

Université de Montréal

The Construction of Social Reality in Minority Discourse:  
Polish Immigrants in Montreal.

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## *Summary*

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*This study is an attempt to trace the image of “ethnic” Canada in the everyday discourse of an immigrant minority. The focus is on how immigrants speak of people belonging to different ethnic categories including their own category and how they describe ethnic relations in Canada.*

*The subjects are Polish immigrants in Montreal. They are approached as agents of history – active subjects, rather than passive objects of social practices. A critical analysis of Polish discourse is undertaken and its functions and potential effects on Canadian society are discussed.*

*Part I consists of theoretical and methodological considerations. Different theoretical perspectives on social categorization are examined and a network of concepts for the study of ethnic discourse is established so as to construct a nuanced approach that recognizes the multifunctional character of the practices of social categorization. This part also contains a description of the methodological framework and research procedures used in the study as well as a profile of the Polish minority in Canada.*

*Part II comprises a case study. The ways through which ethnicity in Canada is constituted in Polish immigrant discourse are explored: how the subjects construct ethnic categories, which categories they treat as significant, what kind of principles they invoke to explain social relations, and how they define and explain ethnic identity. How Polish immigrants evaluate various social categories in different contexts of discourse and the basic functions of their discourse and its social consequences are also examined.*

*The results of the analysis confirm the constructed character of ethnic divisions and stratification. They also demonstrate some of the ways that minorities engage in the processes of social construction. The analysis also uncovers the great variability of ethnic discourse, as it reflects different needs and objectives of the speakers. While some*

*constructions function as ideology, others serve a variety of social functions, often parallel to ideological ones. Some of these constructions challenge the dominant order of Canadian and Québécois society and effectively function as counter-ideology.*

*This variability is taken as proof of multifunctional character of social practices related to ethnic categorization. Since many ideological constructions depend to some extent on the non-ideological functions of ethnic categorization, I argue that the practices of ethnic categorization should be looked upon as the precondition for ideology, rather than as ideology itself.*

*This ethnography of Polish immigrant discourse also demonstrates how micro-social practices taking place at the level of everyday conversation contribute to macro-social processes, such as the formation of ethnic divisions and stratification.*

*Finally, the study is also an attempt to demonstrate the utility of combining the traditional methods of social anthropology with those of discourse analysis, particularly for studying and analyzing oral accounts.*

**KEY WORDS:** *social anthropology, discourse analysis, ethnicity, ideology, Polish-Canadians.*

## **Résumé**

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*La présente étude tente de tracer l'image de la société canadienne qui émerge du discours quotidien d'un groupe ethnique minoritaire. Nous nous concentrons particulièrement sur l'image du Canada pluri-ethnique, c'est-à-dire nous examinons le discours tenu par les immigrants au sujet des gens appartenants aux divers groupes ethniques et raciaux dans ce pays.*

*Les immigrants polonais à Montréal constituent le sujet de notre étude. À titre de comparaison, nous faisons part des observations recueillies auprès de la communauté polonaise d'Ottawa. Nous examinons les façons dont les sujets construisent leurs visions de la société canadienne: comment définissent-ils des catégories ethniques ; comment les distinguent-ils les unes des autres ; lesquelles considèrent-ils comme importantes dans le contexte local ; quels critères utilisent-ils pour déterminer les rapports sociaux et comment expliquent-ils les identités ethniques au Canada. Nous nous penchons aussi sur la manière dont les immigrants polonais évaluent les diverses catégories sociales dans les contextes variés du discours.*

*Nous faisons une analyse critique de ces pratiques et nous examinons leurs fonctions ainsi que leurs potentiels effets sur les différentes parties de la société canadienne, l'objectif étant ici d'examiner les moyens que les groupes minoritaires emploient dans les processus sociaux. Notre approche consiste à voir les groupes minoritaires comme des agents du processus historique – de la même manière que les groupes majoritaires sont examinés habituellement, c'est-à-dire comme des sujets actifs, et non pas comme des objets passifs des pratiques sociales. Percevant donc le discours comme une forme de pratique sociale, nous essayons de comprendre pourquoi les sujets expriment leurs opinions sur les questions posées de la manière donnée et qu'est-ce qu'ils essayent d'obtenir en s'exprimant ainsi. Nous le faisons en nous appuyant sur la présomption que ces pratiques vont au-delà du discours - qu'elles font partie de la construction de la réalité sociale.*

*Nous nous concentrons sur un domaine spécifique de la réalité sociale : celui de l'ethnicité au Canada, étant particulière dans le contexte de Montréal – et nous examinons comment les immigrants polonais, à travers leur discours quotidien, participent dans le processus ethnique.*

*La première partie de l'étude jette les bases théoriques et méthodologiques à l'ensemble. Le discours ethnique appartient au domaine général de la catégorisation sociale. Dans le premier et deuxième chapitres (1 et 2), nous examinons les diverses perspectives psychologiques et sociales de la catégorisation sociale. Nous interrogeons ces perspectives par rapport aux différentes positions qu'elles prennent face à la théorie sociale, à la représentation de la réalité, et leur approche au discours.*

*Dans le chapitre 3, nous procédons au choix analytique et nous établissons la grille de concepts pour procéder à l'étude du discours catégorisant. Nous adoptons l'approche constructiviste à la réalité sociale, en présumant que la réalité des clivages ethniques, telle que nous la connaissons, émerge de l'activité humaine, dans ce cas, du discours quotidien tenu dans un contexte particulier qu'il soit social ou temporel. Nous procédons par la suite à la qualification de cette perspective en établissant une hypothèse que la catégorisation sociale dans un discours va au-delà de la simple idéologie. Nous proposons une approche fonctionnaliste modifiée qui reconnaît un caractère multifonctionnel de la pratique sociale, telle que contenue dans la catégorisation ethnique et raciale.*

*Le chapitre 4 introduit le sujet de l'étude – la communauté polonaise au Canada. Nous traçons un portrait de cette communauté ethnique minoritaire, ce qui permet par la suite de mieux comprendre diverses préoccupations, aspirations et objectifs qui émergent de son discours.*

*Le dernier chapitre de la première partie se préoccupe de la grille méthodologique et des procédés de recherche que nous avons utilisés pour recueillir les données et pour notre analyse. Nous combinons les méthodes et les procédés développés pour l'analyse du discours avec celles de l'anthropologie sociale.*

*La deuxième partie comprend une étude de cas – une vérification de nos choix théoriques et de nos conclusions contenus dans la première partie. L'objectif principal ici est de déterminer comment et jusqu'à quel point une communauté ethnique minoritaire s'engage dans la construction de leur réalité sociale. Nous y examinons des moyens utilisés dans le discours polono - canadien pour construire le monde ethnique canadien, ainsi que les principales fonctions de ce discours et son effet potentiel sur la société canadienne.*

*Le chapitre 6 place le discours polonais dans sa perspective historique. Le chapitre 7 identifie les principales catégories ethniques dans le discours en question et analyse les principes de la construction du paysage social canadien. Nous observons aussi la manière avec laquelle les immigrants polonais gèrent les relations interethniques dans leur discours parlé, notamment en ce qui concerne les questions de conflits et de solidarité. Le chapitre 8 examine la gestion par des immigrants des questions identitaires dans le contexte de la société d'accueil. Le chapitre final examine la véritable construction par les sujets des diverses catégories ethniques et raciales. Nous voyons comment certaines catégories sont « imaginées » dans la vie quotidienne et comment les images émergentes reflètent différents objectifs sociaux des interlocuteurs.*

*Notre analyse démontre que de nombreuses représentations de la société canadienne dans le discours des immigrants polonais fonctionnent comme une idéologie. Les sujets de notre étude participent activement dans la construction de la hiérarchie sociale fondée sur les divisions ethniques. Ils font aussi des nombreuses constructions tirées de différences raciales. Ces constructions contribuent à la marginalisation des minorités raciales et à la perpétuation de la domination de la majorité blanche dans la société canadienne.*

*Tout en même temps, nous trouvons que ses représentations immigrantes desservent une variété d'autres fonctions, qui sont souvent parallèles aux fonctions idéologiques. Nous pouvons distinguer une grande variabilité du discours ethnique puisqu'il reflète de nombreux besoins et objectifs des interlocuteurs. Parmi eux se trouvent ceux qui desservent la minorité polonaise. Certaines de ces constructions défient l'ordre établi de sociétés (canadienne ou québécoise) et fonctionnent carrément comme une contre-idéologie.*

*Nous voyons cette variabilité comme une preuve du caractère multifonctionnel de la catégorisation ethnique et des pratiques sociales qui y sont reliés. Ce-ci confirme notre hypothèse du départ qu' idéologie n'est pas le facteur déterminant dans la catégorisation ethnique. Par conséquent, les pratiques sociales reliées au domaine de l'ethnicité peuvent être étudiées indépendamment de leurs effets idéologiques. Plus encore, nous trouvons des indications que les constructions idéologiques dépendent jusqu'à un certain point des fonctions non-idéologiques de la catégorisation ethnique. Nous essayons de prouver que les pratiques de la catégorisation ethnique doivent être perçues comme des conditions nécessaires pour que l'idéologie existe, plutôt que seulement comme des attributs de celle-ci.*

*Les variables qui déterminent l'apparition de certaines constructions dans le discours polonais sont reliées à l'appartenance des sujets au groupe ethnique donné et à leur statut social en tant que membres de la communauté immigrante. Quelques représentations sont aussi reliées à la catégorie de race à laquelle les sujets appartiennent et ils sont tous influencés par les contextes locaux et globaux dans lesquels le discours polonais se déroule.*

*Les résultats de notre analyse confirment le caractère construit du système ethnique des divisions et stratifications sociales. Ils montrent aussi certains moyens que les minorités peuvent employer dans le processus de la construction sociale. Nous suggérons que les études sociales, quand elles se concentrent sur les phénomènes de l'ethnicité et de la catégorisation sociale en général, privilégient une approche élargie. Nous suggérons qu'il faut régarder au-delà de la problématique du pouvoir et de la domination et examiner des différents aspects et différents agents impliqués dans le processus de la construction sociale.*

*Notre ethnographie du discours des immigrants polonais démontre aussi comment les pratiques microsociales qui s'exercent au niveau des interactions quotidiennes contribuent aux processus macro sociaux et ont des effets sur eux, notamment sur la formulation des divisions et stratifications ethniques.*



*Nous espérons finalement avoir démontré suffisamment dans cette étude l'utilité du croisement des méthodes : tout d'abord, de la traditionnelle méthode ethnographique, c'est-à-dire de l'observation participante, avec celles de l'analyse du discours.*

*Mots Clés:*

*Anthropologie, Analyse du discours, Ethnicité, Ideologie, Canadiens polonais*

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## Introduction

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This study is an attempt to trace the image of Canadian society as it emerges in the everyday talk of an immigrant minority. The particular focus of this research is the image of “ethnic” Canada portrayed by Polish immigrants – how they speak of members of the ethnic, national and racial groups in this country. The term “image” is used metaphorically, recognized as a version of reality created through discourse. “Discourse” is understood here as comprised of both representations and “social practice” (and is referred to herein as “discursive practice” or “social discourse”). Consequently, the ways in which this “image” or version is constructed are also examined by looking at social categorization: practices of dividing society into ethnic categories, of explaining relations within and between ethnic groups, and of defining and explaining ethnic identity.

In this study, the main themes and ideologies in Polish discourses of ethnicity are traced and the patterns of signification and representations of self and others are explored. These patterns and representations define a large portion of social reality, identifying “who is who” in society and explaining the nature of social relations; they provide legitimacy for social hierarchies, as well as the bases for challenging them. They also set guidelines for both collective and individual forms of action in many important domains of social life such as politics, employment, everyday interactions, socializing, etc.

More importantly, I undertake a critical analysis of discursive practices pertaining to ethnicity among Polish immigrants. The goal is to develop an explanation showing that the implications of these practices go beyond discourse and into the realm of the social construction of reality in general, and among minorities in particular. Among the critical questions to answer while explaining any social practice is not only *what* is being done but, perhaps more importantly, *why* it is done and what is being achieved through this practice. Treating discourse as a form of social practice this study is structured around the

questions of why Poles say what they say on the topics in question and what are the consequences of that discourse.

The subjects of this study are members of the Polish community in Quebec, mostly in Montreal, where an absolute majority of Polish Quebecers reside today: approximately 16.5 thousand of a total of 18.5 thousand for the whole province. They form part of a larger Canadian “Polonia,” the name the Polish give to their communities in diaspora. The total number of people claiming Polish origin in Canada today is slightly more than 600 thousand.<sup>1</sup> A significant Polish presence in Canada began in the middle of the nineteenth century and has been maintained up to now by repeated waves of immigration following major political, economic or military crises in Poland. Many of those new immigrants passed through Quebec on their way to the Canadian interior to settle in South Western Ontario and on the Prairies. A number of them remained in Montreal, though. Over the years, they formed a community which, despite its relatively small size and spatial dispersion (there is no “Polish neighbourhood” in Montreal as there is, for example, in Toronto), possesses a well-developed institutional structure and is bustling with different kinds of activities year-round.

Many Polish Montrealers, particularly those who arrived after World War Two, are professionals and members of the intelligentsia who are fluent in one or both official languages of Canada and who adapted quickly to the realities of life in the new country. They set the tone of institutional life of Montreal’s Polonia and are responsible for many discursive patterns in the community. Polish immigrants have internalized the dominant discourse that exists in Quebec and Canada with regard to ethnic divisions and relations, despite the fact that this discourse makes them one of the minorities in this country. At the same time, their social aspirations match in many ways those of the Canadian middle class and they do not always take the various disadvantages stemming from their minority status lightly. This is reflected in their representations of Québécois and Canadian society.

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<sup>1</sup> More accurate numbers together with a profile of Polish communities in Canada are provided in a separate chapter in this study.

## **Issues for analysis**

Anyone seeking to analyze social discourse is forced to address a number of questions that revolve around the following general issues: “society,” “agency,” and “reality.” They are all interconnected and, as we will see, the answer to one often structures the answers to the others. All these issues have to be taken into consideration when analyzing any discourse, especially discourse dealing with social issues (Wetherell and Potter, 1992: 6-10).

Beginning with the issue of “society,” the discourse that will be studied treats of a particular society and is simultaneously situated within the context of that society. For this reason, Polish discourse must be placed in a particular historical context and the factors in Canadian society that shape or influence it identified. What, from the point of view of social science is the nature of Canadian society? How could we characterize ethnic relations in this country? What could be the influence of local conditions – social, economic and political – on Polish representations? Among other things, the importance of the specific context of Quebec and its de facto distinct status in the Canadian confederation cannot be underestimated. In a more narrow perspective, the context of Montreal with its French and English majorities, plus a large immigrant population, is another variable to take into consideration.

Discourse on any given subject is linked to other social practices that define and shape reality in the same area of social life and the same semantic field. The discourse of ethnicity is likewise accompanied by a multitude of “non-discursive” practices that define “who is who” and emphasize differences between members of society; the same practices also influence the allocation of economic resources, status and power to ethnic groups. All of this determines the positions of particular groups in the social hierarchy. What is the relationship between discursive practices and those other social practices?

Trying to answer these questions, we should keep in mind that the place and role of discourse in society are interrelated. We should be able to locate Polish discourse within

a larger ideological background. The representations that we analyze are not produced in a vacuum. Every discourse involves the exchange and circulation of ideas in society. What is the role of discourses of ethnicity in Canada and Quebec? How do they influence the representations produced by the subjects in our study?

All these issues are related to the question of “agency.” What is the role of Polish discourse for the subjects themselves and eventually for other people in Canada? Can we treat it merely as an expression of Polish perceptions of “ethnic groups” and “ethnic relations” in Canada? Such a minimalist explanation would already fit the metaphor of the “image” that we are trying to trace here. Alternatively, we could treat this discourse as a form of engagement in “ethnic relations” in this country. Polish immigrants build versions of reality and society in their everyday talk. How do they fit themselves and others into those versions? The answers to such questions are linked to the choice of theoretical framework that one adopts.

Immigrants coming to a new country find the larger part of the social landscape already structured and defined by others. Dominant social groups and state institutions are guardians of the status quo and impose their versions of reality on the rest of society. How are these versions reflected in immigrants’ discourse? Polish immigrants could be seen – as minorities often are – as passive victims of history, people who have little choice but to reproduce dominant versions of reality, inadvertently serving the interests of the dominant groups. Alternatively, we could treat them as agents of history, as people who are giving their voice to the story, a voice that serves their interests as well. Through their participation in the shaping of the “image” of social reality, they may be trying to “carve out” a piece on their own.

The question of agency is linked to the issue of “identity” and the image of one’s own group. Ethnic divisions depend on the differences between “us” and “them.” It is practically impossible to speak about “others” without depending on some sort of reference to a “self.” How is social identity determined in the context of migration? How can we link the discourse of Polish immigrants about Canadian society to their social



identity? What is the relationship between representations of “others” and representations of “us”?

The last issue, but not the least important for analysis is the question of the “reality” of discursive representations. Analyses in social science often rely on a strong distinction between representations and reality. There is a prevalent assumption that popular or common sense representations may be biased or mistaken, as opposed to those created through scientific methods. This is especially true for many analyses of ideology that present the latter as a misleading version of reality (misrepresentation). Part of the analysis consists, then, of exposing the “truth” behind such misrepresentations. Should this analysis be structured in a similar way? Is it feasible to search for the ultimate “reality” behind social representations? Is it actually relevant to do so for the purposes of this study?

### **Theoretical choices**

In preparation for this study, it was necessary to adopt a theoretical approach that would incorporate the study of discourse into a social theory that would allow me to resolve the above-mentioned issues of “context,” “agency,” “identity,” and “reality” as they apply to the particular discourse in question. I do not pretend to have developed a theory of revolutionary novelty. In fact, I have drawn on some elements of existing theories used to treat issues similar or related to those explored in this study, in order to develop an analytic frame for the investigations here.

The approach to discourse in the present study is modeled on the analyses of racial discourse developed by Wetherell and Potter (cf. Potter and Wetherell; 1987; 1988; Wetherell and Potter, 1992), which systematically incorporate the study of discourse into social theory. The authors approach discourse as a form of social practice and an engagement with critical social issues, which in the case of racist discourse translates into the ideology of racism.

However, the approach to social issues employed here, both within and outside of discourse, is more “open” than is usually the case with analyses of racism, mainly because of the complexity of the present investigation. Analyses of racism usually present a relatively straightforward model of social relations, focusing on the perspective of the dominant “white” majority versus a racial minority or minorities. To some extent, the Polish perspective is similar. Poles speak of racial minorities and, when defined in racial terms, they could themselves be counted among the “white” majority. But the discourse examined here involves much more than that. It comprises the perspective of a minority versus the rest of society, including other minorities and dominant groups as well. Thus, it is necessary to adopt an analytic frame with enough scope and flexibility to account for a wider range of social relations than those of domination that characterizes situations of racism.

Part I consists of theoretical and methodological considerations. Ethnic and racial categorizations are regarded in studies of society as forms of a more general phenomenon of social categorization. I undertake a critical review of approaches to social categorization in the social sciences, looking at how they are explained and how the above-mentioned issues of “context,” “agency,” and “reality” are resolved. I also strive to discern the implicit or explicit approach to discourse in these theories. The ultimate goal is, of course, to find out how and whether these theories could be applied to explain the discourse of ethnic categorization among Polish immigrants. Some of the conceptualizations offered by these theories are selected and integrated into the theoretical framework and set of prescriptions for analysis in the present study.

In Chapter 1, social categorization is examined through the lens of social psychology. Theories in social psychology regard social categorization as a result of inner psychological processes taking place on the level of the individual. I begin with authoritarian personality theory as developed by Adorno and his “California Group” and continue chronologically, through social cognition research to very recent social identity theory in the tradition of Henri Tajfel and his colleagues. I question psychological studies

on a number of positions with regard to social theory, representation and reality and the approach to discourse they embrace.

In Chapter 2, attention turns to perspectives that, in contrast to social psychological approaches, take society as the point of departure to explain social categorization. These perspectives have been developed in different social sciences, mainly sociology, political economy, and social anthropology. Once again, social theory, notions of representation and reality, and implicit and explicit theories of discourse are the focus. How is the discourse of social categorization explained in these perspectives? What line of inquiry do they offer for the analysis of ethnic and racial discourse? Here, the model of discourse analysis *à la* Wetherell and Potter is highlighted.

In Chapter 3, analytic choices are made and a network of concepts is established for the study of categorizing discourse. One of the keys to the analytic framework is the recognition of the active role of discourse in constructing social reality, as mentioned above. Clear-cut distinctions between reality and representation are rejected and social groupings and social relations are approached as rhetorical and ideological constructs. Simultaneously, this perspective is qualified by arguing that categorization in discourse is more than simply ideology. Instead, I offer a qualified functionalist approach that recognizes the multifunctional character of social practices, such as ethnic and racial categorization. With this explanatory framework I account for ethnic and racial categorization in the discourse of a minority.

Chapter 4 presents the methodological frame and research procedures used for compiling data and for carrying out the analyses. The methods and procedures developed in discourse analysis are combined with those of social anthropology. One set of tools is necessary for identifying and organizing patterns of discourse, and another for checking observed patterns against the larger social and discursive contexts.

The final chapter in Part I introduces the subjects of this study, the Polish group in Canada. Here I draw a profile of an ethnic minority, one that should help to understand

the various concerns, aspirations and goals that emerge from the discourse of Polish immigrants.

Part II comprises a case study – a test of the theoretical choices and conclusions made in Part I. It examines how views on social reality, ethnic divisions and relations in Canadian society are brought to life in the everyday talk of Polish immigrants.

## **Part I**

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### **Theoretical Approach and Methodology**

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## Social categorization: perspectives from social psychology

The practice of talking, writing, or any other way of expressing opinions about people as members of collectivities, be they ethnic, racial groups, or other, falls within the domain of the study of social categorization. Thus, anybody who attempts to explain the discourse of ethnicity has to make a set of decisions about the theory of social categorization in general. A number of such theories have been developed in various disciplines, mainly in the context of studies of racism, ethnic relations, and gender relations. Social psychology has been particularly systematic in its efforts to explain social categorization. It has developed many basic concepts associated with this phenomenon, concepts that have also been employed by other disciplines. The concepts of “stereotypes,” “ethnocentrism,” “prejudice” and “categorization” are familiar to most students of social science today. It is therefore with the social-psychological approaches that I begin the review of theories of social categorization.

In this review I concentrate on three perspectives that are the most representative of social psychology of intergroup relations, beginning with authoritarian personality research of Adorno *et al.* (1950). Developed in the 1940’s, it was one of early systematic attempts to explain the nature of interethnic and racial relations (for reviews, see Christie and Jahoda, 1954; Kirscht and Dillehay, 1967). Next, the premises of social cognition studies that have been developing since the 1950’s are examined (see e.g. Hamilton, 1981; Hamilton and Troler, 1986; Mervis and Rosch, 1981; Taylor, 1981; Cantor and Mischel, 1979). Finally, more recently developed social identity theory is considered, the principal theorists of which have been Henri Tajfel and John Turner (e.g. Tajfel, 1978; 1981; Tajfel and Turner, 1985; Turner *et al.*, 1987).

The task of this chapter is two-fold: to examine the main avenues through which social categorization is explained in social psychology and the implicit approach to

text and talk that each perspective takes in producing its explanations. This exercise is concentrated on the main conceptual frameworks at issue, without going into details of research procedures or results. I point out some of the problems of the theories in question for studying the issue of social categorization and for looking at text and talk. The implicit goal is to determine which, if any, of the conceptualizations offered by these theories (and others that will be discussed *en suite*) could be useful for the present analysis.

In examining the principal tenets of social psychological approaches, some of the problems emerging when larger social issues are explained through reference to inner psychological processes taking place within individuals become discernable. Authoritarian personality theory offers some useful insights, mainly by paying attention to the social landscape in which processes of social categorization take place. Its major drawback is that reduces the explanation of social behaviour to the idiosyncrasies of individual agents. The other two approaches offer a wider focus of analysis but go to the other extreme and treat social processes as expressions of universal psychological processes or dynamics inherent in human nature.

### **Authoritarian personality theory**

Authoritarian personality studies link the practice of social categorization to ideology and derive both from the psychological make-up of individuals. The explanation is rather complex and reproduces a long chain of cause and effect, where causes are traced from ideology and patterns of thinking and perceiving the world, to the personality structure of individuals, and then through socialization to social structure. However, the key link in this chain is the personality structure of the individual.

The theory was developed at Berkeley, California, in the 1940's, at a time when social psychologists were studying human attitudes displayed during World War Two. It was the work of T.W. Adorno and his colleagues, a group of psychologists and political scientists, some of them refugees from Nazi Germany. The group, which was soon nicknamed "the California Group," focused on the expressions of anti-democratic

ideology, such as extreme nationalism, racism, anti-Semitism and the phenomenon of *ethnocentrism*, which the researchers defined as a rejection of all out-groups and foreigners (Adorno *et al.*, 1950). They came up with the concept of “authoritarianism” – a syndrome involving particular patterns of thinking, beliefs and attitudes that were entrenched in the personality structure of ethnocentric individuals. Authoritarian ways of thinking were rigid and prone to categorizing, as opposed to tolerant processes that were more flexible and realistic. On the cognitive level, people with an authoritarian personality structure would have a tendency for “stereotypy” – they would perceive the social world in terms of oversimplified, contrasting categories, such as “black” and “white,” “inferior” and “superior,” “them” and “us,” etc. They would not tolerate ambiguity and would exaggerate differences between people from different social groups while minimizing differences within groups. This rigid style of thinking, argued the researchers, lay at the root of prejudice and ethnocentrism (Adorno *et al.*, 1950).

