial discrimination. As others have noted, the problem with the race relations idea is that it reifies and naturalizes racial categories and belonging.⁶⁰ Miles has called this process in a capitalist mode of production and distribution *racialization*.⁶¹ Multiculturalism too is considered a strategy by the state to assist the private accumulation of wealth by creating a

naturalized belief in ethnic or racial membership and equality, thus hiding wage-labour inequality and limiting class consciousness and mobilization.⁶² Mitchell's work also shows that multiculturalism can, at the same time, work to mitigate racist confrontation from impeding capital movements during competition over scarce resources.

The populist discourses on the subject of multiculturalism provide some of the most extreme expressions of racist belief. Some members of the labouring class, who have seen their job base shrink because of technological innovation and factory flight, have voiced their anger and hatred against immigrants, especially *visible others*. They feel immigration threatens their livelihood and they disparage multiculturalism programmes that give shrinking tax dollars to and protect the rights of *foreigners* while doing nothing to help *Canadians*. This view echoes that of worker in the decades around the turn of the 20th century, who saw Chinese 'coolies' as competitors for their jobs.⁶³

Another populist discourse emanates from within the Reform Party, which in the western provinces has grown in popularity and influence since its inception in 1987.⁶⁴ In its platform, the party explicitly states its opposition to multiculturalism policy and present levels of immigration. These are painted as contrary to Canadian culture and traditions. Supporters of the party come from mostly the middle classes and are predominantly white males. Though party officials vigorously deny accusations of racism, they seem to be in continuous damage control, as members frequently state their beliefs in overt racist tones, even if wrapped in a language of utilitarian value. For instance, in April of 1996, a Reform Member of Parliament, Bob Rigma, said publicly "that if he was a retailer whose business was suffering, he would fire or move to the back of the shop a gay or black employee whose presence turned off bigoted customers."⁶⁵ An explanation for this kind of thinking is offered by Harrison, who suggests that multiculturalism, as other federal

policies in the 1970s and 1980s, ignored the sense of lost identity felt by many Anglo Canadians.⁶⁶ The oldest and easiest response to this loss, and one which evokes and provokes sentiments that can be turned into political mobilization, is the construction of an evil other. With no longer any fear of the communist hordes, racial, religious and multicultural others were targeted.

Do these populist discourses support dominant ones, as Karim's model suggests? The answer is both yes and no. As discussed above, such expressions of racism may discourage foreign investment and regional economic integration into global capitalist processes. They may even help protect a policy of multiculturalism that they would like to see ended. The general public may try to rebuke an image of Canada as racist by labeling the nation as multicultural and increasing funding for race relations and other multicultural programmes. On the other hand, populist discourses may support ascendant discourses on otherness in the debate over meaning. Multiculturalism may be too important a component of hegemony to forsake, but its twin policy on immigration can become another discursive site of socio-economic struggle, especially when unemployment levels are high. Though expressed in more subtle terms, indeed the anti-foreigner message of populist discourse is evident in the following two statements by groups involved in consultations on immigration:

"...its {Canada's} values and lifestyle are being eroded and degraded."

"(The current immigration policy) ignores the fragile present condition of the Canadian identity, at a time when the future of the country is uncertain. Immigration policy must not introduce even more uncertainty and ignorance about Canadian heritage values."⁶⁷

In these example, we see again how language helps construct categories of difference, of Canadian and immigrant other, of good traditional values and degraded lifestyle.

Finally, alternative discourses try to break down fixed notions about nation, ethnicity, race and other socially constructed categories of self and collectivity and in so doing challenge symbolic domination and conceptual controls used to divide and conquer. We can find in discourses of women's groups a questioning of categories such as *Indian*, *ethnic person* or *minority woman*, and this may help shed light on the specific circumstances and effects of racism and on the relationship of discourse and power. Karim suggests that the use of hyphenated terms, such as Chinese-Canadian or Ukrainian-Canadian is another attempt to alter entrenched significations.⁶⁸ How effective such a symbolic challenge will be in changing more structural inequities is difficult to assess. Yet discursive means to construct and alter relations of privilege and power should not be underestimated.

Final Thoughts

Challenges to homogenized and essentialized categories of difference and to ascendant representations of reality are critical to processes of disempowerment and social change. But taken too far, they can lead to ultimate otherness. Social and cultural categories totally deconstructed would leave us completely isolated as biographical beings, suggests Harvey. This is what he calls "vulgar situatedness."⁶⁹ With this line of thinking, since no two people have identical experiences, no one can understand or speak for another or mobilize in efforts to fight against institutions and discursive practices that produce and sustain conceptualizations of social otherness. The problem then is when to stop deconstructing and how to start building bridges over gorges in the social landscape. While communication is one key to such efforts, as it can help create spaces of inclusion, we have to remember that communication processes also create and reinforce constructed difference as natural for the betterment of some people and the detriment of others.

Notes

1. These spaces are, of course, always shifting and in many cases overlap. For humans, we might even question, though not in this paper, if there is such a realm as the private.
2. By using the word “unknowingly” I am not suggesting an unconscious desire but rather a lack of awareness that many of the conceptions, meanings and categorizations of self and other are already historically established in the word-signs we must use to be understood.
3. Anderson notes that the validity of research on visible anatomy began to be questioned after the study into population genetics in the 1930s “directed scientists toward the deeper, genotypic variation among populations of individuals.” See Anderson, Kay (1991) *Vancouver's Chinatown: Racial Discourse in Canada, 1975-1980*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, pp. 11.
4. The history of the use of the terms race and ethnicity is complex. The term ethnic used to have more negative connotations than today. Also, in its earlier use, race was closer to our present use of the term ethnicity as it included not just biological characteristics but also cultural differences such as language and custom. Today, of course, race more narrowly refers to physical difference such as skin colour or facial features. For more detailed discussions see Miles, R. (1982) *Racism and Migrant Labour*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, chapter 1; Solomos, John & Back, Les (1994) ‘Conceptualising Racisms: Social Theory, Politics and Research’. *Sociology* 28:1 pp. 143-161.
5. Gramsci, Antonio (1971) *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*. London: Lawrence and Wishart.
6. Williams, Raymond (1977) *Marxism and Literature*. New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 110.
7. Pierre Bourdieu has criticized Sussure's views as too objective. He argues that we need to look more closely at the sociopolitical struggles to create meaning to understand how signification occurs. See, Bourdieu, Pierre (1991) *Language and Symbolic Power*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
8. The Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis draws from this insight. If meaning and

understanding resides in language, then each language community must have a different view of reality since their code is different. I have argued elsewhere that this view neglects the slippage within codes and ignores the potential for interaction. See, Ree, S. (1996) 'Bridger or Wall: Crossing the Cultural Terrain in Intercultural Studies; Human Communication Studies. Vol 24: Japan.

9. See, for instance, Anderson, K. (1991); Duncan, Duncan, James (1993) 'Sites of Representation: Place, Time and the Discourse of the Other.' Pp. 39-56 in Duncan, J. & Ley, D. (eds.) *Place/ Culture/ Representation*. London: Routledge; Said, Edward (1978) *Orientalism*. New York: Random House.
10. Harvey, David (1996) *Justice, Nature & the Geography of Difference*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., chapter 4, pp. 77-95.
11. Quoted in Harvey, D. (1996) pp. 88.
12. By the use of thermodynamics, I am distinguishing from classical dynamics that saw natural systems as linear, closed, ordered and reversible. Thermodynamic systems are open, unpredictable and chaotic. Prigogine and Stengers argue that our universe has both types of systems and in fact, after the title of their book, order can derive from chaos. See, Prigogine, Ilya & Stengers, Isabelle (1984) *Order Out of Chaos*. New York: Bantam Books.
13. Lincoln, Bruce (1989) *Discourse and the Construction of Society: Comparative Studies of Myth, Ritual, and Classification*. New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 4
14. Quoted in Stewart, Susan (1984) *On Longing*. Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 18.
15. We might do well to remember Ghandi's non-violence movement as one example. For more on this argument see Harvey (1996), chapter 4, pp. 77-95.
16. We can think that any synthesis must contain elements of the thesis and antithesis and is inherently unstable. Michael Serres has named this point of instability or agent of potential change in a system of relations the parasite. In English this word has only negative connotations but in French the term is used in information systems to

describe static on a line of communication that may disrupt and alter the transfer of a message. Serres suggests that the parasite, the often unrecognized or excluded third, is always part of systems, enabling and disabling relations. In this sense, perhaps it is better to talk about trialectics than dialectics. See Serres, Michel (1982) *The Parasite*. Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press. For an instructive discussion on dialectics see Harvey, D. (1996), chapters 2 & 3.

17. Lincoln, B. (1989).
18. Ibid., pp. 15-37.
19. Descombes, Vincent (1980) *Modern French Philosophy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 106-107.
20. Barthes, Roland (1972) *Mythologies*. London: Paladin Books.
21. Ibid., pp. 142.
22. Ibid.
23. Lincoln, B. (1989) pp. 5.
24. Barthes also included semiotic discourses in his concept of myth.
25. Lincoln, B. (1989) pp. 53-127.
26. Ibid., pp. 131-141.
27. Duncan, James (1993) 'Sites of Representation: Place, Time and the Discourse of the Other.' Pp. 39-56 in Duncan, J. & Ley, D. (eds.) *Place/ Culture/ Representation*. London: Routledge, pp. 42.
28. See, for example, Foucault, Michel (1970) *The Order of Things*. New York: Random House, Inc.; Foucault, Michel (1980) *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*. New York: Pantheon Books.
29. Said, Edward (1983) *The World, the Text, and the Critic*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, pp. 216.
30. Foucault, Michel (1970) *The Order of Things*. New York: Random House, Inc., pp. 131.
31. Karim, Karim (1993) 'Reconstructing the Multicultural Community in Canada: Discursive Strategies of Inclusion and Exclusion'. *International Journal of Politics, Culture and Society*. 7:2 pp. 189-207.
32. Ibid., pp. 192-3.
33. Ibid.