In social life, authoritarians would be power-oriented – identifying with figures of strength and authority while deriding weakness and subordination. At the level of intergroup relations, they would glorify their own powerful group and denigrate all kinds of social minorities. Adorno *et al.* viewed the authoritarian personality as the psychological basis for politically conservative and anti-democratic ideologies, such as nationalism, fascism, anti-Semitism and racism in general. At the same time, authoritarianism constituted a whole “philosophy of life” and would surface not only in intergroup relations, but also in other areas of social life such as sexual relations, family life, religion, etc. (Adorno *et al.*, 1950).

The theory explained the development of an authoritarian personality in individuals as a product of early socialization. Influenced by psychoanalytic theories, the California group saw the negative attitudes towards minorities as projections of the subjects’ repressed fears and hostilities acquired in childhood. They were a result of a repressive pattern of child rearing – “basically hierarchical, authoritarian and exploitative” as Adorno *et al.* have described it (1950: 971) – in a family structure characterized by a dominant fatherly figure, a dependent, submissive mother and still more subordinate children. The



personality emerging from this pattern of upbringing was full of internal tensions. Respect for authority was mixed with repressed feelings of hostility and accompanied by fears of one's weakness and dependency on others. With time, those repressed negative feelings would be projected, particularly in men, on people considered weaker than them, especially their sex partners and social minorities.

Finally, to complete the chain of cause and effect, the whole syndrome was linked to social structures. Adorno *et al.* argued that the particular patterns of socialization conducive to the development of authoritarian personalities were to be found in the capitalist social formations and as such were typical of modern Western civilization. The California group viewed society through the lens of Marxist theory. The organization of capitalist modes of production required specific mores and habits related to the regulation of workers. They were accompanied by parallel developments in the ideas about child rearing and patterns of parent-child relationships which resulted in reproducing the same syndrome from generation to generation (Adorno *et al.*, 1950).

### **Authoritarian personality theory and the study of social discourse**

Authoritarian personality theory received a good deal of criticism over the years. Criticism has been directed at its major substantive findings as well as at the methodological procedure followed by Adorno *et al.* (cf. Hyman and Sheatsley, 1954; Kirscht and Dillehay, 1967). Questions have been asked about the essential cohesiveness of the authoritarian personality: do the components of personality really “hang together” as claimed, and are authoritarians really more ethnocentric and more politically conservative than other people? Critics have also questioned the notion of a rigid cognitive structure as the major mechanism behind the expressions of racism and ethnocentrism (Billig, 1985).

Many of these problems are related to authoritarian personality studies' particular approach to discourse. The studies depended to a large extent on analyses of verbal and written materials, particularly interviews and questionnaire responses. In developing their analytic concepts the researchers relied to a great extent on

psychoanalytic theory, a fact that seems to have predetermined the mode of discourse analysis they used. Text and talk were analyzed for “depth,” which basically meant going beyond surface expressions and looking for supposed latent content. The researchers looked for the hidden needs, anxieties and motives organizing the subjects’ words. The interpretation emerged as a form of “clinical diagnosis” (Wetherell and Potter, 1992: 55), which presented the characteristics and modes of functioning of a given personality.

Students of social discourse such as Wetherell and Potter (1992: *ibid.*) point out that this type of analysis (where words are treated as merely representational and reflective of a latent content) neglects many important social and practical aspects of discourse. Little attention is paid to the interactional context of speech. Rhetoric, the way words are organized into arguments and what is achieved through argumentation is completely left out. One consequence is that the theory ignores the power of social norms, for example the norms that force people to conceal or mitigate their views. The point is especially valid for late modern societies in Europe and North America where overt expressions of authoritarianism in everyday interaction have become largely unacceptable. Evidence of this tendency can be seen in the frequent use of disclaimers, such as: “I am not prejudiced, but...”, or “I am not racist, but...” (Billig, 1988; van Dijk, 1988). Adorno *et al.* noticed the use of such disclaimers by the subjects of their study, too. However, they disregarded it as merely lip service paid to social norms of tolerance. In reality, suggested the researchers, such expressions of tolerance conflicted with the subjects’ deeper attitudinal structures (1950). Since then, it has been demonstrated that concealing or mitigating “maneuvers” occur even in circumstances where no external normative pressure is to be feared [see, e.g. the expressions of racism among British fascists studied by Billig (1978)]. Many scholars have pointed out that such maneuvers can actually play an important role in the practice of social categorization. They argue that late modern expressions of racist ideology, variously termed in scholarly literature as the “new racism,” “democratic racism,” or “modern racism,” have increasingly relied on denials of racism and prejudice that allow agents to build ideologically charged arguments without

fear of public reprisals or even feelings of guilt (Billig, 1988; Essed, 1988; 1991: 26-30, 271-278; Henry *et al.* 1994).

Given proper attention to discourse, a more substantial critique can be raised against the very idea that a rigid cognitive style lies at the origin of social categorization and ethnocentric thinking (Billig, 1985). Such a notion implies, among other things, a relative stability and uniformity of expressions of prejudice and ethnocentrism, at least across Western societies where authoritarian personalities are most prevalent. Although there are similarities in those expressions across nations and states, there are also significant differences in this respect (cf. Clairmont, 1979; Enoch; 1994; Ginsberg, 1981; Nevitte and Gibbins, 1985).

The realities of social interaction contradict authoritarian personality theory even among people who supposedly fit the authoritarian profile. Studies have shown that in practice the same people may display contradictory attitudes towards minorities – at times prejudiced, at times tolerant – depending on the situational context of interaction (Billig, 1988; Minard, 1952). The content of categorical statements undergoes constant changes and revisions. As Part II of this study will show, such changes can take place across relatively short periods of time, even during the course of one conversation, depending on the interlocutors' rhetorical priorities of the moment (cf. Billig, 1988; Potter and Wetherell, 1987: 122-137; 1988: 54-55). Such diversity of expression contradicts the supposed stability of attitudinal structures among authoritarians.

People can actually display a great flexibility in building images of other people in their talk. Michael Billig (1985), a social psychologist who focuses on analyzing the rhetoric of ideological discourse, suggests that even the authoritarian individuals studied by the California Group did not really display such a rigid cognitive style as that suggested by the researchers at the time the studies were conducted. He analyzes rhetoric in the discursive material (semi-formal interviews) that Adorno *et al.* collected as part of their research procedure, concluding that the respondents who had been classified as “prejudiced” (*ergo* “authoritarian”) demonstrated a similar flexibility of thought in

building their statements about minorities that shown by the respondents classified as “tolerant.” This means that factors other than rigidity of thought must have determined their statements. Billig argues that it is impossible to analyze ethnocentric discourse or any discourse of categorization properly without paying due attention to its rhetorical aspects (1985: 94-96).

Certain general concerns of authoritarian research come close to the angle of investigation undertaken here. As in authoritarian personality analyses, I wish to explore the link between social categorization and ideology. This link is often overlooked in studies of social categorization, which concentrate on “stereotypes” and “attitudes” towards other people. Unfortunately, authoritarian personality theory “isolates” ideology within individuals (Wetherell and Potter, 1992: 56). It also trivializes both its origins and functions. Enmeshed in the authoritarian personality, ideology becomes a form of pathology, a psychic reaction emerging in response to emotional problems of maladjusted individuals.

As in authoritarian personality research, attention is also paid to the interrelatedness of various ideologies or strands of ideology. Adorno *et al.* saw authoritarianism as a “philosophy of life” encompassing racism, nationalism, fascism and other forms of antidemocratic ideology. However, the focus of analysis on authoritarianism is too narrow (Wetherell and Potter, 1992: 56). Even though authoritarianism may have prevailed at times and places throughout history, it is only one of many aspects of social categorization. Categorizing discourse can be, and often is, much more diversified. Racist argumentation, for example, can actually incorporate strands of otherwise conflicting doctrines, such as liberalism and egalitarianism, side by side with extreme nationalism and outright supremacist discourse (Billig, 1978; Wetherell and Potter, 1992).

The focus on authoritarianism is also too narrow in the sense that the theory does not account for the pervasiveness of social categorization (racial, ethnic or otherwise) among all social groups – not only among those where authoritarian personalities

might prevail. This is all the more relevant, if the purpose is to study categorizing practices among minorities – groups that are traditionally perceived as victims, rather than perpetrators of authoritarian ideology (see e.g. Ginsberg, 1981).

Despite any criticism that may be levied against authoritarian personality theory, it had a deep impact on studies of ethnocentrism and prejudice. Hundreds of studies on authoritarianism appeared in the first decade following the appearance of the work, *The Authoritarian Personality* (1950). Among them were books solely devoted to its evaluation (see e.g. Christie and Jahoda, 1954; Kirscht and Dillehay, 1967). Some of the basic concepts of the theory gave new direction to research in social psychology and other disciplines. The New Look psychology of the 1950's concentrated upon perceptual processes, particularly stereotyping and prejudice. It suggested that it was not only authoritarians who were prejudiced and whose judgments were determined by the processes of categorization. "Ordinary" people also appeared to be prone to "categorization," and the concept would soon become the basic operational concept of cognitive psychology (Billig, 1985: 80).

### **The cognitive approach to social categorization**

Social cognition research relies on the assumption that phenomena such as racism and ethnic prejudice are a result of perceptual processes of *categorization* taking place at the level of the human psyche. Cognitive psychologists argue that categories are formed in the human mind on the basis of observation and experience of other people, and are taken to reflect to some extent divisions on the social level. They assume that all human beings function in more or less the same way, and that social categories are ultimately derived from the same perceptual mechanisms and ways of storing and organizing knowledge that individuals use in dealing with other objects in the physical world. These basic assumptions determine the ontology and epistemology (*ergo* also the methodology) of social cognition theory.

To begin with, social categorization is seen as a natural and inevitable phenomenon, the function of which is to clarify and simplify the otherwise complicated world of

physical and social objects. Human intellect has its limits with respect to information processing and has to break it down into categories, argue cognitive researchers, in order to function with some efficiency. Thus categorization is regarded as an adaptive mechanism, in the sense that it brings order and organization into the chaotic mass of stimuli faced by humans in the surrounding environment (Hamilton and Troler, 1986; Tajfel, 1981).

This is a radical departure from the view on social categorization represented by authoritarian personality theory. Whereas Adorno *et al.* saw social categorization as a projection of repressed negative feelings and hence an ultimately irrational (even pathological) phenomenon, cognitive psychologists reevaluated it as a process lying at the root of all thinking and inherent in people generally:

It seems almost inherent in us to lump others we encounter into social groups: females and males; blacks and whites; Catholics and Protestants and Jews. (Hamilton, 1981: 55)

What seems to be distinctive about the contemporary cognitive orientation to stereotypes and stereotyping (...) is a view of these phenomena as “nothing special,” as not essentially different from other cognitive structures and processes. (Ashmore and Del Boca, 1979: 28)

Categorization seen in this way is not only normal and natural but is also central to social life, governing the common sense knowledge and understanding of the world (Tajfel, 1981: 114-15). Some cognitive researchers have gone so far as to state that it may be common to all organisms (Mervis and Rosch, 1981: 89).

Likewise, *stereotypes* – another one of the central concepts of the cognitive approach – are viewed as normal cognitive schemata employed to efficiently store knowledge and expectations about social categories. The fact that stereotypes carry evaluations of categories is seen as a natural consequence of their function of storing knowledge (Hagendoorn, 1993: 33; Hamilton, 1981). However, the very act of forming a stereotype is regarded as neutral in principle. As one of the cognitive theorists has put it:

Stereotypes, both benign and pernicious, evolve to describe categories of people, just as sunsets are characterized as colorful or balls as round (Taylor, 1981: 84).

Negative stereotypes, ethnic prejudice and related phenomena are explained in this approach as cases of faulty information processing – unfortunate but inevitable byproducts of categorization, when the latter is applied to social groups. Cognition specialists recognize that our cognitive mechanisms are not perfect. Even though categorization is a normal and adaptive phenomenon, it produces some undesired side effects, such as errors in perception, faulty generalizations and biased judgment (Hamilton and Troler, 1986). Bias is inherent in the act of categorization, as understood in cognitive psychology. In strictly cognitive terms, categorization is the process whereby people exaggerate the differences between stimuli falling under different labels while minimizing the differences between stimuli falling under the same label (Tajfel and Wilkes, 1963; Wilder, 1981).

At the same time, implied in the focus on cognition is also the assumption that categories formed in the human mind are based on empirical experience of the world – they correspond to salient similarities and differences between stimuli present to the observer. Gordon Allport (1958), whose studies on prejudice stand midway between the “authoritarian personality” and cognitive approach maintained that stereotypes might contain a “grain of truth.” Cognition research has taken that notion much further: individuals categorize on the basis of real and objective features observable in other people and their behavior. Therefore, even though stereotypes may contain erroneous information and oversimplifications, they have some, even though often remote, correspondence to reality (Edwards, 1991; Hamilton, 1979: 59; Hamilton and Troler, 1986: 129). Hamilton (1979) notes:

The characteristics which differentiate significant social groups (such as sex or race) are often physically prominent and salient to an observer. (p. 59)

Cognitive psychology also suggests that categories have a relatively fixed structure. They are organized around the “prototype” – a paradigm example, which is thought to contain the typical attributes of the category shared by all members of the categorized group. On the basis of such prototypical models people come to properly identify members of a particular social category. This implies that categories based

on such prototypes are relatively enduring entities in the human mind (Cantor and Mischel, 1979; Potter and Wetherell, 1987: 120-126).

### **Discourse analysis as the practice of reading cognitions**

Analyzing text and talk in the framework of social cognition theory would involve searching for signs of internal perceptual processes. The approach to discourse would therefore resemble in a way the one used in authoritarian personality research where discourse was passed over as the object of study in favor of hidden subjective patterns. Discourse would again be treated as a representation or a medium through which a researcher would try to reach the other processes deemed the “real” object of study. Such an approach is, in fact, common to social psychologists and is not rare in the social sciences in general.

Some of the consequences of such a treatment of text and talk that cover social issues have already been discussed. The fact of the matter is that cognitive psychology, for the most part, ignores discourse altogether. Its basic assumptions and findings rarely (if ever) depend on the subjects’ discourse in any tangible form. Typically, cognitive research takes place in experimental settings with artificially created groups and/or using survey questionnaires in which social (i.e. also discursive) categories are established in advance by the researchers. Generally, questions are closed: the subjects express their opinions in numerical ratings on point scales or they have a choice among a number of preformed answers (e.g. Allen and Wilder, 1979; Clark and Rutter, 1985; Moghaddam *et al.*, 1994).

Social cognition theory also neglects the role of social discourse in creating and transferring ideas involved in forming cognitions. As a result, notes van Dijk (1988), the cognition perspective lacks a proper social theory for the acquisition and uses of social cognition in real-life situations. The emphasis on perceptions precludes, among other things, the role of social conventions in forming stereotypes and categorical evaluations (Wetherell and Potter, 1992: 40-43). Although cognition researchers generally acknowledge socialization as a factor in forming stereotypes,



the overall thrust of the theory is that perceptual processes alone constitute the basis for social categorization and social conflict. As one of the more prominent cognitive researchers states:

Aspects of our cognitive functioning may, by themselves, constitute the basis for stereotyping and intergroup discrimination. (Hamilton, 1981: 336)

In fact, cognitive theories neglect the factor of social influence and imply that individuals can form categories in isolation and on the basis of empirical observation of reality. All this leads to such predictable *cul-de-sacs*, as for example failure to explain categorization and prejudice against groups, members of which have never been met by the categorizing agents (Billig, 1985: 85).

There is a lack of social theory here, a fact that limits the capacity of the cognition perspective to explain the nature and functions of categorization in society. The perspective ignores or takes for granted the uses of categorization in creating and maintaining political and economic arrangements (Li Zong, 1994; van Dijk, 1988). Intergroup relations, allocation of power and resources and many other social practices related to categorization slip out of the agenda. All causes and most effects of categorization are described in psychological terms alone and treated as if they depended almost exclusively on psychological factors. Important social factors, such as the “beholder’s” social and economic position are neglected in cognitive analyses, as if bearing little relevance to the type of imagery that emerges in his or her mind. The social consequences of categorization are also ignored or limited to value-laden stereotypes and individual attitudes (Wetherell and Potter, 1992: 41-42).

Wetherell and Potter (1992: 42) argue that the social cognition tradition works with a static model of society. What is more, the model is also biological – implying that perceptual mechanisms work in a more or less similar way in all humans and as such they should result in a similar and relatively consistent content of categories produced by different people at different times. The absence of social theory makes it difficult to theorize both persistence and change in images and attitudes towards social groups over

time. Seen from a historical perspective, such images have been changing, depending on the ideological needs of the agents. For example, the image of the Maori in New Zealand has undergone an extensive evolution following the changing ideological needs of European colonizers (Wetherell and Potter, *ibid.*). The same could be said of the image of Mapuche Indians in Spanish and later Chilean discourse (Jenkins, 1994: 207, after Stuchlik, 1979). Closer to home, a salient example is the series of redefinitions that the category “Indian” or “Native” has undergone in Canadian discourse, both the official and popular one (cf. Frideres, 1988: 2-23).

Some scholars question the assumption of social cognition theory that categories are social constructs that have fixed and relatively enduring structures (Potter and Wetherell, 1987: 122-137; Verkuyten *et al.*, 1995). Studies of everyday discourse have shown a great deal of variation in the content of categories produced by different people, even during one and the same conversation or within the same oral account (Billig, 1988; Potter and Wetherell, *ibid.*; also 1988: 54-55).

Other questions that arise concern the inevitability of negative categorization. Cognitive mechanisms are assumed to work in an essentially neutral way and bias in perceptions could just as well result in favorable images. Why should any racial majority form negative images of a racial minority and not positive ones? In their critique of cognitive research, Wetherell and Potter (1992) argue that the “objectivist frame of reference,” which characterizes the theory, implies that the victims of racism are somehow responsible for the negative images of themselves (pp. 40-42). The cognitive psychology approach may thus inadvertently contribute to modern racist rhetoric (Billig, 1985; 1988; Condor, 1988).

The inevitability of prejudice becomes even harder to sustain, when we look beyond categorization and take other mechanisms of thinking into consideration. Researchers who study categorizing discourse argue that people are not restricted by mechanical categorization and that human thought is much more flexible than cognitive psychology would have it (Potter and Wetherell, 1987: 121-137). Billig (1985) argues that in putting

stress on categorization, social psychologists have neglected the opposite side of cognitive processes, that is, “particularization.” If categorization, from the cognitive point of view, involves generalization, particularization involves distinguishing particular instances from general categories, or splitting categories into parts. Billig argues that both categorization and particularization are equally important as cognitive processes when people try to make sense of the world. Particularization is especially important when dealing with information that might threaten the generalizations implicit in stereotypes. Billig points out that both categorization and particularization are used as argumentative strategies when it comes to building images of other people in discourse. All these features of thought become more visible when attention is given to discourse as the object of study in itself, instead of treating it as a medium through which hidden subjective patterns can be isolated.

### **Social identity theory**

The last social psychological perspective considered here –social identity theory – emerged in the 1970’s. Social psychologists who had problems with applying psychological concepts to social issues called for a “more social social psychology” (Rodkin, 1993: 642). The theory that emerged has overcome some of the shortcomings of the cognitive approach, and in this respect represents a significant advance on its predecessor.

On the cognitive level, things remain largely unchanged. Views and attitudes towards social groups are still expressed in terms of psychological (perceptual) processes of categorization and biased, stereotypic judgments. However, the scope of the theory has been expanded. A wide spectrum of social factors has been introduced and has given critical importance to psychological processes. Simultaneously, the focus of study has shifted from internal mechanisms of categorization towards intergroup relations (e.g. Tajfel, 1978; 1981; Tajfel and Turner, 1985; Turner *et al.*, 1987). In effect, social identity theory puts a sociological frame over the principal concepts of the cognitive perspective.

Social identity theory's main concern is with the social identity of individuals, particularly those aspects of identity that stem from group memberships. The key concept is the "group identity" of individuals that defines them as members of a particular social group to which they belong and differentiates them from members of other similar groups (Tajfel, 1981; Turner, 1982; Turner et al. 1987). The theory also gives a critical importance to the fact that society is composed of social groups that stand in relations of power and status to one another (Hogg and Abrams, 1988: 18). Typically, individuals enter the structure by virtue of being born into a number of those groups that are defined on the basis of social class, gender, ethnicity, race or other criteria (Hogg and Abrams, 1988).

Social identity theory traces the determinants of social categorization to the psychological processes involved in the formation of group identity. Crucial among those processes are social comparisons whereby people assess their social value – character traits, abilities and achievements – in relation to others in a similar social position. Individuals make such comparisons inside their own group and at the interpersonal level, but they also need to assess the value of their own group in relation to other groups. The theory puts a particular stress on those latter comparisons, where the individual's own group, or "ingroup" is compared with similar but distinct other groups, i.e. the "outgroups" (Turner, 1982; Turner *et al.* 1987).

Needless to say, intergroup comparisons are most influential in the processes of formation of group identity. This is where social categorization comes to play a critical role. In making intergroup comparisons, people rely on perceptual processes, those already discovered by cognition psychologists. Thus, for example, people have a tendency to maximize the differences between human groups. At the same time, they minimize the differences within those groups and exaggerate the similarities of individuals belonging to the same group. In the process of ingroup-outgroup categorizations, individuals develop their own group identity. Seeing themselves as more and more similar to the members of their own group, as opposed to people from other groups, they begin to define themselves increasingly in group terms. They identify their

own characteristics with those of the group and see themselves as sharing the group's norms, values and interests.

Emerging in the course of intergroup comparisons and evaluations, categorization is a motivated process which functions to promote the interests of the group. The primary motivational factor is a need for a positive social identity. As it befits a psychological perspective, factors of individual psychology are assumed to lie at the bottom of things. The way to derive a positive identity is to evaluate the ingroup as highly as possible (Tajfel, 1981; Tajfel and Turner, 1979). When group identity is invoked, individual self-esteem begins to be bound up with the value of the group and group members begin thinking and acting in a way that favors their group in relation to other comparable groups on the relevant dimensions of comparison. These can be economic gains, political power, prestige, intelligence, etc. or simply the allocation of points, as it occurs in experiments carried out by social identity theorists (see e.g. Tajfel *et al.*, 1971).

By introducing social practice, social identity theory broadens the scope of categorization, as compared to the social cognitions perspective. Ethnic prejudice, racism and other forms of categorization are no longer reduced to value-laden stereotypes. People are no longer just lone and passive beholders. They think and act on behalf of the groups to which they belong. Ethnocentrism, defined here as the preference for one's own ethnic group finds its expression in tangible social practices, such as discrimination, violence, etc. The same goes for forms of ideological expression that are seen as the ways through which people maximize the interests of their own groups to the disadvantage of outsiders (Hogg and Abrams, 1988).

The model of society presented by social identity theory gives social categorization an instrumental role in intergroup relations. Through the practices of categorization, society is shaped into hierarchies of power and status. Within those hierarchies, members of dominant groups make constant efforts to impose and perpetuate the status quo that gives them a privileged position, while the members of minorities are trying to improve their status, all for the sake of positive social identity (Tajfel, 1978; Hogg and Abrams, 1988).

It should be stressed, though, that social identity theory treats group identity, group experience and intergroup relations as general categories. It assumes that the same patterns of identification and interaction apply regardless of what type of groups are in focus. Race, ethnic, or gender relations, for theorists of social identity, are just particular instances – local manifestations – of the universal phenomenon of group dynamics. The theory's findings are typically based on observations made on small experimental groups in laboratory settings, where membership is assigned and where participants are removed from external social reality and from their actual group experience (see, e.g. Tajfel *et al.*, 1971; 1978). The aim of social identity theory is to detect the universal laws governing group psychology. Historical manifestations of intergroup relations are then to be explicated by reference to this general conceptual framework.

### **Social identity in historical context**

Unlike the other social psychological approaches discussed, social identity theory presents a much more comprehensive approach to social phenomena. Everything seems to be in place to explain the nature of intergroup relations. People act as members of their groups and on behalf of their groups. Personal interests are bound with group interests. Social categorization is treated as a social practice. It is “social” in character and not locked in individuals, as authoritarian personality research presented it, and it is also a “practice” with tangible outcomes – no longer reduced to perceptual mechanisms, as social cognition theory would have it. Social categorization is linked to social competition and recognized as playing a critical role in social relations.

The notion of social categorization as a form of social practice will be retained for this study. The basic functionality of practices related to social categorization is also recognized. It has been affirmed by social scientists representing different fields of study and theoretical perspectives. Lévi-Strauss, for example, regards phenomena such as ethnocentrism and negative images of outsiders as a means of preserving group identity and cultural heritage (1983: 15-16). Such defensive strategies may become increasingly functional in the era of globalisation.

However, the problem with social identity theory is that it takes the existence of groups and categories for granted (Wetherell and Potter, 1992: 46). The starting point of the theory is bifocal: the individual and his or her group. They are treated as givens in advance and studied as static elements of the social landscape (see, e.g. Turner, 1987b; Oakes, 1987; Hogg and Abrams, 1988). The latter is also treated as given in advance and assumed to be governed by universal laws of psychological dynamics. In other words, social identity theory does not address the questions of why and how particular groups and categories emerge in the first place and how they are constituted.

There are still strong tones of essentialism in the theory. This, despite the fact that the constructed character of social entities, such as ethnic and racial groups, gender divisions, even age divisions has long been argued in social science (e.g., Bourdieu, 1980). While social identity theory assumes social categorization as the result of group existence, constructivist perspectives approach categorization from the other end, as an important mechanism of group formation. The constructivist frame of reference defines ethnic groups as social constructs predicated on the presumption of shared cultural characteristics or even biological origins (Barth, 1969; Despres, 1982: 8-10; Glazer and Moynihan, 1975). This is the view presented in much of post-Barthian anthropology of ethnicity and communal identity. In "Ethnic Groups and Boundaries," Barth and his colleagues (1969) reject any essence of ethnicity and treat ethnic categorization as an organizational principle that helps people differentiate between human collectivities, or mark their boundaries (see also, Jenkins, 1994; Wallman, 1979).

If constructivist perspectives teach us anything, it is that the existence of groups should not be taken for granted. In fact, there are indications that even the modern idea of individuality, which is the starting point of social identity theory should not be taken for granted. Examples drawn from anthropological studies tell us that individuality can be conceptualized in a variety of ways depending on social and temporal context (see e.g. Geertz, 1984; Shweder and Bourne, 1984).

Social identity theory still emphasizes cognitive processes and has a tendency to treat social categorization in universalistic terms. Categorization is still conceptualized mainly as a perceptual process, albeit occurring in the context of intergroup comparisons. Only the addition of motivation shifts the focus to the level of social practice. As for universalism, social identity theory assumes that the rules governing group identifications and intergroup relations are the same for all social groups and that all human beings function in the same way, regardless of historical contexts. Conflict is assumed to stem from the psychodynamics of group membership. It is assumed that all people have a natural need for a positive social identity and that identity is acquired in the course of social competition where some groups have to prevail over others. Power, prestige and economic interests are not seen as objective reasons for conflict but merely as dimensions of comparison or as the fields where social competition is played out between groups. As a result, social categorization, competition, and conflict are treated as inevitable phenomena, inherent in human nature (Wetherell and Potter, 1992: 47).

These all seem to be culture-bound assumptions, characteristic of the common-sense ideas prevailing in Western culture and ignoring the variety of possible ways of relating to the world that exist in other cultures. There are suggestions that these assumptions may not even hold true for all social collectivities within Western society itself. For example, researchers studying gender identity argue that the basic tenets of social identity theory are oriented towards masculine behavior and that women and men have diametrically different ways of relating to the world and deriving their identity (Skevington, 1989; Williams, 1984). Exploring this difference, Williams (1984) argues that groups may also function in non-competitive relationships such as mutual cooperation and that a positive social identity may be derived communally, through relationships within the group.

Because of its universalistic approach, the traditional social identity perspective has no conceptual tools for explaining differences in patterns of group identification in particular historical and social contexts. The view that all people perceive their group membership in the same way leads to a concept of identity that is rigid and static. Evidence from studies made in actual historical contexts shows this not to be the case. Breakewell's



studies of women's identity (1979) suggest that there is no consensus as to what it means to be a woman in society and that social identity can in fact be multifaceted and transient. Similar conclusions emerge from Marshall and Wetherell's study of the discourse of women who are training to be lawyers (1989). Identity is fluid and fragmentary rather than fixed and its meaning can change depending context.

Anthropological literature covering different cultural contexts provides evidence of the insubstantial and fluid nature of ethnic identity. Fischer's post-modernist analysis of literature in pluralist societies (1986) presents a picture of ethnicity that is constantly invented or reinvented and reinterpreted in each generation by each individual. Fischer also points out that the process of assuming an ethnic identity is an "insistence on a pluralist, multidimensional, or multifaceted concept of self. One can be many different things, and this personal sense can be crucible for wider social ethos of pluralism" (1986: 196). Using the example of aboriginal land claims trials at the US town of Mashpee – "Cape Cod's Indian Town" – Clifford notes how difficult it may be to establish a distinct ethnic identity of a people, not only for external observers, but even for the subjects themselves (1988: 277-346). Studies of Chilean exiles in Paris (Apfelbaum and Vasquez, 1983; Vasquez, 1987) and in Montreal (Grmela, 1991) demonstrate that identity is neither stable, nor unique. Rather, it is multifaceted, changing and highly context-related. A similar picture emerges from studies of other groups of immigrant origin. Meintel's research on youth belonging to several different ethnic groups in Montreal (1989; 1992) demonstrates that the subjects can claim numerous identities and their self-identifications are highly flexible. Meintel poses the question whether, given such fluidity, the ethnic identity of individuals must necessarily correspond to any distinct collectivity to which they would "belong" (1992: 85, quotation marks in original).

Perhaps, as some authors suggest, identity should be approached as a strategy that people implement in various ways, depending on the context and in keeping with their current interests and objectives (Vasquez, 1987: 37-38). This may prove particularly relevant when studying minority groups, including immigrants, who find themselves in a situation

of domination, where their identity or identities are often subject to devaluation or even denigration (see also, Oriol, 1979; 1985).

Part of the problem with social identity theory is that it describes the mechanisms of intergroup relations from a theoretical rather than an empirical stance. Instances of social categorization are explained mainly in psychological terms and are completely detached from social and historical realities that produce them. As has already been mentioned, social identity studies rely to a great extent on experiments with artificially created groups in laboratory settings. Such experiments reveal little about the meanings of group belonging and social categorization in the real world. Questions concerning these issues cannot be answered without looking into social and historical realities of their production.

As has already been argued, studies carried out in particular historical contexts put in question universalistic and essentialist assumptions about social categories and group identity. Many of them also show the utility of a qualitative approach for the study of these elusive phenomena. In Part II of this study, a whole array of “exercises in self-identification” will be revealed, few of which could be detected, had due attention not been paid to the subjects’ discourse.

Unfortunately, discourse is not given a sufficient importance in the framework of social identity theory. Its status is still that of a medium between subjects and the researcher. It is assumed to reveal the individual’s inner motives and reflect categories already in place (Verkuyten *et al.*, 1995; Wetherell and Potter, 1992: 46). Contrary to this, the practitioners of discourse analysis have repeatedly emphasized the constitutive, and not only reflective role of discourse and demonstrated how social categories are constructed in everyday talk, in scientific or popular literature, and other media accounts (see, e.g. Potter and Reicher, 1987; Verkuyten *et al.*, 1995; Marshall and Wetherell, 1989).

## **Conclusions**

This brief review of psychological perspectives on social categorization shows some of the problems that arise when the individual is taken as the starting point of theory – when

complex social phenomena are explained by reference to psychological processes inherent in human nature.

The fact that the realities of social construction also include discursive practices has been made evident here as well. The shortcomings of the scientific perspectives discussed in this chapter stem at least in part from the failure to recognize this fact. In the following chapters, I continue to argue the necessity of studying the discourse of social categorization as a form of social practice and show how it can be incorporated into social theory. Theories that concentrate on social factors and their role in forming social categories will now be examined. Analyses of social categorization cannot be complete without references to larger economic and political forces that contribute to its production, and that is the focus of the next chapter.

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## Structure and ideology: society as the starting point for social categorization

Our attention now turns to theories and studies that, in contrast to psychologically-oriented research, locate the origins and processes of social categorization on the level of society, predominantly in the framework of political and economic relations and link them to the material conditions of life. Many of these studies, which take place in the traditional domains of sociology, political economy and to some extent anthropology, build their explanations around the notions of power and domination. They argue that historically established categorical divisions of people correspond to structures of social inequality. Within those structures, some groups/categories exert political and economic powers to dominate and exploit others.

Discourse involving ethnic and racial categories (as well as some other categories of people) is treated in these perspectives as a form of ideology and is explained by the functions that it plays in society. Further, the social categories under study are regarded as socially and ideologically developed *constructs* that serve particular interests in the existing or emerging social structures.

Studies that emphasize the societal character of social categorization are varied and often conflicting. The differences between them are often substantial when it comes to the understanding of particular concepts and details of theory. It would be difficult, in fact, to speak of a unified perspective here. Notwithstanding the differences, there is a common focus on political and economic relations and a number of key concepts that most of these theories share, namely: *power*, *inequality*, *exploitation*, *material conditions of life*, also *ideology* and the *social construction of reality*. These commonalities are significant enough to speak of a broad theoretical outlook and a common direction, or a sense to analysis.

Examining notions of power and inequality is critical for my investigation because they have been adopted in discourse studies to explain the rhetoric of race and ethnicity. These studies analyze the discourse of ethnicity and race as the practice of producing inequality, the practice through which dominant social groups establish and maintain their power over ethnic and racial minorities. In fact, this approach has so far been the only one used to examine the discourse of ethnicity and race (see e.g., Billig, 1988; van Dijk, 1987; 1993; Litton and Potter, 1985; Potter and Wetherell, 1988; Verkuyten, 1994; Wetherell and Potter, 1992).

Here again, a general outlook, rather than an analytic frame or theory, is the focus because, with few exceptions, discourse studies do not systematically abide by any particular framework of social theory, either adopted or developed on their own, that would explain social inequality. Most discourse analysts concentrate on discursive processes and effects alone, without paying close attention to the wider social determinants involved in producing social inequality.

For all these reasons, rather than examine any particular theoretical perspective(s), I will examine the general direction of theories that focus on power and domination. This survey does not pretend to provide a comprehensive review of all such theories but rather examines some of the main areas of inquiry and the building blocks of this broad outlook as they pertain to issues of ethnicity and race. In so doing, I hope to construct a general line of inquiry to handle the problem of ethnic and racial categorization in discourse – a line that would help to understand the relationship of discourse to wider social issues and processes.

### **Social categorization and social structures**

The emphasis on the societal, rather than psychological character of ethnic and racial categorization has been developing since the late 1960's. An increasing number of scholars began paying closer attention to the political and economic benefits that racial and ethnic divisions (as well as gender and age divisions) of society were bringing to

some people at the expense of others (Zong, 1994). Of critical importance to rejecting individualistic and “biologistic” assumptions about social categorization are structural studies. They demonstrate how inequalities based on racial and ethnic (age and gender) categorizations are rooted in society’s institutional structures and how those structures reproduce inequality irrespective of the intentions and/or attitudes of the individuals involved (Li, 1988; Muszynski, 1994).

Structural studies see forms of social categorization as inscribed in structures of inequality, where racial and ethnic domination is reproduced systematically through the formulation and application of laws, rules and regulations and through unequal allocation of resources (Essed, 1991: 44). Central to many structural approaches to the study of racism is the distinction between “individual racism” and “institutional racism.” While the first concept refers to individual attitudes and behaviour, the second designates various discriminatory effects of institutional arrangements and operations that systematically exclude racialized groups/categories from equal participation in society (Carmichael and Hamilton, 1967; Knowles and Prewitt, 1969). Institutionalized racism is particularly powerful where discrimination is legally sanctioned by the State and incorporated into its laws, programs and policies. The laws and policies of Nazi Germany and the apartheid system of South Africa are the most notorious examples of this but, in fact, government-sanctioned inequality has been documented in many parts of the modern world, including such ostensibly tolerant and democratic countries as Holland and Canada (e.g., Cardoso de Oliveira, 1982; Essed, 1991: 14-22; Zong, 1994). Canada has a history of institutional and political arrangements that have discriminated against racial minorities, particularly Aboriginal peoples and Asian immigrants (Anderson, 1991; Frideres, 1988).

Within the same structural approach, the political economy perspective focuses on economic arrangements linking racial and ethnic inequality to the capitalist mode of production. Explanations are strongly influenced by Marxist theory and emphasize economic exploitation of minority categories for the purpose of accumulation of capital by dominant groups. The economic arrangements in question include the exclusion of minority categories from the labor market or their marginalization, forcing them into the

lower echelons of the work force (Essed, 1991: 17; Szymanski, 1979; Vander Zanden, 1979). The theoretical models that have been developed in this perspective, such as internal colonial theory and split labour market theory, among others, relate social categorization and intergroup conflict to unequal opportunity and differential price of labour between social groups (Bonacich, 1976; Frideres, 1988: 366-413). In the framework of capitalist relations of production, keeping parts of the population marginalized and excluded from valued resources facilitates their use as a source of cheap labour for the benefit of the dominant group(s) (Bolaria and Li, 1988; Bonacich, 1976; Brodtkin-Saks, 1989; Lavender and Forsyth, 1979, Miles, 1982).

Needless to add that institutional and economic arrangements usually combine to constitute powerful systems of inequality locking the minority categories into subordinate positions with few routes of escape or possibilities to improve their situation.

Arrangements of this sort were most clearly manifest under colonial systems of slavery in the Americas and apartheid in Africa, but similar treatment has been suffered by aboriginal peoples and immigrant populations in Europe, the Americas and in other parts of the world (Miles, 1989; Essed, 1991; Frideres, 1988; Zong, 1994).

### **Social categorization as a process**

While acknowledging the power of structural arrangements in shaping intergroup relations, some authors point that the macro-sociological bias in structural studies leads to underrating the role of human beings in making things happen in society (Essed, 1991; Zong, 1994). As Essed notes, the distinction between institutional and individual racism is problematic because:

“It places the individual outside the institutional, thereby severing rules, regulations, and procedures from the people who make and enact them, as if it concerned qualitatively different racism rather than different positions and relations through which racism operates” (...) The term *individual racism* is a contradiction in itself because racism is by definition the expression and activation of group power.” (1991: 36-37)

One should not forget that even in the context of institutionalized life it is still social actors, albeit as members of collectivities, who effectuate social structures. It is social

actors who vote and support politicians, who in turn follow particular agendas, make decisions, etc. It is actors who establish rules, regulations and procedures in institutions, who enact them, and who may, under certain conditions, choose to oppose them as well.

Essed (1991) sees racism as an *ideology, structure* and *process*, with the process consisting of everyday practices through which racial structures and ideologies are constantly produced and reproduced. She introduces the concept of “everyday racism” as the process of “interweaving racism into the fabric of the social system” (ibid.: 37) through various practices of exclusion, marginalization, criminalization, and discrimination of minorities. Particular racist practices and processes defined in terms of ethnic categorization are occasionally mentioned in studies of social inequality, but Essed’s studies of everyday racism in the Netherlands and the United States (1988; 1991) comprises one of the few systematic attempts to identify and analyze the whole range of such practices. These practices occur in all areas and on all levels of social organization and social interaction, ranging from hiring and employment practices to residential segregation to differential treatment in stores, medical offices, public transportation, patterns of socializing, etc.

Practices of categorization do not necessarily involve discrimination or other ways of direct acting upon the object. Essed’s studies demonstrate how they can include even such seemingly trivial acts as avoidance, ignoring or staring. Moving White children out of a “mixed” school can be a defining act and probably no less contributing to social structures than refusing to hire someone on the basis of his/her skin color or ethnic accent is (Essed, 1991; cf. Robinson and Preston, 1979).

Jenkins (1994) attempts to conceptualize the mechanisms involved in such processes. Although, in contrast to Essed, he concentrates more on the problem of ethnicity than race,<sup>1</sup> like her he also sees social categorization as a process involving social practices and places it in the context of power relations:

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<sup>1</sup> Actually, both Essed and Jenkins are concerned with the same aspects of social categorization; however,



These are other-directed processes during which one person or a set of persons defines the other(s) as “X,” “Y” or whatever. This may, at its most consensual, be the validation of the others’ internal definition(s) of themselves. At the conflictual end of the spectrum of possibilities, however, there is the imposition by one set of actors upon another of a putative name and characterization which affects in significant ways the social experience(s) of the categorized. (1994: 199)

Jenkins stresses the social and transactional nature of categorization. It is primarily a “social process” (and not an “individual process”) because it is necessarily embedded in social relationships: involving an actor(s), an object(s), and an audience as well as a socially derived framework of meaning. Categorization is “transactional” in the sense that it involves acting upon other people and shaping their experience. Jenkins also stresses that social categorization is not just a matter of classification. It is necessarily a “meaningful intervention” in other people’s lives (ibid.: 199, 217).

Thus defined, practices of categorization consist of a variety of verbal and non-verbal behaviours, in a wide range of formal and informal social contexts and interactions. For Jenkins, the relative effectiveness of these practices – their capacity to intervene in individuals’ lives – depends on the *power* and/or *authority* of the categorizing agents. In the context of relations between the dominant group and minorities, power and authority translate into a potential of the former to define and constitute the conditions of existence for the latter (Jenkins, ibid.: 217). On a wider social scale the practices of categorization regulate the nature of interethnic relations and the allocation of resources, and generally contribute to the reproduction of the social order (Jenkins, 1994; Miles, 1982; Szymanski, 1979).

### **Social categorization as ideology**

So far, my brief overview of theoretical perspectives that focus on relations of power and inequality has shown a correlation between social categorization and structures and processes of instituting inequality in human society. Social categorization is also regarded as a form of ideology, another building block of these theories. For most students of

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Jenkins collapses racial differentiation and racism into ethnicity, seeing them as “historically-specific forms of the general – perhaps even universal – social phenomenon of ethnicity” (1994: 209). Essed goes the other way around, seeing “ethnicism” as an ideological form of racism (1991: 15) and defining race as an ideological construction involving “racialized” and “ethnicized” structures of power (ibid.: 43).

social inequality, struggles around material conditions take place not only in the social, economic and political realm, but also in an ideological realm that interacts with the structural factors and processes of instituting social reality (Muszynski, 1994).

What is ideology and how does it function socially? Numerous studies of racial and ethnic inequality describe the workings and effects of ideology but few actually define it explicitly. It would seem that ideology is much easier to define implicitly through its ways and workings than explicitly through its content. Part of the problem lies in the fact that contemporary views on ideology have been strongly influenced by Marx's writings, where one can find a lot about the functions of ideology but nothing in a way of precise and explicit definition of the concept. Consequently, there is still an on-going debate as to what Marx meant by the term (Larrain, 1980). Modern Marxist conceptualizations of ideology tend to define ideology as those ideas of the ruling classes and as reflecting the interests of the ruling classes (Billig, 1976). This definition seems to be derived from the statement that Marx wrote in collaboration with Engels in *The German Ideology*, where he perhaps comes the closest to actually defining ideology:

The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas, i.e. the class that is the ruling *material* force of society, is at the same time its ruling *intellectual* force. (Marx and Engels, 1970: 66, italics in original)

Marxist views on the principal function of ideology influence many studies of racial and ethnic inequality, according to which dominant ideology serves the interests of the dominant section of society (Billig, 1982). The term "ideas" contained in ideology that Marx employed in general terms to mean abstract and philosophical systems of thought is used liberally to include a whole variety of ideas, opinions, concepts, images and beliefs that are widespread in society at a particular point in history. Gramsci speaks of a "sedimentation of common sense" in which the scientific and philosophical thought becomes reformulated and mixed with lay systems of knowledge to become "the most widespread conception of life and of man [sic]" (1971: 326). Many studies of social inequality, particularly studies of ideological discourse, conceptualize ideology in the Gramscian sense to include forms of philosophically and scientifically organized thought as well as common

sense theories and popular systems of knowledge that guide people's thinking and perceptions in everyday life (cf. Essed, 1991; Henry and Tator, 1994; Wetherell and Potter, 1992).

In this approach, categorizations based on race, ethnicity and gender are seen as forms of popular ideology providing "interested" frameworks of meaning to human thought and perception of society. They divide humanity in such ways that parts of it can profit from the division at the expense of others (Billig, 1976: 226-261; 1982; Essed, 1988; 1991; Lawrence, 1982; Miles, 1982; 1989; Muszynski, 1994; Wetherell and Potter, 1992).

### **The ways and workings of ideology**

At the simplest, ideology is seen as a *rationalization* and *justification* of the structures of inequality. One of the ways in which it functions is through assigning to minority categories certain traits that would explain their position vis-à-vis the dominant group. Thus, for example, it is generally agreed that the traditional form of racist ideology that justified slavery in Europeanized societies attributed to "colored" people biological characteristics perceived as inferior. European dominance and colonial expansion were explained by the process of natural selection, in accordance with Social Darwinism, popular in the late nineteenth century science. Social Darwinism also became entrenched in twentieth-century lay opinion (Banton, 1987; Miles, 1989; Wetherell and Potter, 1992: 19). Arguments about racial inferiority were also used at times in North America to rationalize the exclusion and marginalization of immigrant workers of various racial and ethnic backgrounds. At the height of eugenics movement, such arguments were also used against some immigrant groups of European origin (cf. Avery and Federowicz, 1982; Znaniecki-Lopata, 1976).

Studies of ethnic and racial relations demonstrate many ways in which inequality can be justified and rationalized. Over time, with traditional ideas of biological inferiority becoming increasingly untenable and discredited by science as well as various social and political bodies, systems of inequality have come to rely on new ideologies of

legitimation. The structural exclusion and marginalization of ethnic and racial minorities are rationalized today with specific ideologies based on nationality, language, religion, and other cultural and social factors (Gilroy, 1987, Potter and Wetherell, 1988; Henry and Tator, 1994). For example, arguments citing cultural deficiency, social inadequacy, lack of language competence, pathological family, etc. have been used against racial and ethnic minorities to justify their lack of progress in society (Essed, 1991: 29; Verkuyten *et al.*, 1995).

The *elusive* and *changing nature* of ideological systems has long been recognized in social science. Ideological systems are dynamic, fluid, ever changing and dependent on the contexts in which they develop (Henry and Tator, 1994). This is related to their *historicity* (historical specificity) and the historicity of the social structures with which they interact. Historicity is one of the central concepts of structural approaches and other perspectives in the “power and domination” perspective. The structures and ideologies of inequality are not seen as imminent, static givens resulting from any “natural” human predisposition but are historically specific: developed in particular historical circumstances and as a result of a complex set of social, economic, political and organizational conditions (Essed, 1991: 12-36; Muszynski, 1994). As Hall writes with respect to racism: “It has no natural and universal law of development. It does not always assume the same shape. There have been many significantly different racisms – each historically specific and articulated in a different way” (1978 :26, in Henry and Tator, 1994). Thus, at any given point of time, categorizing practices will be of a specific nature.

Historical specificity means that systems of categorization are also *geographically* and *socially specific*. Although there are strong similarities between some developments in different parts of the world, in any country or social arena, systems take specific forms. Each category is embedded in its own particular history and may carry multiple meanings affected by the social and discursive contexts in which it is used (cf. Essed, 1991; Henry and Tator, 1994; Muszynski, 1994: 6).

The content and workings of contemporary ideologies of inequality have been shaped by a variety of factors, such as advances in modern biological and social science, protest movements by various political and social bodies acting on behalf of minorities, and the general public commitment to democratic ideals of freedom, justice and equality in Western societies (Essed, 1991; Henry and Tator, 1994; Potter and Wetherell, 1988; Wetherell and Potter, 1992). As a result, vicious, “red neck” forms of racist argumentation (or other categorizing discourse) are no longer acceptable, just like crude ideas of biological inferiority or superiority.

In fact, any form of direct attack on minority groups today risks being labeled as “politically incorrect.” Consequently, ideologies of categorization have acquired new form and content, and new levels of sophistication. Studies of racism in Europe and North America have developed various concepts to explain these changes: “aversive racism” (Gaertner and Dovidio, 1986); “symbolic racism” (Kinder, 1986); “modern racism” (McConahay, 1986); and “democratic racism” (Henry and Tator, 1994). There is no need to elaborate here on the differences between these concepts. They all expose similar characteristics of contemporary racist ideologies, which have succeeded in absorbing the principles and ideas of European Enlightenment, particularly rationalism, egalitarianism, and notions of justice and freedom, the very same ideas and principles that have also been used against racism (Billig, 1988; Essed, 1991: 271-278; van Dijk, 1988). Modern ideologies of racial and ethnic inequality still manage to blame, marginalize and problematize the victims of discrimination, only in more sophisticated ways.

The flexibility of ideology means that ideological arguments can work in many ways. Not all such arguments speak directly against the victims. For example, the social and economic position of immigrant groups can be explained away by reference to “natural” human hostility against foreigners and the “incompatibility of different cultures” (Barker, 1981; Henry and Tator, 1994). Some scholars argue that certain notions developed in social psychology resemble modern racist ideology. They attack in particular the notions that prejudice is a “natural” tendency and that social stereotypes have empirical bases in

reality (Condor, 1988; Potter and Wetherell; 1988). Phrases, such as “We all have our prejudices,” “All people are racists, including Blacks themselves,” “There is a grain of truth in every stereotype,” etc., have been listed among the popular commonplaces of contemporary racist ideologies (e.g., Henry and Tator, 1994; Wetherell and Potter, 1992).

This type of argumentation presents the order of things as natural and unavoidable and as such contributes to manufacturing consensus and maintaining the *status quo* in society. Maintaining the *status quo* is the central function attributed to ideology in Marxist tradition, although the focus there is rather on illusions of harmony and unity created by the dominant ideology. As Billig notes, for Marx and Engels ideology mainly worked through imposing metaphysical abstractions that obscured and concealed the material and exploitative reality of social relations (1982: 36). Marx’s view on religion as the “opium for the masses” exemplifies this understanding of ideology as obscuring social reality through metaphysical abstractions and creating a sense of social unity in a system that is characterized by conflict and contradictions. Within Marxist traditions, ideology is a force for stability precisely because it obscures and conceals contradictions in the social order (cf. Billig, 1982: 3; Larrain, 1980; Miles, 1982; 1989). It creates the illusion that the existing order of things is natural, reasonable and harmonious and that society is functioning for the benefit of all its members. Consensus and social unity are sought through presenting the material and political interests of the ruling class as the interests of the entire population (Larrain, 1979; 1980).

Traditional appeals to the necessity and benefits of “law and order” in society are obvious examples of ideological practice working for the *status quo*. But more subtle workings of ideology have been noted, as well. In the Western cultural tradition dominant groups make frequent use of classic liberal ideologies to obtain and maintain their status with regard to minorities (Billig, 1982; Essed, 1988; 1991; Henry and Tator, 1994; Wetherell and Potter, 1992). For example, Wetherell and Potter (1992) point out that the ideology of humanitarianism has been an important tool used in New Zealand to pacify, submit and control the Maori population, first by British colonials and then by New Zealanders of European extraction.