34. Ibid.
35. On the different strategies used to deny racism see van Dijk, Teun (1992) 'Discourse and the Denial of Racism.' *Discourse & Society*. 3:1 pp. 87-118. London: Sage.
36. Karim, K. (1993) pp. 194.
37. This term refers to the growing nationalist movements in Quebec in the 1960s. Ironically, there were cases of violence against persons and symbols of the Canadian state, culminating in the FLQ crisis and imposition of the War Measures Act, over the kidnapping of a British trade official and the kidnapping and murder of a Quebec Cabinet minister.
38. Canada (1971) *House of Commons Debates*, 8 October.
39. See Kobayashi (1993).
40. Canada, 1971.
41. This phrase was used as the title of Porter's influential book on the relationship between class and ethnicity in Canadian society.
42. Canada, 1971. (Emphasis mine)
43. Corporate Review Branch, Department of Canadian heritage (1996) *Strategic Evaluation of Multiculturalism Programs: Final Report*.
44. Karim, K. pp. 198-201.
45. Corporate Review Branch (1996) pp. 52.
46. Karim, K. PP. 200-201.
47. Anderson, Kay (1991) pp. 27
48. By emphasizing the social and political role of myth and ritual I do not wish to detract from the positive meanings and emotional comforts they provide people or the pleasures and camaraderie of involvement. I am also not suggesting that people are unaware of the possible socio-political intentions of project and event sponsors and organizers. Nor do they passively accept dominant readings of ethnic life if these do not fit with their desires or other realms of experience--class, gender, sex. Also, myths or rituals alone will not maintain group cohesion in times of economic political distress.
49. See Pal, Leslie (1995) *Interests of State: The Politics of Language, Multiculturalism, and Feminism in Canada*. Montreal: McGill Queens

University Press, pp. 189-192.

50. Not all immigrants from these regions face the same economic hardships and social experiences as they are differently situated in class and gender relationships. Conflating difference into simple categories will restrict an analysis of more specific circumstances of domination and exploitation. See Stasiulis, Daiva (1990) 'Theorizing Connections: Gender, Race, Ethnicity, and Class'. Pp. 269-305 in Li, P.S. (ed.) *Race & Ethnic Relations in Canada*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
51. Quoted in Pal, L. (1995) pp. 206.
52. Kobayashi, Audrey (1993) 'Multiculturalism: Representing a Canadian Institution.' Pp. 205-231 in Duncan, J. & Ley, D. (eds.) *Place/ Culture/ Representation*. London: Routledge, pp. 215-220.
53. The committee was made up of seven Members of Parliament from the three main parties. See Kobayashi, A. (1993) pp. 219.
54. Funding increased for cultural integration and community participation programmes from 1.69 mill. in 1982-3 to 4.56 mill. by 1987-88. See Pal, L. (1995) pp. 197.
55. Citizen and Immigration Canada (1994) Immigration Consultants' Report., pp. 19.
56. Bissoondath, Neil. (1994) *Selling Illusions: the Cult of Multiculturalism in Canada*. Toronto: Penguin Books.
57. Harvey, David (1982) *The Limits to Capital*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell Publishers, pp. 413-445.
58. Mitchell, Katharyne (1996) 'In Whose Interest? Transnational Capital and the Production of Multiculturalism in Canada.' Pp. 219-251 in Wilson, R. & Dissanayake, W. (eds.) *Global / Local: Cultural Production and the Transnational Imaginary*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.
59. Ibid., pp. 242-3.
60. See Kobayashi, A. (1993) pp. 221-222; Solomos, J. & Back, L. (1994) 146-158.
61. Solomos, J. & Back, L. (1994) pp. 147.
62. Lewycky, Laverne (1992) 'Multiculturalism in the 1990s and into the

21st Century: Beyond Ideology and Utopia.' Pp. 369-401 in Satzewich, V. (ed.) *Deconstructing a Nation: Immigration, Multiculturalism and Racism*. Nova Scotia: Fernwood Publishing.

63. See Anderson, Kay (1991), especially chapters 2 & 3.
64. In the just completed federal election, Reform took a majority of seats in B.C. and Alberta and became Canada's Official Opposition party.
65. Southam Internet News Services (May 2, 1996).
66. Harrison, Trevor (1995) *Of Passionate Intensity: Right-Wing Populism and the Reform Party of Canada*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
67. Citizen and Immigration Canada (1994) Immigration Consultants' Report, pp. 22.
68. Karim, K. (1993) pp. 203.
69. Harvey, D. (1996) *Justice, Nature & the Geography of Difference*.