If we understand the function of ideology, then we can see the ideological purpose the humanitarian explanation has in obscuring exploitative class relations in New Zealand. It creates a mythology in which the colonial state acts in an economically “neutral” way to establish the rule of law and prevent the settlers from plundering the Maori land. Under the protection of the neutral state the Maori people are able to act as equals in pursuing (sic) their “economic” interests in the market-place. This mythology completely misrepresents the functions of the State in creating the conditions for capitalist production. (Bedggood, 1980: 23, in Wetherell and Potter, 1992: 25)

The discourse of protectiveness and care for minority populations has reportedly been employed for similar purposes in other parts of the world, as well. Whether directed at indigenous peoples in North America (e.g. Frideres, 1988) or immigrant workers in Europe (e.g. Essed, 1991; van Dijk, 1988a) humanitarian glosses on social relations have coexisted with various practices of domination and exploitation of subordinate groups.

To give another example, similar uses have been made of the idea of egalitarianism – another liberal “metaphysical abstraction” and a core idea of modern democracies. The discourse of egalitarianism has been used extensively as an ideological tool in the context of ethnic and racial categorization. On one hand, it propagates a myth of equality of all people, allowing dominant groups to dismiss racial or ethnic discrimination as a “thing of the past” and, on the other, it calls for the equality of opportunity (not equality of outcome) denying any right to special treatment for any group. Overall, the ideology of egalitarianism allows dominant groups and official governing bodies to control discontent with racial and ethnic injustice and block initiatives for change, such as affirmative action programs or demands for special privileges made by minority groups that claim underprivileged status or past grievances. In the context of general equality, any special treatment can be presented as “unfair” and leading to “reverse discrimination” (van Dijk, 1993; Essed, 1988; Frideres, 1988: 379; Henry and Tator, 1994).

Essed (1991) assigns yet another role to ideology in maintaining social unity, in this case, that of the dominant group itself. She argues that ideologies of race and ethnicity are helpful for holding the dominant group together and determining its uniformity of action – a critical factor in maintaining the position of majority in race relations.

Conceptualizing race and ethnic relations as power relations, she draws on Arendt's (1970) argument that power is the property of a group as long as the group stays together.

Therefore:

To keep the group intact it is necessary to cultivate ideologies supporting the idea of innate group differences based on "race" or ethnicity. Group power can only empower individuals when they have a sense of group membership. Therefore, it is necessary to keep a permanent sense of "us" (dominant group) as opposed to "them" (dominated groups). (Essed, 1991: 41)

The notion of ideologically produced dichotomies brings us to another critical function often attributed to ideology by theorists of social inequality, i.e. the *construction of social categories*. Race, ethnicity and gender categorizations (and occasionally age categorization, as well) are regarded in these theories and studies as *social constructions* constituted in such a way that they give power to some parts of society while locking others into positions of subordination (Butler, 1990; Sollors, 1989; Miles, 1989; Muszynski, 1994, c.f also Berger and Luckmann, 1966). Some constructionist accounts speak of social constructions, others of ideological ones, and still some others use both terms. Essed calls race "an ideological construction with structural expressions (racialized or "ethnicized" structures of power)" (...) – an *ideological construction* and not just a social construction, because the idea of "race" has never existed outside of a framework of group interest" (Essed, 1991: 43). Whether social categories are "social" or "ideological" constructions or both is of little relevance to us at this point. While it is possible to make an operational distinction between the two concepts, in the final analysis, the construction is always social, if only for the fact that ideology in itself is a social product. Notwithstanding this possible distinction, few if any scholars ascribing to the constructionist perspective would question the crucial constitutive role of ideology in constructing social categories.

For one thing, ideology is heavily present in the conceptualizations of social categories and relationships by members of society. Categorization of races, social groups, and genders, assignment of traits to those groups and categories, and theories of origin and nature of social divisions and difference are all central to ideologies of inequality and ideological discourse in particular (Miles, 1982; 1989; Wetherell and Potter, 1992). Several authors have noted certain similarities at the level of ideological construction



between systems of inequality based on race, ethnicity and gender (de Beauvoir, 1989: xxix; Essed, 1988; Miles, 1989: 3; cf. also Brodtkin-Saks, 1989). In all cases, construction seems to rely on dichotomies such as “Us” *versus* “Them,” “Self” *versus* “Other,” or “One” *versus* “Other”, meaning not only difference and opposition but also superiority and inferiority. In such dichotomies the primary term corresponds to subject, while the opposite (“other”) is reduced to object, which leads to denying the “other” personhood, or even humanity. In all cases, ideology also tends to define the essence of social categories. The material of construction consists then of natural predispositions, character traits and cultural traits, (e.g., “feminine nature,” “black soul,” genetic make-up, “Jewish character”), etc. (de Beauvoir, 1989: xxix, 65; Muszynski, 1994).

Theories and models developed for systems of inequality also link developments in patterns of ideas to historical developments in social, political and economic relations. To acknowledge the constructed character of social categories is also to acknowledge their historicity. Exploring historical developments of systems of categorization allows researchers to see how they are defined and constantly redefined in the changing contexts of social, political and economic relations and with changing contexts of discourse used (Laclau and Mouffe, 1990: 109). Thus, feminist writers and social scientists trace the roots of patriarchy in Western civilization and the dichotomy underlying patriarchal consciousness that has led to conceptualize one sex as superior and the other as inferior. They also try to uncover how that ideology has come to bear on the value attached to women’s labour and to its products (de Beauvoir, 1989: xxix; Lerner, 1986; Muszynski, 1994; cf. also Engels, 1942). In a similar way, other historians and social scientists have traced the history and genealogy of racial accounts in science and popular culture, how they interplayed with particular historical developments in economic and political relations and how all that has led to a racial hierarchy (e.g. Banton, 1987). According to Miles (1989), forms of racial differentiation existed in pre-colonial times and social formations, but classifying the “Other” as inferior developed with colonization and imperialism. Thus, developments in racist ideology were linked to global developments in capitalism and colonization that bore on the reference system of “Self and “Other” insofar as they created a demand for new meanings (cf. Campbell, 1988; Miles, 1989).

## **The power of ideology**

The power of ideology is given various degrees of recognition in studies of inequality. Some structural studies have a distinctly pragmatic orientation, which minimizes the power of ideology in structuring social relations, particularly where those relations are narrowed down to “structural” or “institutional discrimination” (Essed, 1991: 37). More power is assigned to ideology in studies focusing on the practices of human agents in instituting inequality. Such is the approach taken by Essed in her studies of everyday racism in the U.S. and the Netherlands (1988; 1991). She argues that racism must be understood as ideology, structure and process, where all three elements combine to produce a system of inequality based on racial and ethnic categorization. She argues that ideology has a powerful role in structuring racism in society as the element of the triad that provides a framework of meaning for social structures and processes (1991: 44). However, she places the main emphasis on process, i.e. on the everyday practices of human agents. She sees process as the condition of existence for both ideologies and structures of inequality:

Racist ideology is a social product which has real effects only through regular patterns of action generating and articulating the ideology in, for instance, governmental policy, hiring patterns, education, service organizations, or the formulation of academic theories. (1991: 22)

Racism is a process because structures and ideologies do not exist outside the everyday practices through which they are created and confirmed. (1991: 44)

In traditional sociological analyses of ideology, social representations are usually conceived as conditioned by group interests, *ergo* determined by social structures. This position seems to have been influenced by the classic Marxist position, where ideology is argued to be directly bound to and determined by the material relations of production. In any case, ideology is thought to play a sort of “after the event” role, providing justification and legitimation for existing material and social relations and social structures, or for changes in those relations (Billig, 1976: 226-261).

More decisive powers are assigned to ideology in recent Marxist perspectives, particularly those following Althusser (1970, 1977; Coward and Ellis, 1977; Hall 1980;

Miles, 1989). Here, ideology appears as a powerful force that can predetermine the practices and structures of inequality. In fact, as Wetherell and Potter note, in new Marxist perspectives, ideology is treated as a “condition of existence” for capitalism and is critical in its reproduction (1992: 26-29). In these new approaches, social and material determination means not so much a cause-and-effect type of relationship as the setting of limits and creating demands for certain patterns of thought and ideas which are necessary (a “condition of existence”) for material relations to reproduce themselves in particular social contexts (Wetherell and Potter, 1992). The new role of ideology is exemplified in what Miles writes with regard to racist ideology in the context of colonial Africa:

Racism was not simply a legitimation of class exploitations (although it was that) but, more important, it constructed the social world in such a way that identified a certain population as a labouring class. The problem that remained was to organize the social world that forced the population into its “natural” class position: in other words, reality had to be brought into line with that representation in order to ensure the material objective of production. (1989: 105)

The notion of ideology as a determinant, rather than something that is determined, goes together with an understanding of ideology as a force that is at once relatively independent of material relations and is “material” itself. In Marxist approaches, following Althusser, ideology acquires an “objective level of social reality” (Larrain, 1980: 12-14). Althusser argues that ideology is material because it exists as systems of representations, images and concepts, and most of all as social structures imposed on people (1977: 33). As such, it is independent of human subjectivity. In fact, the Althusserian tradition asserts that ideology is capable of producing subjects, fixing them into positions in social structures and hierarchies and training them to recognize themselves in predetermined ways (Larrain, 1980: 8; cf. Coward and Ellis, 1977: 67).

This approach to ideology represents a poststructuralist current in the Marxist tradition and is in accord with the constructionist approach. For the poststructuralists concerned with the issues of power and domination, the struggles for material conditions are also “predetermined” in ideological discourse (Muszynski, 1994: 13). Poststructuralist currents of theorizing emphasize the materiality of discourses and their relative independence of any primal anterior social reality. Poststructuralist theorists also argue that social phenomena (i.e. human beings, social groups and processes) are always

constituted in discourse (cf. Malik, 1996). One might say that the particular twist given to ideology is that it is seen as giving meaning and purpose to these constructions. As Muszynski argues:

It is in the ideological realm that reality is cast and broadcast; as in mass media reports where viewers are shown selective images and presented with the labels that make sense to them. For example, they are told that a “riot” is taking place which then makes police intervention appear legitimate. A central factor in the oversimplified versions presented in the mass media are the categorizations that result when groups form themselves in a struggle defined in terms of “us” and “them.” When struggles come to be defined in such terms, the structural inequalities (...) like racism, ethnic discrimination, and sexism, in fact are reproduced because the very nature of the ensuing struggle reaffirms those categories (e.g. race, sex/gender, ethnicity) that allow the inequalities to be perpetuated and reproduced in the first place. (1994: 6).

### **The reality of ideological constructs**

There can be little doubt that the studies that focus on issues of power and domination present a very critical view of social categorization. First, they link social categorization to inequality, domination, oppression, exploitation, etc., i.e. concepts that are negatively charged, since they refer to undesirable situations in society. Many studies take an implicitly or explicitly political or moralistic stance in this respect. Second, these approaches associate historical forms of categorization with illusion and misrepresentation of social reality. Race, ethnicity and gender are often regarded as empty constructions, “collective fictions that are continually reinvented” (Sollors, 1989: xi). Members of majorities are treated explicitly or implicitly as “agents of invention,” engaged in creating ideologies that serve their material interests and privileged position (e.g., Butler, 1990: xi; Hagendoorn, 1993; Jenkins, 1994; Labovitz and Hagedoorn, 1979; Miles, 1982; Rodkin, 1993; Verkuyten *et al.*, 1995; Wetherell and Potter, 1992).

Marxist orthodoxy regards racial and ethnic divisions as a distortion or falsification of social reality, to which it opposes its own truth of class divisions. Class is the only social division that objectively exists and can be objectively defined, argues Marxist orthodoxy, by its relation to the material means of production. Race (as well as ethnicity and gender) is an ideological creation, a false representation serving to cover-up, or displace the reality of class divisions and class conflict (Miles, 1982). The fact that people take such ideological constructions for reality and act as though race exists is attributed to “false

consciousness” – another popular Marxist term, frequently equated with ideology (cf. Billig, 1976: 261-268; Larrain, 1980: 8-16).

This point of view leads in many cases to the dismissal of race and ethnicity and/or putting them in quotation marks. Some theorists argue that social sciences should abandon such concepts as “race” altogether, because by using them “they are guilty of conferring analytic status on what is nothing more than an ideological construction” (Phizacklea, 1984: 200; cf. Miles, 1982). The pure class perspective is of course only one perspective, albeit a very influential one, among approaches to social categorization, and it has its opponents (cf. Gilroy, 1987). In fact, the race *versus* class debate remains at the center of the social studies of inequality (Harris, 1987). What is of interest at this point is the generally critical approach to the issue of social construction, i.e. its treatment as a misrepresentation or a collective fiction. This approach is often present regardless of the author’s explicit stand on the issue of class. For example, Essed dismisses class reductionism out of hand (1991: 39), but while defining race and ethnicity as ideological constructions (1991: 43) she has a tendency to put both terms and their derivatives in quotation marks (e.g. “race,” “ethnicity,” “racial,” “ethnic,” “racialized,” “ethnicized,” etc.), as if doubting or questioning their authenticity. One cannot escape the impression that in such discussions, the constructed character of social forms is equated with emptiness and falsehood.

At stake is more than the question of authenticity of social constructs. What is implied is a distinction between representation and reality and an epistemological distinction between ideological and non-ideological forms. Ideology is generally associated with distortion of reality. Another strong influence of Marxist traditions is evident here. As Marx and Engels argue in their critique of German ideology, “In all ideology men and their circumstances appear upside-down” (1970: 47). Larrain notes that the negative aspect of ideology is always present in Marx’s writings and is consistently associated with misrepresentation, distortion, error of perception or other forms of negative relationship to material reality, such as concealment, denial, misunderstanding, displacement or dilution (1980: 17). Marx also opposes ideology to what he regards as

“real, positive science,” a distinction suggesting that the latter represents for him a non-ideological point of view (Marx and Engels, 1970: 48). Marxist perspectives have developed this distinction into a strong opposition between ideology and science (Larrain, *ibid.*; Althusser, 1977; Miles, 1989). In this opposition, science is (in principle) a neutral, non-interested form of knowledge, capable of providing an accurate representation of facts, while ideology is a non-neutral, “interest-laden” form – a misrepresentations of facts. Needless to say, many non-Marxist perspectives in social science also embrace this point of view.

### **Theories of social inequality and the study of social discourse**

A possible line of inquiry emerging from my broad survey of theories of inequality would take the student of ethnic and racial categorization through the study of social structures (structures of power and inequality), social processes (practices of categorization) and ideology (social representations). In general, these theories locate categorization firmly within social reality and link it to the material conditions of life. The latter present a tangible reason for social conflict, certainly more tangible than “natural” predispositions or psychological drives offered by social psychological theories. The link to material conditions and the emphasis on historicity imply a vision of society dynamic enough to explain changes in social relations and social representations that take place over time and geographical space.

The attribution of a macro-sociological bias to power and domination theories, and particularly to structural studies, has already been acknowledged. One problem that arises is too much emphasis on the macro-structural aspects of social categorization at the neglect of micro inequalities and practices that (re)produce the system (Essed, 1991: 7, 36-39; Li, 1994: 124-125). One way of overcoming this shortcoming has been to study the everyday processes of categorization that constitute social structures. However, it has also been argued that structural theories do not generally address the issue of how people construct the images of social “others,” and how far these constructions reflect the actual group interests of social agents (Hagendoorn, 1993, Zong, 1994). They also tend to go to the other extreme on the individual-social continuum, leaving the psychological aspects

of categorization virtually unexplored or banned as too “mentalistic” (van Dijk, 1988: 132). Studies of social processes partly explain how ideological constructs are formed in everyday practice, but they offer only a partial solution to the problem, insofar as they do not handle the issue of conceptualization. Some researchers have proposed combining a structural approach with social psychological theories, particularly social cognition and/or social identity perspectives, arguing that the latter will cover the micro-sociological “void” (c.f. Hagendoorn, 1993; Rodkin, 1993; Zong, 1994). Occasionally, traditional concepts of social psychology (i.e. “stereotypes”, “cognitive processes”, “prejudicial attitudes”, etc.) are used to explain categorizing practices and popular support for structural arrangements in society.

While such borrowings may offer an easy way out of a serious analytical problem, their explanatory validity is questionable when applied to structuralist frameworks. There are fundamental differences between the traditional social psychological and structuralist perspectives. Any systematic incorporation of the two can only take place at the price of compromising the basic tenets of one or another. Otherwise, the resulting model will lack internal coherence. Therefore, any application of social psychological concepts to structural studies (or *vice versa*) can only be very superficial and has to ignore the theoretical frameworks standing behind those concepts, which in effect compromises the validity of the emerging explanations.

Another way to handle the problem of conceptualization and micro-processes is offered by a discourse-based approach to social categorization. Discourse analysts concerned with wider social issues see language as an essential dimension of power in society and concentrate on the ways it contributes to the production and reproduction of the social order and structures of inequality (cf. Condor, 1988; van Dijk, 1984; 1988; 1991; 1993; Fowler and Kress, 1979; Litton and Potter, 1985; Potter and Wetherell, 1987; 1992; Verkuyten *et al.* 1995; Trew, 1979a; 1979b; Wetherell and Potter, 1988; 1992; see also Marshall and Wetherell, 1989). So far, discourse studies have largely been ignored by social sciences dealing with the issues of ethnicity and race. One reason for this omission is perhaps the formal and informal division of labour and the ever-growing specialization

in the sciences. Another is the fact that, for a long time, language was treated as only a medium of communication, reflexive and basically neutral, through which social scientists tried to reach more tangible “objective” reality (Potter and Wetherell, 1987). In contrast, discourse analysts argue that language not only reflects or represents social reality but also makes things happen and thus constitutes that reality (cf. Austin, 1975). Drawing on developments in semiotics, speech act theory and ethnomethodology, they see discourse as a form of social practice and texts as *actively* involved in the construction of subjects, objects, events and categories (Litton and Potter, 1985; Potter and Wetherell, 1987; Verkuyten *et al.* 1995; Wetherell and Potter, 1992).

According to Wetherell and Potter (1992; Potter and Wetherell, 1987; 1988), categories are constructed in discourse. Through discourse they are also instituted in social reality. Many practices of categorization are undeniably discursive in character and most of them are somehow embedded in discourse. It is hard to imagine circumstances under which a formulation of a category – a kind of defining process described by Jenkins (*op. cit.*) – does not involve discourse, at least to some extent. The transactional capacity of discourse, what Jenkins (1991) calls “acting upon the object,” is not difficult to establish, either. An obvious discursive “acting upon the object” is, for example, declaring someone “competent” or “incompetent,” “deviant” or “criminal,” “eligible” or “ineligible,” “colored” or “colorblind,” etc. Depending on the power and authority of the categorizing agents, such acts have profound social, political and economic consequences (cf. Austin, 1975; Potter and Wetherell, 1987: 15-31). Various types of official classification condition the existence of entire populations (see e.g. Frideres, 1988: 25-38). Name-calling in ordinary communication, ethnic jokes and other types of verbal abuse are also likely to have an effect upon the victim’s experience. As with all categorizing practices, issues of power and control are at the heart of the matter. These are, of course, only the more crude and basic examples of discursive practices of categorization. Social categories are constituted in various forms of discourse, through a variety of channels and, as demonstrated in Part Two of this study, the rhetorical strategies involved in such practices are often very subtle.



Discourse studies link the discursive practices of categorization to ideology. The more systematic efforts in this respect situate the study of discourse within the study of ideology and explore how ideologies of ethnic, racial and gender inequality are articulated in various forms of discourse (cf. Billig, 1976; 1982; 1985; 1988; Potter and Wetherell, 1988; Wetherell and Potter, 1992). One major area of inquiry is media discourse (see e.g. van Dijk, 1987; 1991). As Jenkins notes, it is particularly critical to recognize the impact of media language on constituting social reality in public opinion and on framing legislative and administrative actions with regard to social categories of people (Jenkins, 1991: 214; c.f. Dick, 1985; Jeffers and Perloff, 1986; Ungerleider, 1991). The language of elites, particularly politicians and various governing and administrative bodies, but also academics, is another critical area of inquiry (c.f. Condor; 1988; Litton and Potter, 1985; Wetherell and Potter, 1992). The third major area concerns various forms of everyday talk, which is the most common form of discourse and the traditional domain of common sense (c.f. Potter and Wetherell, 1988; Wetherell and Potter, 1992; Verkuyten *et al.* 1995). In the following chapters some of the analytic tools that discourse studies have to offer for the study of social categorization both at the macro- and micro-levels of ideological construction will be demonstrated. Some other ways social theory can profit from discourse analysis will also be discussed.

Discourse studies and power and domination theories complement each other. For their part, social theories of inequality offer a “convenient” line of inquiry for discourse studies concerned with wider social issues. When texts and talk are approached as the discourse of power, the task of the researcher is to explore them for signs of ideology, to examine the relationship between ideas and social, political and material interests of the groups involved and to demonstrate how discursive practices contribute to shaping power structures in society. The notion of “discursive construction” fits well with the notion of “social construction of reality.” The idea of “historical specificity” of social structures, together with the flexibility and fluidity of ideological constructions help resolve the problem of discursive variation and explain the observed variability of categorical expressions – the eternal problem of studies concerned with ethnic and racial categorization.

### **Issues to be resolved**

Most of the basic contentions of the theories discussed in this chapter will be retained in my study. However, there are also a number of positions here that must be qualified before they can be utilized in the analytical framework that I wish to develop. First, it is necessary to take a stand on the epistemological distinction between ideological and non-ideological forms. There are dangerous pitfalls along the path of contrasting science and ideology, or of claiming a monopoly on truth for one form of knowledge over and against others. That should be obvious for anyone taking a historical approach to ideas and social versions of reality.

This is related to the question of the reality of social constructs. Should they be treated as “empty constructions” without any reality? Such an approach is actually difficult to reconcile with the whole concept of the social construction of reality and with treating ideology as material and constitutive of social conditions. It also denies the authenticity of the social experience of people who live that reality, whether it has been imposed on them, or they have chosen it themselves.

Then, there is the question of minorities and their relationship to ideological representations. Studies of power and domination tend to subsume all aspects of categorization under the economic exploitation of minorities by dominant groups, often ignoring or neglecting the fact that minorities categorize, too. Not only do minorities use ethnic and racial constructions to define their own existence, but they also categorize other minorities and majorities as well (e.g., Meintel, 1989; Kurokawa-Maykovich, 1979; Lewis, 1979). Where the material benefits to the agents are not obvious, establishing a straightforward causal correlation between the material variables and the practices of categorization can be problematic. Does the power and domination outlook have enough scope and flexibility to fully explain the issue of minority agency? To achieve that may require a more comprehensive understanding of social categorization, beyond material and other benefits to the dominant group.

Ultimately, the issue is whether all social constructions are ideological, or whether all social constructions should be studied as ideological. This question is particularly relevant to studies of ethnic and racial discourse, where all representations have so far been approached in such a way. Such exclusive focus on ideological forms can result in limited, if not “distorted” explanations of reality, as it leaves out the study of cultural forms as non-ideological creations. Resolving these issues is the subject of the following chapter, where the analytical framework for this study will be presented.

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## **Minority discourse, ideology and the practices of reality construction**

In previous chapters of this study, the major theoretical approaches to social categorization were introduced and their applicability for the study of social discourse was discussed. This chapter constitutes a more decisive step towards taking an alternative theoretical stand and choosing a line of inquiry that will be followed in Part II of this study.

The objective here is to develop an approach to studying minority participation in social processes. Social studies in general offer a largely one-dimensional picture of the role of minorities in social processes and their relationship with society at large. No matter which social theory is used, unless the subject is explicitly that of resistance to domination and oppression, minorities are usually placed at the receiving end, as more or less helpless objects, rather than subjects of social processes. I believe this to be a limited approach, which does not do justice to the reality of social life and which may, despite all good intentions, contribute to an “ideological distortion.” An overall stress on subordination and powerlessness in the absence of other characteristics conveys a message of objectification and, in a way, denies full “personhood” to the people in question. Ironically, this same effect has been argued by critical social studies with regard to the treatment of minorities in mass media (Dick, 1985; Ungerleider, 1991; Van Dijk, 1984). There is a need for a more balanced approach and it is imperative to begin to recognize minorities as subjects and not merely objects of social processes.

With regard to social categorization and social discourse in general, most of the basic assumptions of the constructionist approach and the power and domination perspectives are accepted here, as they were introduced in the previous chapter of this study. Reduced to general statements, the approach adopted is based on the following premises:

1. Social reality, including groups, categories and other divisions of people is socially constructed.
2. Social discourse plays a critical – not only reflective but also constitutive – role in the construction of reality.
3. All discursive accounts involving social categories of people are potentially ideological accounts.

Accordingly, the study in Part II will consist of an analysis of discursive processes of construction and a search for the ideological aspects of the emerging constructs. However, for reasons that will become apparent, this analysis strives to go beyond the analysis of ideology. One of the purposes of this chapter is to advance the following:

4. The ideological character of discursive (and other social) constructions does not necessarily explain the reasons for the existence and persistence of such constructions, nor does it exhaust the range of possible functions of those constructions.

While accepting that ideology is a pervasive aspect of social discourse, I shall suggest that this is only one of its dimensions and that, even in cases so obviously ideological as ethnic and racial categorization, attention should be paid to other functions as well. In other words, I wish to argue that the same discursive constructs can carry both ideological and non-ideological functions and that a comprehensive approach may be necessary to study either of these aspects. Paradoxical as it sounds, reaching beyond ideology and studying different functions of the same forms may be the key to a better understanding of how ideology works and its effects on society. For my study in particular, it may be the key to answering the question of why minority groups perpetuate certain forms of ideological discourse that function, oftentimes clearly against their own interests.

In order to advance these arguments, close attention must be paid to the concept of ideological construction and the distinction between the ideological and non-ideological

aspects of social constructs. A relatively precise definition of ideology is also needed. Through a chain of interconnected arguments, the nature of ideology will be probed. I will argue that ideology can be better understood when defined as a function rather than a form of social phenomena. Such an approach should open a way to study social forms (including ideological forms) from different angles. The same social constructs can be studied for both ideological and non-ideological functions. Functions are not necessarily mutually exclusive, the way ideological and non-ideological forms are often assumed to be. Different functions can, and often do coexist in social forms. Furthermore, non-ideological functions can actually be vital for the existence, pervasiveness and effectiveness of ideological forms. All this should help to understand how non-ideological practices can result in ideological effects, as well as how ideological practices (or what is recognized as such) can also have non-ideological effects. Ostensibly, the understanding of those mechanisms is crucial, if the issues of agency and participation in ideological processes are to be addressed.

### **Ideology and the problem of participation**

The issue of human agency and participation in social processes is undoubtedly one of the key issues of social science, regardless of discipline and area of study. It is not different when it comes to racial and ethnic discourse. Any student of such discourse will ultimately be faced with the question: why do people produce and reproduce it?

Assuming that ethnic and racial discourse is a form of ideology, and as such is linked to material struggles in society, one possible way to answer the question would be to explore the links between particular accounts and the material interests of the group(s) to which the speakers belong. Thus, Wetherell and Potter explain the racial discourse produced by the White majority in New Zealand (1988; 1992; cf. Miles, 1982; 1989) as an ideological practice that serves to institute and legitimize that group's advantage over racial minorities. Verkuyten *et al.* (1995) and Van Dijk (1988a; 1988b; 1993) approach ethnic and racial discourse in the Netherlands and the U.S. in a similar way. Explaining such discourse as a factor of material interests is generally argued or implied in studies that concentrate on majorities as the agents of domination. This approach is based on two

powerful propositions that social science has inherited from Marx. First, a person's world-view is determined by their social being. Second, ideology always serves the interests of the dominant sector of society. Needless to say, intentionality is not considered to be a decisive factor, because it is widely recognized in social studies today that intention or any form of self-conscious motivation are not necessary conditions for practices of racial or ethnic categorization to occur.

However, making a straightforward correlation between ideological discourse and the material or other social interests of the speakers becomes hard to sustain where the benefits to the latter are less than evident. The case in question is, of course, that of minority discourse. In her studies of racism, Essed notes:

Apart from factors structuring the impact of racism and the question of responsibility, it is also necessary to make a clear distinction between the structural beneficiaries of racism and the actual agents of racism in everyday situations. (1991: 43)

She goes on to note that, although it is always the dominant group that structurally benefits from racism, the actual agents often come from the victimized category itself. Indeed, there is evidence that minorities are not immune to racist and ethnic ideologies and their members often engage in racist and "ethnicist" practices in a manner not different from the majorities (cf. Kurokawa-Maykovich, 1979; Meintel, 1989; Ginsberg, 1981).

The case of ideological discourse produced by a minority poses a specific problem. A subordinate group that perpetuates certain ideological discourse (e.g. racist or "ethnicist" discourse) may be acting against its own interests, while the only people who profit from such practice are the members of the dominant group. This renders my initial question more specific: Why do people participate in constructions of reality that actually work against them?

The answer to this question brings us back to yet another of Marx's assertions: the ruling ideas in any age are the ideas of the ruling class. In other words, the views and actions of the subordinate groups might be determined by the ideas of the dominant group that

prevail in society at a given point in time. However, in order to adopt such an explanation, a clear conception of the nature of ideology, its relationship to ideas and the mechanisms of its reproduction is necessary. What are the mechanisms through which ideas determine human actions? How is it possible that certain ideas “rule” so much that people reproduce them even against their own interests? Is ideology to be equated with the “ruling ideas”? This would lead, among other things, to the conclusion that people reproduce ideology because their views and actions are determined by... ideology. Such a circular explanation might be inevitable, but the mechanisms of action and reproduction of ideology would still need to be determined. What does lie in the nature of ideology that allows it to hold such a sway over people?

### **On truth and falsity of ideological forms**

Some authors explain collective participation in ideological processes by reference to “false consciousness” on the part of the agents. This point of view forms part of the perspective that denies any objective reality to ideological constructions. Accordingly, ideology imposes collective fictions to cover up the objective reality of class divisions and exploitation. In case of ethnic and racial categorization, it is the fiction of racial and ethnic divisions in society (see e.g. Lukács, 1971; Miles, 1989; Phizacklea, 1984; cf. Billig, 1976: 261-268).

The concept of “false consciousness” implies that people who take ethnic and racial categorization for reality are victims of collective “delusion.” This includes both minorities and the members of the dominant sector of society from whom ideology conceals the objective reality of social structure. For the latter however, ideology is a false consciousness only in a limited sense, not as far as their own interests are concerned (these are actually served by ideology) but rather in regard to the interests of the subordinate category (Billig, 1976: 265). Minorities, on the other hand, are the victims of ideology, so in their case a full sense of “false consciousness” applies. They perpetuate ideas that harm their own interests because they are unable to see their own “true” position in society (see e.g. Miles, 1982; Phizacklea, 1984).



Undoubtedly, the concept of “false consciousness” provides a convenient explanation for collective participation in ideological processes. There is a common sense adequacy in the notion that people may unwittingly take certain versions of reality for truth and reproduce them. However, the concept of ideology as “false consciousness” is problematic insofar as it is synonymous with illusion and implies fictitiousness of ideological forms. It can be argued that any notion of falsity of ideological constructs contradicts the very concept of social construction. If ethnicity and race are ideological forms, so must be ethnic and racial patterns of self-identification, forms of association, institutions and, of course, ethnic and racial discourse. All these are socially constructed and “real” to human experience. Assuming that existence and authenticity of objects, events and experiences can be established at all, there is no reason to assume that social constructs are inauthentic just because they are man’s creations, or even because they happen to be ideological. On the contrary, it should be safe to contend that if anything, it is human practice – the activity of construction – that brings social forms into existence.

The concept of “false consciousness” is derived from Marx’s original proposition that ideology works by creating forms that conceal certain aspects of social structure and social relations from people. However, while it is conceivable that some ideological forms are fictitious, it is equally conceivable that concealment can also take place through an imposition of forms that are objective and real, or that eventually become such. Therefore, Marxist theorists who assert the materiality of ideology criticize the concept of “false consciousness.” For Althusser and his followers, ideology is neither false nor a form of consciousness. It is real and material because it is inscribed in social practices and expressed in objective social forms, such as, for example, the State apparatus, schools, mass media and other social institutions (Althusser, 1977; Hirst, 1977: 27-28). As Hirst argues, ideology has practical and visible effects on society, and as such it cannot be “false” (Hirst, 1977: 38).

One could argue against Hirst that practical and visible effects can and often do arise from forms of fiction. When dealing with social phenomena, the objective reality of the effect does not preclude the fictitiousness of the cause. Nevertheless, it is hard to deny the

authenticity of many ideological constructions. Paul Gilroy (1982; 1987) argues this, while focusing on the practical effects for the victims of ideology. In his studies of racism in Great Britain, he sees race as an important cultural and political category – a locus of self-identification as well as an organizing principle for the Black community. Without denying the reality of class divisions, Gilroy opposes class reductionism associated with the “false consciousness” perspective because it denies the objective reality of Black political organization. He argues that whatever is said about the authenticity of race as a biological category, it is hard to deny the authenticity of Black experience of race, Black political organizations and their resistance to racism.

Once the principle of the social construction of reality is accepted, the fact that certain constructs may have been derived from imaginary forms cannot serve to deny their reality. Whatever the original ontological status of ideological constructions, at least some of them have been objectified through social practice and rooted in social reality. In terms of the sociology of knowledge, the objectivity that marks the social world in human experience acquires an ontological status through the human activity that produced it (Berger and Luckmann, 1966: 57). Incidentally, this is also in accordance with Marx’s view on the notion of truth, as expressed in his early writings, where he argues that it is through practical activity that man demonstrates the truth of his thought (Billig, 1976: 268).

When it comes to social discourse, “false consciousness” translates into misrepresentation of social reality, which in the first place implies a distinction between representation and the reality to which this representation would relate. According to Potter and Wetherell (1987:180-182; Wetherell and Potter; 1992) such a distinction is hardly tenable as far as discourse analysis is concerned. The two discourse analysts argue that discourse is thoroughly constitutive of social reality, meaning that events, phenomena, experiences, etc. are constituted in discourse. Therefore, whatever knowledge about them comes to us, it is always in a form of representation:

Our accounts of objects always construct (...) objects in certain ways and this

construction is inescapable. Some versions of reality may be infinitely preferable to others, and should be argued for and pushed forward whenever possible, but in our view, there is no “versionless” reality. (Wetherell and Potter, 1992: 62)

Consequently, approaching ideological discourse as a form of misrepresentation does not make much sense to Wetherell and Potter, since any formulation of reality would have to be framed in some form of discourse. By extension, the distinction between “falsity” and “truth,” at least when it comes to the study of discourse, cannot be relied upon. Instead of questioning the veracity of facts, the two discourse analysts propose to look at the ways facts become constituted and established as “truths,” and what consequences these constitutions might accrue (1992: 65-69).

Straddling the issue of representation and reality, or truth and falsity of social representations is the problem of distinction between the ideological and non-ideological formulations of reality. A typical example is the distinction between science and ideology (Larrain, 1980: 6). In principle at least, science is contrasted with and preferred to ideology as a form of knowledge that is capable of providing an undistorted (albeit not always perfect) and objective version of reality. Critical social science, and Marxist perspectives in particular, are more demanding in this respect and further distinguish between ideological and non-ideological science. For instance, Robert Miles’ analyses of racism (1982; 1989) rely on the opposition between non-ideological and ideological science to distinguish between what he regards as the true and false versions of reality. Taking a historical approach to racism (1989), Miles distinguishes between nineteenth-century biological theories of race and modern population genetics, regarding the first as an expression of ideology while viewing the second as the “real” science that accurately describes the reality of biological differences between human populations. For Miles, as for some other social scientists (and social activists as well), developments in modern genetics provide an important proof that racial theories were forms of delusion or misrepresentation of reality.

Althusser (1977) also makes a distinction between ideological and non-ideological forms of knowledge, although he does so on different grounds. He assumes that science can, in

principle, reach beyond ideology but that class interests may distort scientific conceptions, leading to misrepresentation. He therefore distinguishes between genuine science and the science distorted by class interests (*ergo*, ideological).

For Wetherell and Potter, strong distinctions between ideological and non-ideological forms of knowledge are doomed to fail. They see all systems of knowledge, including the sciences, as socially constructed forms. These forms may differ from each other according to their specific canon, institutional settings (i.e. science *versus* common sense knowledge) and standard procedures of gathering and processing data, but they are all subject to social determinants characteristic of the historical context in which they function. The fact that there have been many different scientific formulations of reality throughout history, some of which are clearly in conflict with each other, cannot be ignored. Various works in the sociology of knowledge contend that even in the natural sciences, establishing truth is as much a social process as it is a matter of strict scientific procedure (cf. Barnes and Bloor, 1982; Berger and Luckman, 1966; 1982; Gilbert and Mulkay, 1984; Kuhn, 1970). Consequently, Wetherell and Potter argue that, rather than seeing them as a domain of truth, sciences should be considered as “fields of discursive struggle” in which “plausibility has to be fought for and actively established” (1992: 66).

Anthropology offers a good example of the predicament of modern epistemologies. Anthropologists have for a long time struggled to reconcile the ideal of “hard” science with an essentially interpretative approach that forms the basis of the ethnographic practice (Bloch, 1995). The ideal of “hard” science derived from natural sciences is, of course, to eliminate any possible human influence from the procedure. “Participant observation,” on the other hand, connotes the inseparability of knowledge from the ethnographer. While there have been repeated efforts to attain the ideal of hard science, the first-hand experience and ethnographic interpretation still remain the essential *modus operandi* in anthropology (at least in social anthropology). In general, anthropology is also somewhat reluctant to use objectifying instruments, quantifying formulas and any such methods that would make it the “natural science of society” (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1992: 8). Comaroff and Comaroff argue that this may actually be the major

strength of ethnography, which refuses to fall into the trap of “illusory objectivity” (ibid.) For, despite the realist idiom of ethnography, most ethnographers accept that their craft is historically contingent and culturally configured or, in other words, socially influenced.

This does not mean, of course, that any social influence should be equated with ideological contamination. However, it must be acknowledged that, as a social practice, science is not immune to such penetration. Arguably, many scientific formulations of reality have come to be seen, at one time or another, as serving the cause of racism and other forms of oppression. Accusations that certain theories and other formulations of reality have served ideological functions are the common stock of critical social science today. They cause occasional stirs in anthropological and sociological circles (cf. D’Andrade, 1995). A case in point is the debate of Sahlins *versus* Obeyesekere over their interpretations of captain Cook’s death in Hawaii. Ironic as it may sound, Marx’s deliberations on Jewry and Judaism (see e.g. Marx, 1975a; 1975b), when judged today by even the mildest critical standards, constitute a blatant case of anti-Semitic discourse – perfectly matching the Nazi propaganda produced a century later. Generally ignored, as it is embarrassing to his modern followers, Marx’s views on “the Jewish Question” formed an integral part of his social theory. They were also part of a serious debate that occupied intellectual circles in the nineteenth century and ended up in solidifying the modern anti-Semitic doctrine for the coming generations (cf. Billig, 1982; Dannhauser, 1981). As Gramsci accurately notes, every major intellectual current leaves behind a “sedimentation of ‘common sense’” that bears witness to its historical effectiveness (1971: 326).

All this is not to say that science is not possible, or that science cannot study and eventually contribute to the undermining of ideology (cf. Larrain, 1980). However, this clearly cannot be done by checking ideological accounts against scientific accounts of reality, however accurate and incontestable the latter claim to be. Such a distinction is not only missing the point, but is also not likely to teach us anything about the nature of ideological representations. It could also lead to a form of distortion, whereby certain versions of reality are preferred over others and excluded from critical investigation.

Mannheim argues this much against Marxism itself. He points out that Marxism, which claims to have the monopoly on “truth” about society, has a tendency to criticize all other points of view as ideological while refusing to undergo the same critique itself (1972: 66).

Just as truth (or what is recognized as truth) is not the monopoly of science, error and falsity are not necessarily properties of ideology. Nor would ideology necessarily suffer from exposure to scientific or otherwise established truths. As it happens, even everyday ideological discourse can actually draw on science and its “truths” to boost its power and effectiveness. One needs only to look at the range of argumentative resources that are mobilized in the discourse of politicians, journalists and ordinary people to bolster the causes of racism, sexism, and “ethnicism.” These resources may include lies and other forms of fiction, but they may just as well include facts and pieces of information that come from scientific findings. Among them can be found such seemingly “neutral” and uncontested facts as statistical data (e.g. statistics on poverty or unemployment rates) or numerical measurements (e.g. measurements of brain size for different sexes or races, results of IQ tests, etc.) (Wetherell and Potter, 1992). What is more, as Billig (1978; 1985; 1988) notes, the flexibility and variability of ideological discourse extend beyond its factual content, meaning that this discourse can also incorporate patterns of argumentation and nomenclature that are characteristic of both the natural and social sciences.

### **Redefining ideology: from forms and contents to functions**

The problem of the distinction between science and ideology or ideological and non-ideological forms of knowledge and discourse forces a reexamination of the concept of ideology itself and the way in which it should be approached. Approaching ideology as “false consciousness” or as any other form of misrepresentation or “mis-recognition” becomes all the more problematic with the realization that there is no reality that is incontestably “true” or non-ideological.

Actually, the main problem lies in the overwhelming variation, flexibility and pervasiveness of ideological expressions that seem to “pop up” in the most unexpected forms and places. This problem may in itself hold the key to the effectiveness of ideology in society, and therefore also serve as a partial answer to our question of agency and collective participation. If science has problems with separating ideology from other forms of knowledge or discourse and cannot even guard itself against “ideological penetration” (despite safeguards and aspirations of disinterestedness), how can one expect members of the general public to succeed in this respect?

Another consequence of this predicament is that defining ideology on the basis of form or content has little analytic utility. It actually means defining the propositional claims of ideology in an *a priori* fashion, a procedure that is highly unreliable and that leads to some predictable cul-de-sacs, given the variability of ideological forms. Ideological content can be at times paradoxically chauvinistic and democratic, discriminatory and egalitarian, arguably factual and (also arguably) fictitious. Ideological effects can be identified in various forms of discourse and systems of knowledge: science, religion, politics, journalism, everyday common sense, etc. They may also be found in our own analyses (for examples of this variability, see, Wetherell and Potter, 1988; 1992).

If ideology cannot be distinguished in terms of a distinctive content or form, or as a separate knowledge system, what distinguishable features does it have? How can one grasp and explain its elusive nature? For Wetherell and Potter, the problem is mainly epistemological. Given all the variability and flexibility of ideology, how can it be studied and retained as an analytical tool for the study of social discourse? This is the question they attempt to answer in their study of racist discourse in New Zealand (1992). They propose a “shift from the study of ideology *per se* to the study of ideological practice and ideological outcomes” (ibid.: 70). Accordingly, they define racist discourse (in the context of New Zealand) in the following way:

Racist discourse, in our view, should be seen as discourse (of whatever content) which has the effect of establishing, sustaining and reinforcing oppressive power relations between those defined, in the New Zealand case, as the Maori and those defined as Pakeha. (...) Racist discourse

is discourse which has the effect of categorizing, allocating and discriminating between certain groups (...). [I]t is discourse which justifies, sustains and legitimates those practices which maintain the power and dominance of Pakeha New Zealanders. (1992: 70)

The main advantage of the authors' approach is that the potential pitfalls caused by the variability of ideological expressions can be avoided. Indeed, their approach accounts for such variability. The changes of form and content, the twists and turns of ideological discourse can be explained as a part of "ideological practice" itself. Whatever the form or content of discourse, it can be studied for ideological effects and, if these emerge, it can be identified as an ideological practice.

This approach is adopted here in order to focus on the study of ideological practice and ideological outcomes of discourse. However, it is also important to realize that while offering a way to avoid certain epistemological problems, this approach does not provide an explicit answer to the ontological question about the nature of ideology. While defining the "ideological," Wetherell and Potter stop short of defining ideology itself. This results in a somewhat limited approach that brings up further ontological questions. Above all, framing ideological discourse as a "practice" implies a definite agent, which brings us back to the question of agency. Likewise, the notion of "effects" implies "causes," which also call for an explanation. In either case, the answer lies in the nature of being of ideology.

If Wetherell and Potter's approach is to be followed, rather than defining ideology the question of what makes discourse (or any other social practice) "ideological" should be addressed. Wetherell and Potter speak about specific "practices," "effects," and "outcomes" but at the bottom of things lies a specific function that makes social forms serve the interests of the dominant sector of society. Marx argued the existence of this function a long time ago. However, since his time, the usual view of ideology has been that of a metaphysical entity – a body of ideas, a form of knowledge, a form of practice, form of discourse, etc. – that carries such a function. I propose to view ideology as the function itself. Instead of being a social form that carries specific functions, it should be viewed as a specific function of social forms. The term "function" as used here refers to



something akin to an action, a property, a quality, or a correspondence (as in mathematical correspondence) that applies to social phenomena in a specific way. When ideology is a function of social practice, it affects the construction of certain aspects of social reality, such as the relations of production.

In other words, I propose a distinction between ideology as a function and ideological forms that carry that function. When it comes to everyday discourse, versions of reality can be constructed out of content coming from various sources: science, political discourse, mass media, forms of common-sense, etc. Ideology is that particular function of discursive constructs that makes them serve the interests of the dominant part of society. It should not be equated with the constructs themselves, though, nor with their content. The constructs can at best be judged as “ideological” if they display the said function at the moment of passing judgment.

Viewing ideology as a function rather than as a form, or as a “property” rather than as a “body,” does not contradict the main propositions of Marx’s theory. They can still be used to analyze and explain social forms. It may actually reflect what Marx had in mind when he conceptualized ideology in the first place. Trying to establish a strict interpretation of Marx’s original propositions, Larrain (1980) argues that despite certain ambiguities in his texts, Marx does not identify ideology with ideas or forms (as so many of his followers have done). On the contrary, argues Larrain, Marx distinguishes between ideas or forms of consciousness that are ideological and others that are not. Together, ideological and non-ideological forms constitute the superstructure of ideas in society. It is important to note that the distinction applies to “ruling ideas” and the “ideas of the ruling classes” as well: “In the superstructure of ideas of society, the ruling ideas are the ideas of the ruling classes, but this does not make all of them ideological” (ibid.: 10). What makes ideas “ideological” in Marx’s view is a “particular mode of being” that puts them at the service of the ruling classes.

The distinction between ideology as a function and ideological forms (i.e. forms that function to the effect of forwarding certain particular interests) should clarify much of the

confusion that exists in studies of ideology. The notion of the “materiality” of ideology asserted by Althusser and his followers becomes more plausible and comprehensible when applied to ideological forms such as ideological discourse, ideological institutions, ideological practice, etc. The concept of ideology as a function also solves the perennial problem of distinguishing between science and ideology. The two can be distinguished from each other, but not as two forms of knowledge – the way science can be distinguished from common sense – but rather as two different and hardly comparable phenomena. While science is a form of knowledge, a form of discourse, a form of social practice, and arguably other kinds of form as well (e.g., a social institution), ideology is a function of knowledge, a function of discourse, a function of social practice, or in more general terms, a function of ideas. It can be attached to and affect different forms without being identical to any of them.

Even more important for my investigations, defining ideology as a function of social forms allows the variability and pervasiveness of ideological expressions in society to be accounted for. Why it is so hard to maintain a distinction between ideological and non-ideological forms becomes more understandable. As a function, ideology has the potential to affect any social form and content, regardless of its origin and of its other functions, regardless of the intention of the actors, and even regardless of whether the form itself is “true” or “false” (no matter the way or the criteria by which veracity is established). It becomes more obvious how facts and socially established “truths” can be found in ideological arguments side by side with fiction, or as some might argue, with deceptions or delusions. The predicament of science in its efforts to keep clear of “ideological penetration,” (i.e. why, despite all efforts and good intentions, certain scientific formulations of reality end up being accused of perpetuating “ideology”) becomes clear.

### **Ideology and other functions of social practices**

If ideology is separated from ideas and the concept of ideology as a function of ideas is accepted, a number of implications emerge regarding the issue of agency in the construction of ideological forms. It then becomes evident how some social practices

serve the interests of the ruling sectors of society irrespective of the motives and interests (conscious or unconscious, real or perceived) of the actors and no matter whether the latter are the beneficiaries or the victims of these practices.

In acknowledging that social forms are separate from ideology, it becomes easier to conceive that some initially non-ideological forms may in certain contexts become ideological. In the same vein, it is also possible that a form that has been recognized as “ideological” may lose its defining function and cease to be so:

Ideological distortion is not an immanent attribute of a theory or form of consciousness, nor is it confined to the given situation in which it emerged. (Larrain, 1980: 16)

Consequently, ideology as a function can be separated from the origin and causes of social phenomena. There is no reason to assume that ideology in itself lies at the root of social forms and that it is their cause or their condition of existence. Ideology can be a condition of existence for capitalism, or for social inequality, but not necessarily for social forms through which that inequality is articulated at a given point in time. Keeping in mind, of course, that some social constructs can and do result from ideological practices, it is nevertheless conceivable that social forms, such as ethnic and racial categorization, can be produced and reproduced independently of the fact that they serve (or can potentially serve) the interests of the ruling classes, or any social interests for that matter (cf. Elster, 1989).

The ideological character of social forms is determined by their reference to present social practice, to concrete developments in social relations at the moment and place of passing judgment (Larrain, 1980: 16). Who exactly will profit from these forms (and at whose expense) also depends on the particular context. Historically speaking, human groups have been engaged for centuries in what is regarded today as forms of ethnic and racial categorization, but not always in contexts of domination and submission. For example, literary and artistic records from antiquity and the Middle Ages show that people in Europe (and Asia as well) had been categorizing people in other parts of the world long before they found themselves in a position to dominate them (see, e.g.

Gagnon, 1975; Robe, 1972; Wittkower, 1977). The ruling classes of Europe might have profited in some ways from the descriptions and images of “dog-faced people,” “cannibals,” “black souls” and other representations of so-called “oriental races,” but it was only in the context of colonialism that their material interests could begin to be served at the expense of those “races” (cf. Campbell, 1988).

By conceiving ideology as a function, one can also speak of forms that are ideological but not exclusively so. Traditionally, ideological and non-ideological forms have been assumed to be mutually exclusive, particularly when ideology is defined by its content. Accordingly, one might assume that a piece of discourse or a point of view is either ideological or not, depending on whether it contains certain ideas, doctrines, etc., or not. With the conception of ideology as a function, such distinctions become less relevant. Whether they are ideological or not, different functions can coexist within discursive forms. Discourse is ideological when it serves the interests of dominant groups in society. But it does not mean that the same piece of discourse has to be exclusively ideological – that it does not carry other functions as well. It is indeed common that discursive accounts have numerous functions that are neither contradictory nor mutually exclusive (Wetherell and Potter, 1987; 1992). Furthermore, functions not only coexist in discourse, but can also reinforce each other, as is the case with the functions of many (if not most) social phenomena. To put this in a simple way, people can do things for a variety of reasons. Their actions can have multiple functions and multiple effects. Only some of these functions and effects are ideological.

If ideology is not a cause or condition of existence for forms of social categorization, but rather one of the functions at play, identifying the other functions should give us at least some of the answers as to why these forms are produced and reproduced in the first place. What then are the other functions in question? To answer this question, different areas of human activity where these forms of categorization are employed will be examined. These areas of activity have been explored with varying success using the different social scientific perspectives discussed in previous chapters of this study. For one thing, it is generally understood that people use social categorization to **make sense of social**

**reality.** Accordingly, ethnicity and race can be studied as essentially cognitive categories predicated on the actors' presumption of certain social, cultural or biological characteristics. It must be kept in mind however, that these cognitive categories are socially produced and socially structured phenomena rather than the result of inner psychological processes taking place within individuals. The same goes for practices of **self-identification and the identification of others** by actors – another area of human activity where ethnic and racial categorization is extensively used. The identity systems based on race and ethnicity are socially constructed and subject to critical social influences.

Ethnicity and, to some extent, race can also be studied as functions of **social organization**, critical for the construction of social groups. Of particular relevance here is Barth's approach (1969; see also 1982) whereby ethnicity is seen as a function of social organization that determines boundaries of social groups and relations between them. By identifying the instrumental and transactional aspects of ethnic categorization, Barth's theory also opens a way to study how ethnicity can be strategically used in the **service of material and other social interests of the actors**, which is another important function of ethnic and racial categorization, and not necessarily equivalent with ideology as I define it. Such equivalence can be spoken about when the actors belong to the dominant sector of society. However, cases may also emerge where members of a minority seek to promote their own group interests by means of practices of ethnic categorization, however widely defined. How successful these efforts can be is an entirely different matter. At the same time, the practices themselves may have ideological effects, in the sense that the ultimate beneficiary may turn out to be the ruling majority.

### **The conditions of existence for ideology**

The discussion in this chapter leads to the conclusion that the practices of ethnic and racial categorization among minorities should be approached as practices that can, under certain circumstances, have concrete ideological effects but that are not ideological in and of themselves. Certainly, they are not exclusively ideological. Ideology as a function is thus akin to structural factors that act at the level of an ideational superstructure, or in

terms of Marxist theory, the “superstructure of ideas” in society. It is hard to believe that minorities would simply reproduce the ideological forms imposed on them by the majority, advertently or inadvertently, without seeking objectives of their own. In Part II of this study, I will examine how one particular minority tries to achieve its objectives through discourse and how its efforts fit in the construction of social reality in Canada.

One of the primary goals in Part II is to demonstrate how multifunctional the discourse of ethnic categorization can be. Once again, the relevance of Barth’s approach is striking because it identifies all the above-mentioned functions of ethnic categorization and incorporates them into one comprehensive explanation, showing how they coexist in the processes of social construction. Incidentally, Barth also approaches ethnic categorization as an essentially non-ideological form of social practice, but his explanation is flexible enough to accommodate the ideological aspect as well (Jenkins, 1994).

Assuming that social practices can be essentially non-ideological or not only ideological, my goal will also be to study how they can have ideological effects. There are conditions of existence for ideology that should be taken into consideration. First among them is the particular social and historical context of discourse, including the existent social structure and the distribution of political and economic power among different groups and classes of people. This will be approached as the “objective social landscape,” for despite the argued relativity of such terms in discourse, there must be some form of reference to reality outside of discourse. Without it such an analysis would simply be impossible (cf. Malik, 1996).

The “objective social landscape” is distinguished from the “ideational landscape.” The latter is the domain of discourse that is considered in Part II. Here, Marx’s assertion that ruling ideas are the ideas of the ruling classes is particularly relevant. In the case at hand, the kinds of ideas available as discursive resources and the consequences of their usage in given social contexts have to be examined for the following practices: making sense of social reality, self-identification (and identification of others), construction of social groups, and in the struggles for widely defined social interests. The choice of resources is

vast but in many ways predetermined. Only some of them can be used for particular practices in particular contexts, if people are to make any sense in their discourse. In addition, some discursive resources come in ready-made ideological formulations – for example, anecdotes, jokes, and stories – being a result of ideological practices already in place. In this sense, ideological forms can be seen as reproducing themselves.

It is also my contention that the “other” functions of ideological forms should be counted among their conditions of existence. Once it is accepted that ideology is a specific function that turns discursive constructs into ideological forms but is not in itself a condition of existence for these constructs, then whatever the conditions of existence for these constructs are, they should be counted among the conditions of existence for ideology. Ideological forms can only exist in discourse because there exist certain discursive practices and their “products” to which ideology applies. These are not just any practices or products. Certain discursive forms are obviously more susceptible to ideological penetration and more useful as “carriers” of ideology than others. For example, a user manual for a DVD player is much less likely to become an ideological form than an account of ethnic categorization. Not that user manuals are immune to ideological penetration, but under normal circumstances their usefulness for carrying ideological messages is rather limited.

Not only do the forms of ethnic categorization provide the material for ideological forms, they also carry a certain practical utility or adequacy from which the latter can profit. From the perspective of some writers focused on themes of power and domination, ideological accounts are persuasive because they possess a “practical adequacy” for the subjects. Where the focus is on majorities as the agents of domination, this term relates to the fact that ideology serves the material interests of the agents (Miles, 1982). Because of this “practical adequacy” ideological forms appear sufficiently convincing for agents to actively reproduce them. In my opinion, “practical adequacy” also stems from the other-than-ideological functions of these forms, functions that give sense to the practices through which people attempt to reach a variety of practical goals, often on a routine,

everyday basis. Ideological forms are only some of the effects of these practices, and therein may lie their enormous power and effectiveness in society.



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## Methodology and research procedure

In previous chapters some of the ways of understanding and explaining ethnic and racial discourse from different theoretical perspectives were explored. As well, theoretical choices as to how to approach the discourse in question for the purposes of this study were made. The main objective of this chapter is to provide a general overview of the methodological procedures and analytic tools used in this study to reach the conclusions in Part II.

This study, among other things, is an attempt to combine the methods and procedures of social anthropology with those of discourse analysis. The methods and procedures developed and adapted by Potter and Wetherell primarily for the study of ideological discourse, and particularly for issues related to racial and ethnic categorization, are heavily drawn upon to analyze the discursive materials in this study. Although originally developed in the context of social psychology, the authors' approach to discourse analysis is compatible with the disciplinary context of social anthropology, for it stresses an ethnographic understanding of the research material. Participant observation, a standard anthropological procedure, has so far been the best means of obtaining the level of ethnographic understanding necessary to be able to read cultural patterns. While systematic discourse analysis has developed tools that are useful for analyzing qualitative interview material, systematic analysis of qualitative interview material is still much neglected in social anthropology (Meintel, 1991: 212).

The most complete description of analytic tools and research procedures used in analyzing discourse can be found in Potter and Wetherell (1987). Discussion of methods of interviewing and analysis of interview material for the purposes of discourse analysis can be found in Potter and Mulkey (1985). Wetherell and Potter (1988) discuss the issues related to identifying and analyzing "interpretative repertoires" – an analytic tool initially developed by Gilbert and Mulkey (1982; 1984) for the study of scientific discourse. Also,

Potter and Wetherell (1988) address a number of questions pertaining to rhetorical construction and its use in ideological discourse. While all these works give examples of the application of these analytic tools to particular narratives, Wetherell and Potter (1992) demonstrate how it can be done in a comprehensive study of racial discourse practiced by a whole community – the White majority in New Zealand. In addition, a short study of majority discourse in Amsterdam conducted by Verkuyten *et al.*'s (1994) present a good example of how the same analytic tools are applicable in other ethnographic contexts.

Of course, it is not within the scope of a single chapter to introduce and discuss all the intricacies and complicated issues involved in the critical investigation of social discourse. This chapter gives only a brief introduction to some basic analytical concepts and a description of the procedures that were followed in this study.

### **Action-orientation approach to discourse: basic premises and analytic concepts**

The first basic premise of discourse analysis is the *functionality* of language. Different forms of language use have a variety of functions and consequences. Second, discourse analysis ascribes a critical importance to *variability*. That is, different functions make for variation in narrative accounts. The same objects can be described in a number of different and sometimes conflicting ways. Variability is often discarded in social research that takes a “realistic” descriptive model of language and looks for consistency in narrative material. Discourse analysis, on the other hand, regards variability as an expression of the functionality of language and makes it a central topic of study (Potter and Wetherell, 1987: 32-55). One of the principal purposes of analysis is to search for specific patterns of variation; this is a search, in a manner of speaking, for regularity in variability, and an attempt to determine what functions those patterns serve (cf. Trew, 1979a; 1979b). Examining *context* is also particularly important for discourse analysis. Not only does contextual information help the analyst get a better understanding of modes of discourse, but it is also a factor in determining the construction of narratives.

A central premise of discourse analysis is the notion that discourse is both *constructed* and *constructive* (Potter and Wetherell, 1987; Wetherell and Potter, 1992). The perspective developed by Wetherell and Potter is strongly influenced by post-structuralist currents in social sciences, insofar as the authors ascribe a powerful role to discourse in society. Their theoretical approach draws heavily from the works of Foucault (1980), where discourse is not only seen as an important part of the common sense of a culture, but also as a powerful agent capable of producing subjects and objects, of constituting truths and social reality in general. However, while post-structuralist theories treat discourse for the most part in abstract terms and concentrate largely on the workings of discourse at the macro-social scale, Wetherell and Potter introduce a micro-sociological twist to the constructionist approach: in order to achieve anything, discourse has to be used and manipulated by human agents. The object of analytic practice for the authors is the ways this happens in actual social settings. Their focus is the “action orientation” of discourse. In analyzing everyday talk, Wetherell and Potter emphasize those aspects of construction that stem from the use of discourse as social practice, on the contexts of this use, and on actual discursive performance, or what they call “the act of discursive instantiation” (1992: 90).

In the framework of this “action orientation” approach the analyst seeks to uncover the sense of texts and talk, not so much from their abstract or dictionary meanings as from their situated use. One of the basic analytic concepts of this approach is that of “interpretive repertoires” (Gilbert and Mulkay, 1982; 1984; Potter and Wetherell, 1987: 138-155; Wetherell and Potter, 1988; 1992). Generally speaking, interpretative repertoires are systems of signification that people rely on when talking about self, other people, objects, events or other phenomena. They include clusters of terms and categories, ready-made descriptions and figures of speech that can be used as interpretative resources – another analytic concept of discourse analysis – for creating particular versions of reality. For the analyst, interpretative repertoires are the means for understanding the content of speech and the way the latter is organized. The focus of analysis is on the nature of the repertoire, the context in which it is used, the way it is

used, and what is achieved by that use (this last aspect being particularly critical to rhetorical construction).

A short example from Polish immigrant discourse illustrates the concept of interpretive repertoire. Based on my analyses, the extract below contains one of the most prominent repertoires of Polish discourse in Canada.

0385 I am Polish by birth. I feel Polish, even though I also am Canadian in the  
 0386 second place. But, I would say, I am more Polish than Canadian. Perhaps, it's  
 0387 because I spent twenty five years – the best years of my life, so to speak – in  
 0388 Poland. It is what shapes a person, what gives you a personality,  
 0389 your own views. And, no matter, it is also the culture, religion,  
 0390 the way of life, the way of expressing yourself, some kind of  
 0391 outlook on life and everything. And from a perspective of time, no matter  
 0392 how you look at it, you will always feel Polish in the first place,  
 0393 and in the second place, I would say that I am Canadian.  
 Helena, age 34, self-employed, residing in Montreal for the last 9 years

The speaker employs here a cluster of categories such as *origin* (“Polish by birth”) and *socialization* (“It is what shapes a person...”), and terms such as *personality*, *culture*, *religion*, *views*, *way of life* and *language*. She presents these terms as factors that determine her identity as a Polish person and explains why that identity is more important than her Canadian identity. For the sake of convenience, I have labeled this cluster of terms and categories a *repertoire of cultural determinism*, a term that reflects the repertoire’s content and use at the same time.

The elements of a repertoire are usually assembled around a metaphor, an image or a broadly understood idea in such a way that their use “makes sense” to the interlocutors (irrespective of whether they agree with the results of given discursive instantiation or not). It is not only the terms and categories themselves but also the logical connections that can be made between them that make up an interpretative repertoire. We can speak of a repertoire when particular terms are used repeatedly in association with certain topics and result in similar conceptualizations of the same objects. The functionality and accountability of the repertoires – the fact that they make sense and can be used – stems from the interlocutors’ familiarity with the terms and associations that constitute the repertoires. As such, interpretative repertoires act as popular “common places” in a

society, and endow the produced versions of reality with a certain accountability that cannot be easily undermined (Potter and Wetherell, 1987; Wetherell and Potter, 1992; see also Billig, 1987).

Despite their status of “socially accepted clichés” (Wetherell and Potter, 1992: 91), interpretative repertoires should not be confused with rigid cognitive representations, schemata or semiotic codes (cf. Potter and Wetherell, 1987). The semiotic aspect is important, insofar as it determines the utility of repertoires for the purposes of rhetorical construction. The latter depends on a certain linguistic and cultural competence, and on common assumptions about the meaning of terms and associations shared by speakers as members of specific “interpretive communities” (cf. Eco, 1979: 7; Luke, 1989: 60-63). But whatever their semiotic or cognitive functions, interpretative repertoires do not have any special powers that govern the conditions of their use (as codes have, for example). It is rather the context and speakers’ practical needs that determine the choice of repertoires and the ways in which they are used.

Repertoires are primarily rhetorical devices that people employ for various ends. Depending on context and need speakers can also switch between repertoires or, in some cases even blend them together. As we shall see in Part II, the repertoire of cultural determinism is not the only one used by Polish immigrants to conceptualize ethnic or national identity. Its terms do not always occur in the same frequency and combinations, either. Rather than ready-made or strictly applied formulas, interpretative repertoires should be regarded as repositories of terms and expressions from which people draw in different numbers and combinations to use as resources in building versions of reality.

In many ways, “action-oriented” discourse analysis is a search for a regular pattern of repertoire use leading to the formation of hypotheses about the possible goals and effects of these discursive practices. Special emphasis is on the metaphor of construction. The metaphor corresponds not only to the fact that particular accounts are constructed, but also that discourse constructs subjects and objects. Wetherell and Potter (1992) use the term in three senses. At the most basic level, construction corresponds to the referential

property of language. People experience reality through discursive versions (among other things) that evoke for them the objects of talk. Much social practice of dealing with people and objects takes place only in terms of specific discursive versions – a fact that is particularly relevant to social science in general. The pervasiveness of this phenomenon in human society demonstrates the actual and potential power of discursive practices in shaping reality.

The second meaning of “construction” can be derived from the post-structuralist accounts of realism in various forms of talk and writing. Realism in this sense refers to those workings of discourse that result in real-seeming versions of objects. Some textual versions are so obvious – appearing as mere descriptions of “things out there” – that they do not seem to be versions at all. Post-structuralist analyses of realism in literature (e.g. Barthes, 1975), link this phenomenon to an historically developed familiarity of authors and readers with the forms of sense-making that have shaped those representations. In this regard, according to Wetherell and Potter, post-structuralist perspectives on construction capture an important part of the operation of interpretative repertoires.

However, at the same time, the authors point out that in both the above-mentioned instances, construction is treated as a more or less automatic process. In the first case, construction is regarded as stemming from the referential properties of language, while in post-structuralist approaches, it is largely a result of the “transparency of familiar forms of sense making” (ibid.: 95). Without contradicting the first two views of construction, the action orientation perspective on discourse analysis proposes yet another take on the notion of construction. The authors propose to analyze the ways through which construction is actively achieved by speakers in the course of pursuing argumentative goals.

To get at this third kind of construction, the researcher analyzes the range of rhetorical techniques and devices that people actively use to put text and talk together in such a way that the reality emerging from them appears factual, solid and realistic. This type of discursive construction has already been explored by conversation analysts and

ethnomethodologists who focus on interactional materials and discourse in situations of dispute such as, for example, arguments in courts or scientific debates (see e.g. Gilbert and Mulkey, 1982; 1984). In fact, this view of construction is relevant whenever people engage in potentially sensitive, offensive, disputable, problematic, and otherwise controversial discourse.

Wetherell and Potter (1992) emphasize a specific feature occurring in this type of rhetorical construction: that arguments are not only constructed to press a particular point but also *against alternatives* (cf. Billig, 1987). One of the goals of analysis is to explore the way a particular argument or version is designed, explicitly or implicitly, to undermine any competing alternative views. The latter may be explicitly present, e.g. in the form of an argument raised by one of the interlocutors, or it may be absent from the particular conversation but nevertheless present and available in the local interpretive context. Again, this aspect of rhetorical construction is particularly important to analyses of ethnic and racial discourse where topics are often sensitive in different ways for different parties and where much of the argumentation involved can be subject to dispute.

The following extract from an interview recorded by Potter and Wetherell in New Zealand provides an excellent example with which to identify a few classic rhetorical moves that speakers actively use nowadays to warrant their versions (for a fuller description of various discursive features used to warrant accounts, see Litton and Potter, 1985; Potter and Wetherell, 1987; Wetherell and Potter, 1988; 1992)<sup>1</sup>.

001 *Interviewer.* Do you think New Zealand can be described  
 002 generally as a violent society? In terms of crime rate  
 003 and =  
 004 *Jones.* Yes, it has got a very high crime rate. (0.4) Um.  
 005 (2.0) Yes, I think so. It's not as bad as some places  
 006 though (1.2) *but* crime rate *is* going up.  
 007 *Interviewer.* Uhm. Why do you think, what's responsible  
 008 there and what could be done about it?  
 009 (2.6)  
 010 *Jones.* To really answer that you'd have to look at (1.8)  
 011 the type of crimes you've got, ah, and who's committing  
 012 them.

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<sup>1</sup> Passages in italics indicate the special emphasis added by the speaker. For other transcription conventions, see Potter and Wetherell, (1988: 65).

013 *Interviewer.* Yes. Ummm.  
 014 *Jones.* There have been you know ideas put out, what is  
 015 it, that the majority of rapes are committed by Islanders  
 016 or Maoris and a lot of house burglaries I would imagine  
 017 are committed by kids and the majority of the kids that  
 018 are hanging around in the streets are Islanders, they're  
 019 not the Maoris, well it's unfair to say the Maoris because  
 020 the Maoris I know are quite nice really.  
 021 *Interviewer.* Yes.  
 022 *Jones.* Maoris (0.2) are quite good it's the Islanders  
 023 that come here and can't handle it  
 024 *Interviewer.* Yeah, Yeah, so it's partly sort of  
 025 immigration, it's related to immigration.  
 026 *Jones.* Umm. Yeah, we don't, seeing them coming through  
 027 off the aircraft at night, half of them can't speak  
 028 English, um:: (0.8). If they can't speak English they're  
 029 not going to be able to get a job, they're going to go  
 030 and be in their little communities and (0.4) they're  
 031 not going to contribute anything to the country. And  
 032 they're going to get frustrated and they're going to get  
 033 bored. And they're gonna, you know, there is nothing for  
 034 them to do so the kids are going to start hanging around  
 035 in the streets. At home, Mum and Dad can't speak English.  
 036 and so the kids can't speak English. They go to school  
 037 and suddenly they are confronted with English – 'we can't  
 038 speak that, and so what do we *do?*' – *nothing*. And so by  
 039 the time they get to fifteen they just drop out, they  
 040 have had it up to here with school (.) and it's not the  
 041 school's fault. They have *brilliant lives*, they have  
 042 *brilliant lives* back in, *family lives* back in the  
 043 Islands, that's where they should be.

(Wetherell and Potter, 1988: 57)

One noted feature of contemporary discursive accounts involving ethnic and racial categories is that they are often organized against any potential (explicit or implicit) accusations of bias or prejudice that could be made against the authors. In the piece of discourse cited above the speaker is caught in what Wetherell and Potter have called elsewhere a "dilemma of stake or interest" (1992: 97). He tries to construct a highly evaluative and, in fact offensive, account without being heard as racist. It is not simply a question of the speakers trying to "save face." If the account appears to be ideologically charged, it could lose some of its power or even miss the objective.

The speaker manages the dilemma by constructing the account to sound like a mere description of "the way things are," rather than to reflect his own private opinions, motives or dispositions. One of the techniques in use here is that of *factual-type assertions* about the object, in this case immigrants from the Pacific islands, i.e.



“Islanders” (Potter and Wetherell, 1988). Assertions are usually backed up in a variety of ways. Here, for example, the accusation of high criminality among the Islanders is supported by a reference to an external source or authority: “There have been ... ideas put out.” Needless to say, rhetorical moves of this kind are not always foolproof. The reference made here is vague and could be questioned, but in the fast flow of conversation it might just pass unnoticed. In fact, *systematically vague formulations* are regularly used in everyday conversations, something that attests to the efficiency of this rhetorical device. Another way to support the factual claims is to incorporate them into *causal narratives*. Note how the asserted high criminality among the Islanders is reinforced throughout the account by tracing it back to the (also asserted) fact that they are not able to speak English. Causal narratives create an impression of “objective” logical reasoning, which adds additional weight to the argument.

A related feature of such accounts is *remedial motive work*, which is another way to fend off any potential suspicion of personal bias and to maintain the impression of “factuality” and “rationality” of the account (Wetherell and Potter, 1992: 64). It can be identified here in the use of contrasts or exceptions. In the account above, Maoris – another racial minority in New Zealand – are positively contrasted with Islanders. Another form of remedial motive work is the introduction of mitigating factors for some of the negative evaluations that are present in the account. Here, the mitigating factors (inscribed in causal narratives) explain away the blameworthy behavior of the Islanders. One does not appear biased when he/she explains and tones down the negative characteristics of the object. Towards the end of the passage, we can read: “They have *brilliant lives* back in the Islands, that’s where they should be.” This is a preemptive move, in preparation for the argument for repatriation of immigrants to the Islands (The full account is reproduced in Potter and Wetherell, 1988: 57-59).

Looking at discourse from this point of view helps us understand how, in technical terms, it can serve ideological functions in society. It is important to realize that rhetorical work of this kind is not simply a way to disguise the central message of the account. It is the way the message is constructed. Rhetorical work is central to construction, not only to the

development of argumentative practice but also to the mobilization of meaning. Once we realize this, it makes much more sense to see the power of ideological forms as stemming from the way they are constructed, rather than from the fact that they are disguised (see Foucault, 1980). The realization of this fact has perhaps constituted the most significant advance of post-structuralist theories over orthodox Marxism.

The “action orientation” approach has so far been applied mainly to the kind of talk and text produced by the more empowered members of society. The analysis in Part II will demonstrate how the same analytical concepts can be applied to the discourse produced by a minority. It will also show how, through the pattern of interpretative repertoires and a variety of rhetorical strategies, members of an ethnic minority construct their versions of social reality in Canada.

### **Participant observation: preliminary eavesdropping**

The specific goal of this research was to study the discourse of ethnicity and race among members of the Polish community in Montreal. The profile of Poles in Canada is presented in a separate chapter, but I will briefly justify the choice of Montreal as the site for this study (The other places that were seriously considered were New York and Toronto). Montreal was chosen because of its multiethnic environment and its specificity as a city with two distinct majorities whose dominant status is somewhat precarious. Francophones have only recently come to power, progressively displacing the Anglophones (see Anctil, 1984; Linteau, 1982). To make things even more interesting, outside the province, in Canada and on the North-American continent in general, the power and status positions of these two groups is reversed. In both these larger contexts, Anglophones make up an absolute majority. In addition, Montreal is home to a multitude of ethnic minorities that from time to time receive recognition as a “third power,” on both provincial and federal levels of public discourse. All this makes the city a very interesting environment for studies of ethnic relations and promises potentially rich patterns of discourse that should somehow reflect this complex situation.

In order to carry out this research, two different methods of collecting data were used, namely participant observation in the Polish community and open-ended interviews with a sample of informants. Observation was conducted in Montreal and to a lesser extent in Ottawa. I attended a number of public meetings, shows, lectures and conferences organized by local Polish organizations. Gaining community experience also involved becoming a member of the editorial staff of a Polish-Canadian periodical, a member of a volunteer Polish organization, and for a time, an active participant in board meetings on a major community cultural project. Participating in community events and institutions was necessary to meet and talk to a large sample of community members – people whom I might not have normally met or chosen as friends or acquaintances in private life.

At the same time, even without these public engagements, the fact of being a Polish-Canadian gave me numerous opportunities to participate in various informal groups and interactions of all sorts. These involved, for example, attending private parties, joining groups of people on outdoor excursions and picnics, attending games, and other private and public events. Many of those events occurred quite regularly and some were informally institutionalized among segments of the community, for example, the “after-Church” chat, a seemingly trivial and ephemeral practice has in fact a lasting regularity and is often treated with the solemnity of a ritual. This occurs every Sunday, after Mass in Polish churches in Montreal. People leaving church spend a few minutes in front, conversing with family, friends and acquaintances, exchanging rumors, news and opinions on different topics. This activity intensifies during important Catholic holidays when people consider it their duty to exchange greetings and a few words with everyone they know, even if they happen to be only remote acquaintances, and make up for months of silence. It is not unusual then, for some of these meetings to end with spontaneous invitations for a cup of tea or even for dinner. For many people, it is an occasion to reaffirm family bonds and renew friendships. Needless to add that it is also an informal forum for various kinds of discursive exchange.

A quite different ethnic practice that I was able to observe repeatedly were soccer matches among Polish immigrants in a public park in Lachine (today, one of the

boroughs of greater Montreal). More specifically, I participated in the social interaction surrounding the game itself. If the weather was mild, players would arrive, often from remote locations on the island of Montreal, accompanied by families and friends. While the players engage in the game, the other adults converse and play with children at the edge of the field.<sup>2</sup>

Occasionally, “international” matches, for example between Poles and Italians, or Poles and Haitians, underline the ethnic character of the event. Such games occur either spontaneously, when a group of another ethnic origin is met practicing on the same playing field, or the games are set up in advance. In the latter case, the word is spread around, resulting in more Polish players volunteering for the game and, of course, more spectators showing up to support their “national” team and have an occasion to chat. This made my task easier as I could listen to conversations and comments and directly engage people in conversations on topics related to the subject of the study.

As part of the research procedure, I collected a small archive of randomly selected documents, mainly articles and editorials from Polish-Canadian newspapers and magazines. Material dealing with ethnicity and intergroup relations, as well as politics and language issues in Quebec was selected. Although this material did not play major part in the analysis, it helped in the first stage of field research to identify the issues of major concern to the community.

In the first stage of observation, I concentrated mainly on listening and taking notes on what others were talking about. This is not to say that I did not participate, but whatever I did or said to others had no explicit purpose related to the study. In this sense, this first stage of research resembled a passive information gathering – a form of “eavesdropping”

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<sup>2</sup> To the best of my knowledge, games were played on Saturdays, with relative regularity, from May to November, between 1990 and 1994, and later between 1996 and 1998. The practice started among a small group of friends, but with time other Poles would also come and join. As an unwritten rule, everyone could join in the game, and it was not unusual to see people from backgrounds other than Polish on both teams. The teams could be rearranged any time, depending on the number and competence of the players. Participants changed over the years, but the core group of Polish players remained the same. After 1998, the practice came to an end. In 2002, with the encouragement and sponsorship of one of the more affluent players, the core group set up an amateur club and now plays in the local soccer league.

– as compared to the later stages that would prove to be more dynamic, and at times interventionist. Given the overall focus of study on everyday patterns of language use, my primary interest was informal verbal behavior among people: private discussions, “*couloir* talk,” and other kinds of informal or semi-formal talk.

This preliminary “eavesdropping” focused on the content of discourse with a particular emphasis on topics related to the subject of the study in order to identify issues that were important to members of the Polish community, to make out the major themes in their discourse, and to find out how those themes were developed by speakers. One of the more immediate goals of this stage was to establish what kinds of questions would eventually have to be asked during the interviews that were planned for the second phase of research.

It could be argued that as an “insider” – a member of the community under study –I should have had enough competence to know most of these things out of hand. In a way, I could have posed as an informant myself. Reality proved to be more complicated. For one thing, upon engaging in this study I had to question my identity as a member of the local *Polonia* and my knowledge about this community: I had never really participated in the public life of the Polish community before. My participation in Polish events of any sort in Canada had been limited to socializing with Polish friends and family and to attending a few lectures over a period of nine years, and I had never held membership in any Polish-Canadian organization before engaging in this study. What was my knowledge of the local *Polonia*, its affairs, its current issues and concerns? Clearly, to be able to claim any competence in this respect required going beyond my small circle of Polish family and friends and engaging in the public life of the community.

I also had to question my role as “native” researcher from the other end. I had a sufficient command of language and a sort of cultural knowledge that, I assumed, could never be matched by an outsider. However, and this posed another problem with studying one’s own culture and group: having the same competence presented the danger of taking too many things for granted. One of the unquestionable advantages of being a non-native

researcher is that things that appear normal and transparent to the members can appear to him as problematic. Although I did not fully realize it from the beginning, the initial period of systematic observation gave me a measure of critical perspective that came in very handy during the next stage of research, which consisted of carrying out interviews with selected informants.

## **The Interviews**

Despite all its virtues, participant observation is not by itself a sufficient method of collecting data for the purposes of discourse analysis, especially when the object is everyday talk. In the fast flow of everyday conversation, many patterns and other features of discourse can easily slip the researcher's attention and go unnoticed. Full stretches of speech need to be recorded to obtain material that can be transcribed and analyzed in detail, and also to provide examples, which are a vital part of explanation in discourse analysis (Wetherell and Potter, 1992: 93-102). While ethical and to some extent technical considerations limit the possibilities of tape recording of live conversations in public places, interviews provide a useful alternative. In addition, they provide a measure of control to the research process, in that they allow the researcher to explore a relatively standard range of topics with each of the informants.

Therefore, apart from participant observation, I conducted a number of open-ended interviews, between the end of 1996 and the end of 1997. Altogether, interviews with twenty individuals were fully recorded and analyzed. Of these, sixteen interviews were recorded with Poles residing in Montreal and four with the Polish residents of Ottawa. One individual was interviewed twice with an interval of four months separating the two interviews. The discursive patterns in the Polish community in Montreal were the main focus of the study. The material collected in Ottawa provided some basis for the comparison of the patterns of discourse occurring in the two Polish communities.

Since my research methods were highly qualitative and labour-intensive, I interviewed only a small number of informants. In fact, Potter and Wetherell stress that the success of a study in discourse analysis is “*not* in the least dependent on sample size” (1987: 161,

italics in the original). Strictly speaking, one is more interested in language patterns than in people who use them. Since a few people can normally produce numerous linguistic patterns, a small number of interviews is enough to obtain a sufficient amount of material for analysis. As I proceeded with recording and preliminary analysis of the interviews, it soon became apparent that certain discursive patterns repeated themselves with an amazing regularity from one interview to the other. Small variations that could be linked to the speakers' social profiles were later checked against data coming from participant observation. Further participant observation only confirmed the results of the analysis of the interview material. Very soon, it became evident that more interviews would not bring anything new to the study and would only add to the labour involved.

The participants were found through contacts in the Polish communities in Montreal and Ottawa. As is often the routine in anthropological fieldwork, I so to speak, "spread the word." All the participants were informed about the purpose of the study in very general terms. It was presented to them in the form of a question: *What do Poles think about Canada and about its society?* The majority of those in the sample, with the exception of three people, had never met the researcher or spoken to him in person before the interviews, except for the initial contact necessary to arrange the interviews.

Although I do not claim that such a small number of people could fully represent the composition of the Polish community, the sample is nevertheless fairly balanced regarding a number of criteria. Both genders were equally represented in each residential study group. Their ages ranged from twenty-nine to seventy-seven. In accordance with the focus of the study, all the participants were first-generation immigrants. By this term I designate the people who came and settled in this country as adults (eighteen years and older). Their length of residence in Canada was ranging between three and a half and fifty years, with an average length of residence between five and ten years. Most were trained professionals with college or university education and with experience in their professions, or were students. Only two participants had an education below that which

corresponds to the level of CEGEP<sup>3</sup> in Quebec. At the time of the interviews, five participants were working as professionals for various institutions and companies, three were self-employed, four were retired, four were students, three were temporarily unemployed and one was a welfare recipient.

In terms of language competence, Polish is the mother tongue for all interviewees. Competence in the official languages of Canada is as follows: ten out of sixteen informants who formed the Montreal study group speak both English and French; five out of the sixteen speak English only, and one person from Montreal speaks French only. Ottawa informants speak English only. In addition, five individuals are fluent in one or more languages other than Polish, English or French. With language being generally considered an important factor of political affiliation and social integration in Quebec, it may be worth noting that when it comes to the distribution of language competence, the study group is fairly representative of the Polish immigrant population in Montreal (see the next chapter for further details) It may also be worth adding that four informants have spouses or partners from ethnic backgrounds other than Polish.

The interviews were conducted by me in Montreal (fifteen), Ottawa (two) and the Gatineau Provincial Park in Quebec (two); most at participants' homes, one at the home of a third person, one in a restaurant, and two outdoors on the grounds of the above-mentioned provincial park. Most people were interviewed as individuals on a one-to-one basis, but in two cases couples were interviewed together. In one case, a spouse was present during the interview but did not take part in the conversation. The time length of the interviews ranged from 30 min to 2h 45min, with the average length of one hour. In all cases, the language of interview was Polish.

### **Interview style**

The interview style was highly informal and conversational. One of my goals was to recreate the same discursive patterns that the participants used in everyday conversations.

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<sup>3</sup> Depending on the profile of the school (i.e. whether it was offering general or professional education), the last 2-3 years of schooling before university.



In fact, the prescription for conducting interviews for the purposes of discourse analysis is slightly unorthodox, as compared to what is usually practiced in social science, except in anthropology (see Potter and Mulkay, 1985; Potter and Wetherell, 1987). The conventional method used in much social science research requires that all interactional aspects of the interview be reduced to a minimum, with interviews conducted in a neutral and non-interventionist manner, so as not to influence participants' answers. Reducing the researcher's influence is recommended even for in-depth interviews that are otherwise largely informal and unstructured (Wiseman and Aron, 1970: 27-37). The interview is largely a means of collecting responses about phenomena that are assumed to exist outside the interview context itself: interviewee's beliefs, attitudes, recollections of events, etc. The stress is on clarity and consistency, as the researcher tries to establish what people "really" think, feel or believe (Potter and Wetherell, 1987).

In contrast, in discourse analysis (and this is also true of much of social anthropology) the interview is not regarded as a means of collecting data about the object of study, but rather as data and object all in one, and so has to be treated as a segment of interaction in its own right. Therefore, the manner of conducting interviews is much more active and interventionist (Wetherell and Potter, 1992). The interviewer takes on the role of interlocutor and tries to recreate to some extent the conditions of a normal conversation. Not only does he ask questions, but he also makes comments, and may even challenge some of the assumptions made by the interviewee. In many respects, his actions resemble those of an "agent-provocateur" – trying to tempt the participants to use different ways of thinking and arguing that they would also use outside the interview.

All this is not to mean that there are no rules or restraints for interviewing. Despite the relatively informal and conversational style of the interviews, a number of guidelines and boundaries that restricted the interviewer's movements and gave a measure of structure to the whole procedure were followed. For conversations to be a source of material for analysis in the study of social issues, care had to be taken that the same standard range of topics was covered during each interview. In all cases, I worked from the same list of questions and comments, even though they were posed in varying order and at different

times during the interviews. The inventory of themes covered includes: social divisions, political issues, employment, immigration, crime, and social relations with particular focus on ethnic and racial relations; also relations in the Polish community, participation in ethnic organizations, and social identity.

While the main purpose of the interviews was to elicit discourse involving ethnic and racial categories and relations, these are sensitive issues. I did not want the speakers to become overly cautious, as this could jeopardize efforts to elicit maximally free and unrestrained speech. In one of the first interviews, an informant actually asked to have the tape recorder switched off, while voicing his opinion on a sensitive issue, once he noticed my interest in the subject. As a result of this experience, I decided to avoid introducing any sensitive topics explicitly. I also chose to avoid introducing ethnic and racial categories (including terms such as “ethnic groups,” “races,” etc.) explicitly, and waited for informants to introduce them first. Instead, I used terms such as, “people living here,” “people living in Canada,” “different people,” etc. My questions were mostly indirect, for example: *Do you like the city you live in, now? What do you like in Canada? What is it that you don't like? What is the employment situation in Montreal? Do you think that Montreal is a safe city, in terms of crime?* It is a testimony to the importance of ethnic and racial discourse in Canada, at least among Polish immigrants, that most participants introduced the categories and topics in question early on in the interviews. Once this happened, I picked up the topic and tried to induce my interlocutors to develop arguments that related to my research agenda. In this respect, it can be said that in following my research agenda, I was encouraging informants to follow certain discursive paths that they had initiated themselves.

### **Interview analysis**

The interviews were recorded and the tapes transcribed word-for-word. The language of transcription, like the language of the interviews, was Polish. Material presented in the examples has been translated into English as accurately as possible. All personal data, such as age, length of residence in Canada, and the occupation titles/job descriptions appear in the examples as supplied by the informants. For the sake of confidentiality,

names of informants and all personal names appearing in the extracts, except for the names of public figures, have been changed.

The next step in the analysis consisted of coding the transcripts. I scrutinized the transcripts for themes related to the subject of the study. Some of the themes stemmed from original assumptions with which the study had begun, while others emerged from participant observation – from listening and searching for patterns of talk in the Polish community. Still others emerged from the interviews, as the study progressed, as a result of repeated readings. Technically speaking, the procedure of coding was as follows: 1. The transcribed texts were divided into lines, with a number assigned to each line. 2. Chunks of text pertinent to a theme of interest were selected and their identifying numbers were entered under the appropriate headings (e.g. “welfare abuse”: lines 0028-0122). The process was inclusive: I included borderline cases and cases that initially seemed only vaguely related to the theme in question. Themes frequently overlapped or merged together, which required making multiple codings for the same stretches of discourse. Coding of this type is also a cyclical activity, where a lot depends on the degree of understanding of a particular theme by the researcher. This means going through the same transcripts over and over again, often coming back to them after they have already been coded – in order to search for pieces of evidence that only become relevant after a certain level of understanding of the patterns under study has been reached (Potter and Wetherell, *ibid.*). The goal of coding is more pragmatic than analytic: it is intended to make a large body of material manageable and to help the researcher concentrate on relevant issues without having to go through the entire body of scripts each time he or she engages in analysis (Potter and Wetherell, 1987: 167).

It is not easy to convey the whole process of the analysis through description. There are no mechanical procedures to follow, as is the case with quantitative methodologies such as surveys. As it is the case with most qualitative methodologies, much discourse analysis is actually a learned interpretation guided by the initial research assumptions and by the cultural competence pertinent to the particular group and socio-cultural context. Seasoned analysts compare it to a craft skill, “something like bicycle riding or chicken sexing”

(Wetherell and Potter, 1992: 101). The skill is gradually acquired with a lot of careful reading and rereading, as one tries to find sense in the long stretches of talk and learns to identify their organizational features (Potter and Wetherell, 1987: 168). There is no doubt that it involves a lot of critical interrogation. We have to ask ourselves not only what we are reading but also *how* we are reading it. As Potter and Wetherell (1987: 168) point out, part of the process consists of questioning our own presuppositions and taken-for-granted techniques of making sense of text and talk.

The proper analysis consists of two phases. The first involves looking for systematic patterns in the transcriptions. One of the principal patterns to search for is variation, i.e., differences and inconsistencies in the content and form of the accounts. Variation indicates critical turning points in the flow of talk. It shows when the speakers are making strategic movements and employing some of their more important rhetorical skills to achieve desired effects through their discourse.

Searching for inconsistencies in the data may seem very unorthodox in social science, which, in its efforts to mirror natural sciences, has for the most part tried to do just the opposite. In fact, by the use of surveys and rigidly structured questionnaires many researchers try to suppress or eliminate any potential inconsistencies in the data collected among the population. In contrast to this, discourse analysts like Potter and Wetherell (1987; 1988) argue against any research methods that suppress variability and question the validity of results obtained through surveys, questionnaires or structured interviews. They argue that no matter what, even such rigidly structured forms of collecting data are forms of interaction, only their structure seriously restricts the room for maneuver that participants would normally have in most real-life conversations. This concern is particularly valid for the study of ethnic and racial practices, which are a sensitive area of social interaction. The fact that these practices are often so subtle and indirect reflects people's moral and intellectual malaise, especially with regard to the expressions of racism and ethnic prejudice. Given the fact that in surveys and rigidly structured interviews the subjects do not have much room for argumentative maneuvers (and it should be noted here that inconsistency is often a result of such maneuvers), many may

simply opt for “non-prejudiced” and “non-discriminating” responses (Potter and Wetherell, 1987: 36-55). Anonymity may not be a sufficient preventive measure in this case. The ideological rejection of racism in its traditional form and its portrayal as morally “bad,” may motivate people to maintain not only the facade of “tolerance” and “openness,” but also a concept of themselves as non-discriminating (Essed, 1988; Billig, 1988). Let us add that the same concerns are likely to be valid for any subject generally regarded as potentially controversial, i.e., where there is awareness on the part of the interlocutors of a potential conflict between opinions.

To return to the analysis, the researcher looks not only for variation but also for features shared by the accounts, i.e. their consistency. This involves, among other things, a search for patterns of variation to see which inconsistencies repeat themselves throughout the accounts and in what contexts.

The rest of the process involves manipulating concepts in the ways that have been introduced and explained in Potter and Wetherell (1987). This involves searching for significant patterns of consistency and variation in the texts, forming working hypotheses about the possible functions and consequences of these patterns and checking these hypotheses against the textual evidence. The patterns of variation and consistency detected in oral accounts are used to discern the pattern of interpretative repertoires (an analytic concept discussed earlier) that the subjects are using.

The second phase of analysis consists of identifying the functions and effects of the given discursive acts. This entails forming hypotheses about these functions and effects and searching for linguistic evidence to support these hypotheses. The concern in discourse analysis with functions and consequences derives from its focus on construction and emphasis on the “action orientation” of discourse. The objective here is to answer the question: what is achieved by the particular discursive act or the overall pattern of discourse present in this account?

### **The importance of ethnographic understanding**

A critical aspect of the analysis concerns the relation between particular discursive patterns and the external context. Relying on the internal context of the text would not take us far in the study of social issues. Hence Wetherell and Potter (1992) ascribe critical importance to ethnographic understanding in the process of making sense of discursive material and identifying its relationship with wider social issues. Given the analytic tools necessary, it is perhaps technically possible to perform a mechanistic analysis of discursive accounts without considering their reference to the social context, as is sometimes done in conversation analysis. However, this alone would be to no avail if we wanted to explain how particular patterns of discourse relate to the situation of Poles in Quebec and Canada at large, including the cultural context, their position in the local social structure, and the problems, ambitions, dilemmas, etc. that derive from this. For this, we need a considerable level of ethnographic understanding of these issues. Here, participant observation in the community under study proves once again an invaluable tool in obtaining such understanding.

Indeed, ethnographic understanding is crucial already at the most basic level of reading the text. To make sense of the text it is necessary to know what particular words in a language mean. For instance, issues related to Polish identity would be difficult to analyze without knowledge of what the words “culture”, “religion” and “language” mean to Poles. Truly, much of this competence is based on taken-for-granted assumptions that could in turn be subject to critical analysis. But it is equally true that any analysis has to start somewhere and therefore has to rely on some sort of assumptions and expectations. This analysis is thus conditional on various ethnographic assumptions that arise from my knowledge and comprehension of Polish people in the local milieu as well as the broader world context. Once again, competence gained as a longtime member of this group as well as that acquired through participant observation play an important role in my analysis of the interviews.

## **Validating the results**

Once certain analytic claims are established, the second stage of participant observation focuses on validating these findings in the wider discursive context. The main goal at this point is to verify whether particular discursive patterns identified through the analysis of interviews would be found in the Polish community at large. The analysis so far facilitates the “reading” of Polish discourse of ethnicity and allows the identification of features of interest to this study, without resorting to tape recordings and transcripts.

At this point, the passive observer would be obliged to record a large number of interactions, without any guarantee that the relevant topics would emerge. A much easier and shorter way appeared one day during a conversation with a couple of friends, when the topic shifted to race relations in Canada. There was a disagreement. I happened to challenge some of my friends’ assumptions, and at a certain point during the discussion, I realized that the same discursive features that had been identified in the interview material were emerging: the pattern of discursive repertoires, discursive strategies and the functions and effects associated with them were repeating themselves with amazing regularity! The repeated experience of recreating similar situations brought the same results. This procedure led to a more dynamic and interventionist manner of conducting research than in the first stage of participant observation and during the interviews. This permitted me to study the patterns of discourse that normally occur in uncontrolled social settings, my goal from the beginning of the research.

Most discursive patterns found in the transcripts are confirmed in informal discussions in the community at large. Thus, both broad patterns and many micro-sequences found in the interviews can be accounted for. Some such patterns have a high degree of predictability and their appearance was easy to provoke with simple questions. Through the use of this procedure, some of the loose ends were tied, features of discourse that initially did not fit my explanations were accounted for, and some of “dead ends” were eliminated from the analysis.

For example, when interlocutors were asked during the interviews about their ethnic identity, they denied their Canadian identity, in an absolute majority of cases, and cited a number of reasons for this to be so. Both the denial itself and the reasons they cited were highly predictable in each case. However, later on during the interview, many of the same people would actually admit their Canadian identity and present an entirely different set of factors as the reasons for possessing it. To confirm this pattern in the community at large, it was then enough to ask pertinent questions during informal conversations and see whether the pattern repeated itself. This way, I was able to discover and confirm the presence of one of the most prominent interpretive repertoires found in the community under study (i.e., the above-mentioned repertoire of cultural determinism) and explain some of the more obvious contradictions in Polish discourse.

There are certain ethical questions that can be raised with regard to this procedure. This type of “experimentation” constitutes a conscious intervention in other people’s lives. To what extent is this permissible, for the purposes of research, without the subjects’ explicit knowledge and authorization? In this case, the interlocutors had some knowledge of my professional background and the general purposes of the research. They did not know, however, that the questions posed were actually “leading questions.” At the same time, the few informants who were informed of this either did not mind or did not take it seriously (I suspect it was both), the method being so unorthodox and far from the popular view of how scientific research is performed.

In my view, this is a frequent situation in ethnographic fieldwork. To some extent, any participant observation is a form of “undercover operation.” An ethnographer working in the field does not ask the subjects’ authorization in each particular case of “research instantiation.” Nor do the subjects always take him seriously when he is moving around, “poking” into their lives and asking them all sorts of “weird” questions (cf. Clifford, 1988: 18; Rosenhan, 1973). It is perhaps the very precariousness of this method that makes participant observation such an effective tool for collecting data in uncontrolled social environments.



Wetherell and Potter raise perhaps more serious concerns in their study of racism in New Zealand (1992) with regard to the researcher engaging in potentially ideological discourse. They point out that enticing people to construct ideologically charged arguments is a way of perpetuating ideological forms in society. However, it is doubtful that the impact of this research on the overall discursive patterns in the Polish community was very great and that without the little “intervention” those patterns would have developed in any different way.

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## **Introducing the social agents: profile of an ethnic minority**

Having discussed theoretical and methodological issues, here I introduce the main actors in this study. This chapter presents a short profile of the Polish group in Canada and is intended to provide the historical and sociological perspective necessary for understanding the patterns of discourse that will be unveiled in Part II. For although Polish discourse reflects to a great extent the types of concerns, dilemmas and aspirations that can be found among many ethnic minorities in Quebec and across North America, they also stem from the history and characteristic features of the Polish community, as well as this community's particular position in Canadian society.

In many ways, the focus and content of this chapter reflects the literature that is available on the Polish group in Canada today. For, despite over one hundred years of Polish existence in this country, the scope and depth of scholarly literature on the group is very limited. Canada is not much different in this respect from the United States, where as late as 1971, Greeley was able to state that "the last serious sociological study of American Poles was done by Thomas and Znaniecki in 1918" (1971: 178). Since then, a number of publications appeared on both sides of the border, but the material available today is still far from satisfactory. Most of this literature is of descriptive character and the few systematic analyses that can be found cover a limited number of topics. Among the topics that have not been touched in any systematic way is that of Polish relations with other ethnic groups in Canada. Likewise, the information on many other topics is either outdated or has to be gathered in bits and pieces scattered across a variety of sources of different theoretical standing and depth of perspective.

One unfortunate aspect of this scarcity of material is the absence of studies of the Polish group in Quebec. For this reason a general historical perspective on the Polish group in Canada and to some extent the general North American context will be provided, in the

hope that it will nevertheless shed some light on what it is like to be Polish in Quebec. This overview begins with a brief look at the history of Polish migration to Canada, the social profiles of consecutive “waves” of immigrants and the patterns of socio-economic adjustment that they have undergone. Certain processes the Polish have undergone in terms of status mobility, institutional life, group identity, and relations with the other constituents of North-American society will be discussed.

### **Polish immigration to Canada from a historical perspective: social profiles and patterns of adaptation**

The first period of significant Polish immigration to North America began in the 1870’s and lasted until 1914, when it was interrupted by the outbreak of World War One. During that period, approximately 115,000 Poles entered Canada. The overwhelming majority were peasants, arriving from overpopulated parts of Galicia, where they had been impoverished by eternal subdivisions of their family holdings and had no prospects for improving their lot (Groniowski, 1982; Kogler, 1976). Almost all settled in Western Canada and began farming in the Prairies. Winnipeg became the first center of the growing Polish community in Canada. Later on, between 1907 and 1914, new arrivals as well as some of the older immigrants moved to jobs on the railways and in bush camps, clearing the land, opening mines, and lumbering. Occasionally, these immigrants would also find employment in the fields during harvest time. Gradually, however, Polish workers began moving to urban and industrial areas of central Canada, and the center of gravity of the Polish community began slowly to shift eastward (Kogler, *ibid.*; Radecki and Heydenkorn, 1976).

This first wave of immigrants, coming from the poorest social strata, had a hard time adjusting to the new society. They usually possessed little funds to begin a new life. In 1917, a survey revealed that 50% of “Slavic” (Ukrainian and Polish) families possessed no money upon arrival in Canada. They were unfamiliar with the language and possessed few skills that were in demand on the existing job market. Those who went into farming did not always get the best land, either, because it was already taken by earlier arrivals, or

because they were directed to less desirable areas. Local officials took little interest in the arrivals from Central and Eastern Europe who were classified in the “non-preferred” category of immigrants. In addition, the farming skills of the latter were not fully adequate for Canadian soil and climatic conditions (Avery and Fedorowicz, 1982). Many who tried their luck with farming were eventually forced to abandon their land and look for other employment. The memoirs and reminiscences of those early Polish settlers illustrate the hardships they endured (Heydenkorn, 1974b; Matejko 1982; Matejko, 1979).

The situation of newcomers was all the worse because of the initial lack of larger Polish communities to cushion the shock of arrival. Canadian authorities and railway promoters did not encourage block settlements, but the immigrants usually preferred to live near people like themselves. Once an area contained a number of Poles, it attracted others to come and settle nearby. In time, a church or a small chapel would be built and would form the nucleus of the little colony. Although the development of such colonies has been little documented, a number must have sprung up in the initial period, as is attested today by many Polish-sounding place names in the prairie provinces (Radecki and Heydenkorn, *ibid.*: 1976; Matejko, 1982).

When Polish immigrants began moving to urban areas after World War I, new problems arose, associated mainly with their rapid immersion into urban and industrial society. Based on immigrants’ memoirs, Spustek (1982) stresses the difficulties of adjustment of peasants to North American society. Their contact with the new reality was, to say the least, shocking. They were unfamiliar with the work relations and the rapid pace of industrial society, ignorant of the local language, laws, institutions, and culture in general. The most serious problem was the lack of language competence, which forced them to take whatever jobs were available, exposing them to exploitation by employers and others. Few immigrants could afford to attend language classes, as they were preoccupied with the more immediate problems of survival. On the labour market they were not only exploited but were also the first to suffer in times of crises (Spustek, 1982; *c.f.* Matejko, 1979).

The attitude of the surrounding society did not help much with the immigrants' adjustment problems. Nativism and racism were in full blossom in North America for much of the first half of the twentieth century. Many Anglo-Saxon Canadians expressed fear at the arrival of large numbers of what they considered to be "racially inferior" Slavs (Znaniiecki-Lopata, 1976: 70-72). Voices against "balkanizing" Canada rose as a reaction to the growth of immigrant colonies in the West. The same fears were pronounced against the growing Polish population in the cities. Poor sanitary conditions and urban crime were only some of the accusations launched at the Polish community (Avery and Fedorowicz, 1982: 9; Znaniiecki-Lopata, *ibid.*).

Even in the enclosure of urban ghettos, where the immigrants were somewhat cut off from the prejudice of the dominant society, their life was not free of distress. Unstable earnings and the uncertainties of the labour market, as well as long-lasting indebtedness (many emigrants had had to borrow money for their passage to America) were some of the factors that delayed reunification of families. At the same time, the immigrants from Poland did not find in America the same family and village solidarity that they could count on in Poland. Many of them were shocked by the apparent indifference and apathy of their compatriots. After a short period of initial help from more established Poles in finding a job and shelter, many immigrants were left on their own. As one man put it in his memoirs: "Here, in America, every working man must think for himself, about himself and is not to count on anyone else" (Pamietniki Emigrantow, 1977, pp. 288, quoted in Spustek, 1982: 14). This passage aptly summarizes how an immigrant perceived the spirit of individualism that, as Thomas and Znaniiecki (1920) argued, was replacing the Old World "primary community" solidarity.

In their classic *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America*, Thomas and Znaniiecki (1920) trace the development of an immigrant community. One of their most important observations was that progressive modernization meant a breakdown of the traditional primary group based on formalized solidarity of family and kin. This breakdown had already begun in Poland with the progress of industrialization and the development of

market relations. It was aggravated in North America by the fact that immigrants were isolated from their original social milieu (1920, vol. 5, pp.166). The immediate effect was disorganization of immigrants' life. Thomas and Znaniecki saw this disorganization in cases of economic dependence on social assistance, breakup of families, demoralization, delinquency, "sexual immorality," and even murder (ibid., vol.5).

As a form of collective reaction to social disorganization, immigrants formed ethnic organizations. These organizations, according to Thomas and Znaniecki, were to replace the dissolving primary community. Their members sought forms of cooperation and solidarity through the formation of parishes, mutual aid organizations, fraternities, etc. While parishes could be seen as an attempt to recreate the old peasant *okolica* (i.e. a tightly knit neighborhood), secular institutions were oriented to creating a super-territorial Polish society in the new country (ibid. vol.5; see also Pacyga, 1982). Despite the rapid development of Polish organizations, Thomas and Znaniecki saw their future as rather bleak. Whatever their officially stated interests, one of the most important functions of the institutions was to facilitate the immigrants' contact with the host society and their eventual integration into that society. One of the general conclusions of the *Polish Peasant* was that the immigrants would eventually be assimilated and, in consequence, their institutions would dissolve. This view was to influence the sociology of ethnic relations in America for years to come (Del Balso, 1984). However, contrary to these previsions, Polish organizations in Canada and the United States were only to attain their full bloom in later decades (Znaniecki-Lopata, 1976). The organizational structure that developed during that early period studied by Thomas and Znaniecki survived and provided a basis on which later institutional developments took place (Radecki, 1974b).

Another response to the harsh realities of immigrant life was a return to Poland. In fact, letters and memoirs from that period show that many Poles did not plan to stay permanently in the first place. They came to America with a resolution to work, make savings and eventually return to Poland (Radecki and Heydenkorn, 1976: 29; Matejko, 1979; Thomas and Znaniecki, 1920, vol.2). Between 1906 and 1914, approximately 25% of Polish immigrants in Canada chose this solution (Avery and Fedorowicz, 1982: 9).

The second wave of Polish immigration came after the armistice of 1918 and the restoration of the Polish State. About 56,000 Poles entered Canada between 1919 and 1939 (Radecki and Heydenkorn, 1976: 31). Although most of the immigrants still originated from rural areas and declared themselves agriculturists (which was *nota bene* necessary to meet Canadian immigration requirements at that time), many already had some experience of work for modern industry. They moved straight to work in urban areas and industries of central Canada. In 1921 Ontario was home to almost 43,000 Poles, the largest Polish group in a single province. Most Polish immigrants in Canada were still farm-laborers and semi-skilled wage laborers but a noticeable number of small Polish enterprises had come into existence (Avery and Fedorowicz, 1982).

Immigrants of the second phase had a slightly easier time adapting to life in Canada than their predecessors. For one thing, they could count on established Polish communities and organizations to cushion the difficulties of arrival. The restored Polish State opened consulates to help the newly arrived, providing information and support in cases of emergencies. An emigration office was established in Warsaw and cooperated with Canadian companies in recruiting immigrants for specific projects. Still, the majority of immigrants came on their own and without any help (Avery and Fedorowicz, 1982; Radecki and Heydenkorn, 1976: 30-32).

Poles were now better prepared to meet the challenges of the New World. With the introduction of compulsory education by the newly restored Polish Republic, illiteracy rates dropped. Many immigrants had acquired some skills and experience with machinery during military service. Others had obtained administrative skills during the organization of the new State. An interesting aspect of this phase of immigration was that it contained a large number of people who had already been to North America before the First World War and had returned to Poland. Once in Poland, they were not able to adjust, either economically or socially, and decided to re-emigrate (Matejko, 1979).

The third major wave of Polish immigration began after the Second World War when, between 1946 and 1957, over 65,000 Poles entered Canada (Kogler, 1976: 17). Most of the migrants were ex-servicemen from the Polish Corps who had seen combat in various parts of the world, one-time members of the Underground<sup>1</sup>, former inmates of Nazi and Soviet concentration camps, and a large number of other displaced persons. They arrived mainly from Great Britain and other countries of Western Europe that often served as stepping-stone for escapees from the communist regimes in Central Europe (Kogler, *ibid.*).

This group was better prepared for life in Canada than any other preceding it. In contrast to previous waves of Polish immigration, it included large numbers of professionals: lawyers, teachers, scientists, physicians, etc. Many spoke English and/or French. The veterans knew how to operate various kinds of machinery; many of them had savings and belongings with them. In addition, an established network of local Polish organizations that made concentrated efforts to accommodate the new arrivals already existed (Radecki and Heydenkorn, *ibid.*).

Nevertheless, post-World War Two immigrants also experienced their share of hardship. The first arrivals, among them many highly skilled professionals, were required, as a condition of their entry to Canada, to sign two-year contracts obligating them to do unskilled or semi-skilled labour for designated Canadian enterprises, mainly in farming, mining, and lumbering industries. Later they would be formally allowed to change jobs and bring their families to Canada (Matejko and Matejko, 1974: 40-41; Radecki and Heydenkorn, 1976: 32-34). However, even after the two-year period most were still compelled to work in low-paid, menial jobs before they were able to move into their former professions (Kogler, 1976: 17-18; see also Niesiobedzka, 1974).

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<sup>1</sup> The term “Underground” (Pol. *Podziemie*) refers to a vast system of clandestine organizations that existed in Poland under the German and Soviet occupation, during World War Two. They formed an underground state complete with civil administration, judiciary system, educational system, police, military units, etc.



Other problems pertained to the fact that most of these people regarded themselves as political exiles. They had not planned to come to Canada in the first place and did not see it as a permanent place of residence. As years passed, they were forced to abandon their hopes of return to Poland and come to terms with the permanency of their situation (Kogler, *ibid.*; Brzezinski, 1974).

Since 1957, the pace of Polish immigration to Canada has slowed. One reason was the restriction on emigration and freedom of movement introduced by the Soviet-instilled regime in Poland. Between 1957 and 1986, 55,000 Poles entered Canada, many of them post-war refugees who had originally settled in various countries of Western Europe, Latin America, and Australia, and who later decided to move to Canada (Radecki and Heydenkorn, 1976: 34-35; Kosela and Szafnicki, 1991: 67). Some were cases of family reunification. In fact, family reunification and forced exile were the only cases where emigration was officially allowed by Poland's communist authorities. Other newcomers included defectors who claimed refugee status in Canada, or who defected to Western Europe and applied for immigration to Canada.

Between the end of World War Two and the end of the communist regime in 1989, the periods of greater intensity of Polish immigration to North America corresponded to political and economic crises in Poland. The post-Solidarity period (between 1981 and 1986) brought a 5% increase in the overall number of Polish immigrants settled in Canada (Kosela and Szafnicki, 1991: 71). In terms of regional distribution, the recent immigrants settled in Ontario, with Quebec (mainly Montreal) and British Columbia being the second and third choices (Kosela and Szafnicki, *ibid.*; Radecki and Heydenkorn, 1976: 35).

When compared to their predecessors, immigrants from post-war Poland find the least problems adjusting to Canadian society. Apart from some cases of sponsored family members, they are all well educated. Most arrive with university or technical degrees and with some knowledge of English or French, which partly reflects contemporary Canada's immigration policies (Radecki and Heydenkorn, *ibid.*: 34-35). For those who do not

speak either one of Canada's official languages, training is offered by provincial governments. Matejko, who studied the adaptation of Polish professionals at the end of the 1970's found them well established and remarkably well adapted to the Canadian way of life (1982: 363). Although there are no studies done on the most recent arrivals, it is only reasonable to assume that, at least until the recession of the late 1980's, many of them also found it relatively easy to enter their professions.

If in the first two periods of Polish immigration, a certain number of Poles chose to return to the country of origin, and those who came right after World War Two at least entertained such thoughts for a while, this was not the case with people who arrived from the communist Poland. A return meant inevitable harassment by authorities and in many cases, imprisonment. Consequently, until 1989, those immigrants had no choice and no plans to return, a factor that might have affected the patterns of their adjustment. Many came as political refugees and these considered themselves "eternal exiles," given the apparent permanency of the communist regime in Eastern Europe at the time. For these reasons, one can assume that their adaptation followed a different pattern than what is usually described in the literature about exiles and different again from that of ordinary economic immigrants (c.f. Apfelbaum and Vasquez, 1983; Vasquez, 1987).

After the collapse of the communist regime, many Poles have chosen to return to Poland. Although the full extent of this movement is yet to be assessed, it had significant proportions, at least initially. For example, from January to May 1996, the Polish consulate in New York registered over five hundred resettlement claims from Polish citizens. At that time, the corresponding figure for Montreal was twenty-five (figures based on personal communication with a source in the consulate), which was still high, considering that the overall population of Poles in Montreal is ten times smaller than the one in New York. It has to be added that this was almost seven years after the collapse of the communist regime in Warsaw when many of the former political refugees and politically motivated emigrants may have already gone back. Time will show the character, size, and the permanence of this movement.

## The community today

In 1986, there were 222,260 persons of homogenous Polish origin (i.e. whose both parents were Polish) in Canada, which amounted to 0.9% of the Canadian population. At the same time, there were 612,105 persons who declared Polish origin or who had at least one parent of Polish origin (Kosela and Szafnicki, 1991: 20). By 1986, most Polish Canadians lived in Ontario, home to 117,575 (52.9%) “homogeneous” Poles, while the Prairie Provinces together numbered 63,845 (28.73%).<sup>2</sup> The percentage of Poles of mixed origin follows similar patterns of localization. The decisive shift in Polish settlement from the Prairies to central Canada happened after World War Two when some of the previous generations of Polish immigrants moved to Ontario while simultaneously 50% of the postwar arrivals settled in Ontario. At the same time only 19% went to the Prairies (Kogler, *ibid.*: 18-19). In 1986, the other two provinces containing a large Polish population were British Columbia (19,305 or 8.69%) and Quebec (18,830 or 8.47%) (Kosela and Szafnicki, 1986: 22). Along with the shift of the Polish population from the Prairie Provinces to the center of Canada came a shift from rural to urban distribution. In 1981, as many as 88% of Poles were living in cities, compared to 49.3% in 1941 (Heydenkorn, 1986; Kogler, 1976: 19).

Using mother tongue as the criterion of belonging to the Polish group, one can determine that as recently as 1996, there were 18,455 Poles living in Quebec. The corresponding figure for Montreal was 16,630 (Census Canada, Statistics Canada, 1996), from which it is obvious that the overwhelming majority of Polish-Quebecers live in the city. There is no “Polish neighborhood” to speak of in Montreal today. The figures concerning knowledge of official languages in Canada among this group are presented in the table below:

Table 1. Population by detailed mother tongue. Mother tongue: Polish. Source: Census Canada, Statistics Canada, 1996.

	Province of Quebec	Montreal
Total knowledge of official	18,455	16,630

<sup>2</sup> The figures for the year 1986 are based on *Dimensions: Profile of Ethnic Groups*, Census Canada 1986, cited in Kosela and Szafnicki, 1991.

languages		
English only	5,470	5,045
French only	2,180	1,805
Both English and French	9,735	8,740
Neither English nor French	1,070	1,030

### **Occupational status and mobility**

Polish immigrants started at the lowest level of the social ladder. As mentioned, people who arrived in the first phases of immigration were forced to take unskilled or semi-skilled and, consequently, low-paid jobs. Farmers who started from scratch did not fare any better. The Great Depression and other economic fluctuations of the century did not help to improve the situation of immigrants – they were among the first ones to suffer in times of crises. Nevertheless, the Polish group as a whole has enjoyed a steady growth in terms of occupational status and income. Already by the mid 1920's, Polish immigrant farmers owned nearly 4,000 farms worth a total of \$27,000,000 and with total yearly incomes of around \$7,000,000. Added to the possessions and income of their descendants, that figure would be 2½ times higher (Radecki and Heydenkorn, 1976: 170). By 1915, there was a considerable number of small enterprises owned by Poles, including twenty-eight in Montreal, among them restaurants, groceries, travel, real estate, and insurance agencies, bakeries, etc., and a financial company with a capital of \$50,000 (Radecki and Heydenkorn. *ibid.*: 180).

The arrival of many professionals and academics after World War Two brought further improvements in the status of Poles in Canada. Polish names appeared among doctors, engineers, professors, etc. Among other things, Polish scientists from this generation set up the Department of Aeronautics at the University of Montreal (Radecki and Heydenkorn, 1976: 181). In 1961, 40% of the Polish labour force in Toronto were already employed in white collar positions and about 50% worked in blue collar occupations (*ibid.*: 182). Kosela and Szafnicki argue that since the middle of the 1960's Poles have been one of the better-educated ethnic groups in Canada (1991: 77-78). In 1986, the average income of a Polish family in Canada was between \$39,000 and \$44,000 (Kosela and Szafnicki, *ibid.*: 81).

## **Institutional structure**

It has already been mentioned that creating their own institutions was one of the ways through which Polish immigrants responded to the harsh social and physical realities of the host country. Today, in cities like Montreal, where there are no specifically Polish neighborhoods a network of ethnic institutions helps spatially dispersed Poles maintain a sense of community. These ethnic institutions also cater to many social, material and emotional needs of the community's members.

Most of today's institutions have their roots in the first years of Polish immigration to North America. The first were of religious character, which was a consequence of the traditionally dominant role of the Catholic Church in the life of Polish peasants. The parishes not only managed the spiritual needs of the faithful, but were also centers of community life. With time, numerous associations, both religious and secular, formed around them, with priests providing active leadership. The first secular institutions were mutual aid societies, providing life insurance as well as sickness and unemployment insurance to the members (Avery and Fedorowicz, 1991: 8; Radecki, 1974: 81-91).

The Catholic clergy established the first network of Polish schools in Canada, which started functioning as early as 1875. The first Polish newspapers were also an initiative of the clerical establishment. Apart from covering religious topics, they provided information for newcomers, covered events from Poland and other issues that mattered to the Polish-Canadian community (Kogler, 1976: 20).

Almost simultaneously, however, there were attempts to break the monopoly of the Church over the institutional life of the community. As early as the 1870's, organizations that catered to the secular needs of the immigrants were created – mainly mutual aid, business and fraternal associations – that were not controlled by the Catholic clergy. In 1921, several such organizations merged into the *Polish Friendly Alliance Society in Canada*, today known as the *Polish Alliance of Canada*. It became the first major Polish organization with ambitions to unite Polish Canadians regardless of their religious

persuasion. The *Alliance* initiated a number of internal insurance programs for the members, created a network of Polish language schools, and sponsored a variety of choirs, theaters, libraries, sports clubs, etc. Later, it would establish cultural foundations to facilitate cultural exchange with Poland (Heydenkorn, 1974a; Kogler, 1976; Radecki and Heydenkorn, 1976: 60-85; Radecki, 1974: 81-91).

Polish institutions, both religious and secular, enjoyed steady growth throughout the 1920's and 1930's. By 1929, the clergy had established a network of 33 Polish parishes and 157 missions. Its secular counterpart and rival, the *Polish Alliance*, was publishing its own periodical and had 17 branches established around the country. On the political level, the *Polish National Union of Canada* attracted the more conservative, pro-clerical and nationalistic elements of the community. Other larger organizations worth mentioning include the Canadian branches of the American-based *Polish Army Veterans Association*, Polish branches of the Canadian Legion, the *Polish Teacher's Association*, the *Falcons* (a sports and gymnastics society with a paramilitary structure that was typical of the period), the *White Eagle Society*, Polish branches of the Boy Scouts and Girl Guides, etc. Various independent mutual aid societies also existed (Avery and Fedorowicz, 1982: 11-12; Radecki, 1974: 81-91).

World War II brought profound modifications in the organizational structure of the Polish community. In 1944 the *Canadian Polish Congress* was formed as an umbrella organization uniting all major Polish Canadian groups. Its original purpose was to coordinate the efforts of member organizations in assisting the anticipated influx of Polish immigrants and refugees after the War. As it turned out, it would serve this function throughout the whole era of communist rule in Poland and still does so today. It remains the largest and most influential Polish association in Canada, representing about 160 organizations and having branches in all major Canadian cities (Avery and Fedorowicz, *ibid.*; Radecki and Heydenkorn, 1976: 60-85). The Quebec branch of Canadian Polish Congress, whose headquarters are in Montreal, represents 32 various Polish organizations today, among them a library and scientific institute, a school council, a credit union, a trade council, a few professional associations, a women's

federation, a number of mutual aid and philanthropic associations, veteran's organizations, choirs, folk dance groups, etc. In addition, there are a number of Polish organizations that are not associated with the Congress.

Post-war immigrants established associations of markedly different character than those created prior to the War including: the *Association of Polish Engineers*; the *Federation of Polish Women*; the *Polish ex-Political Prisoners Association*; the *Polish Library and Institute* in Montreal; and the *Polish Research Institute* in Toronto. These new organizations reflected the needs and interests of new immigrants. Several associations also appeared to cater to the needs of Polish Army veterans, and to propagate the idea of Polish independence throughout Canada and beyond (Radecki, 1974b: 81-91; Avery and Fedorowicz, *ibid.*: 16).

### **Economic institutions**

Apart from their socio-cultural activities, many of the first Polish associations in Canada provided insurance programs for their members. When the community became more affluent, particularly after World War Two, these programs were gradually replaced by credit unions. The first, the *St. Stanislaus Credit Union* was created in Toronto, in 1945. As late as the 1980's, it remained the largest financial institution of its kind in North America with capital assets of \$80 million (Kogler, 1976: 30; Heydenkorn, 1986). The banking needs of Montreal's Polish community are served by the *Polish Credit Union of Quebec*.

The community hall is another popular type of economic institution. Many Polish community halls exist in Canada today, including fifteen in Toronto, ten in Hamilton, and seven in Montreal. The halls often serve as centers of activity for Polish associations that use them for meetings, the celebration of national holidays, dances, and social gatherings. They also have reading rooms, libraries, billiard rooms and space for other cultural activities. Profits derive from membership fees, revenues from renting the halls for weddings, dances, and bingo, and in some cases, the sale of liquor.

In 1956, a new type of financial institution appeared: the so-called “cultural foundation.” After the first one (the *Adam Mickiewicz Foundation*) was established, it became the ambition of every major Polish association to establish its own foundation. These base their activities on investments and donations, the proceeds from which are distributed in the form of scholarships, subsidies to various cultural institutions and events, libraries, and Polish part-time schools (Kogler, 1976: 32). At least two such foundations of long standing operate in Montreal: *The Polish Social and Cultural Foundation* and *Wieslaw Dymny Foundation*. In addition, there is the recently established but already well respected *Canadian Foundation for Polish Studies*. Its principal activities include sponsoring publications and organizing lectures and conferences designed to promote knowledge about Polish history, society and culture in Canada.

Apart from these communal institutions, there are a considerable number of specifically Polish or Polish-owned business enterprises in each major Canadian city, which cater to the needs of the local Polish community, although most of them rely on other patrons as well.

### **Language Schools**

The role of the clergy in establishing Polish language schools has already been mentioned. For the first twenty years of the twentieth century, Polish parochial schools functioned as full-time institutions and formed a part of the bilingual school system in Manitoba and Saskatchewan. They were later replaced by the English language school system imposed by the government, only to be reorganized into a network of Polish part-time schools. From the beginning, secular Polish organizations had ambitions of establishing their own schools, independent of the parochial system. Soon, diverse Polish educational institutions proliferated around Canada, and the major associations established their educational commissions to bring some cohesion into this uncoordinated network. Financial support for the schools remains the responsibility of the sponsoring organizations. As late as 1974, there were sixty-three Polish part-time schools in Canada sponsored by various organisms. They served approximately 3,600 pupils, about 5% of the total number of Polish children of school age in Canada (Kogler, 1976: 23-24;



Radecki, 1974a). In 1997, there were already ninety elementary schools with 12,000 students and nineteen high schools with 1,500 students (Wolski, 1997: 18). Among the institutions of higher learning, one that is fully concentrated on Polish studies is the Department of Polish Studies at the University of Toronto (ibid.).

In Montreal, there are eight Polish elementary schools and two high schools associated with the local Polish School Council (Polish Schools in Montreal, 1997). In addition, there is the *Polish Institute and Library* associated with McGill University that sponsors lectures and conferences.

## Media

It is difficult to determine the number of Polish periodicals appearing in Canada today. Given the small size of Polish communities, many newspapers and magazines are short-lived, unable to support themselves on the limited market. Some of the others appear irregularly, for the same reasons. From the time the first appeared in Winnipeg, in 1904, until 1963, there were over one hundred and twenty-five different Polish publications available at one time or another. Today, such periodicals cover a whole spectrum of issues: political, social, cultural, religious. The first weekly was the *Gazeta Katolicka*. Established in 1908, for a long time it remained the major newspaper of the Polish community. It still enjoys a monopoly among Catholic publications (today as *Glos Polski*) and has a circulation of about 5,500 copies. In addition, there are a large number of strictly parochial publications such as bulletins, local newsletters, etc. The monopoly of Catholic newspapers was broken in 1933 by *Zwiazkowiec*, the organ of the *Polish Alliance*. Since then, *Zwiazkowiec* has become the largest Polish periodical in Canada, with a circulation of 10,000. In addition, there are many independent weeklies and biweeklies with circulation ranging from 600 to 4,000 copies.

Given the limited market for Polish periodicals in Canada, many are non-profit organizations (Radecki and Heydenkorn, 1976; Heydenkorn, 1986; see also Adolf, 1974). Some have very modest beginnings, which does not preclude a chance of business success. Montreal's *Biuletyn Polonijny* (*Polish Community Bulletin*) is an example of a

periodical with modest beginnings that has quickly found its niche on the local Polish market.

In addition to the press, Polish-Canadian television and radio programs have short spots in public stations in major Canadian cities. Montreal has one radio program and one weekly television program broadcast on Saturdays. The main content of the programs is the news concerning the local Polonia. There are no data available as to the role of these media for the local Polish community, but at present they appear to have a minimal influence as compared to news available from Poland via the Internet and satellite television.

### **Participation in life of the community**

Participation in Polish institutions has been diminishing over the years. Registered membership in secular organizations has dropped to 7% of the Polish population. Parish membership and church attendance has dropped as well (Heydenkorn, 1986). One of the explanations for this situation could be the progressive assimilation of the Polish community; especially the fact that that immigration from Poland has dropped considerably over the last fifty years. This would seemingly confirm the hypothesis of Herbert Gans who correlates the low participation in ethnic institutions in the United States to the assimilation of ethnic groups (1979, 1994). However, Gans' hypothesis assumes a one-to-one relationship between "levels" of ethnicity and the intensity of institutional life. There are indications that this does not have to be the case. Chrisman's findings in his study of the Danish community in California (1981) suggest that participation in ethnic institutions could be explained more in terms of choices made by individuals than an automatic consequence of immigrant status or ethnicity. Chrisman found many of his subjects well assimilated into American society, yet still active in ethnic associations. He argues that their participation is a result of "choices made to maximize the various social goals held by individuals" (ibid.: 265).

With regard to Polish institutional life, low participation cannot always be attributed to low ethnic identity. It seems that individual choices and interests, although socially

determined to some extent, play their role independently of the level of ethnic commitment. Matejko's study of adaptation and ethnic identity among the Polish intelligentsia in Canada (1982), found that the subjects expressed very little interest in participating in ethnic institutional life. At the same time, however, they show a high level of ethnic commitment of an informal nature: they are interested in Polish issues, speak and read Polish, and have many friends among Poles (1982: 363-372). Matejko also found a "remarkably good" adaptation of his subjects to the Canadian way of life and what he regards as "a harmonious reconciliation of Polish identity with Canadian identity" (ibid.: 363).

At the same time, Matejko notes that those Poles who belong to the working class, or those on the margin of the intelligentsia, show a much greater interest in ethnic institutional life. One reason for this difference, the author suggests, is that ethnic institutions provide working class Poles with rare opportunities for significant social contact outside work and the family circle. Ethnic associations offer opportunities for gaining a measure of prestige and recognition that are denied the members by mainstream Canadian society. Matejko further argues that ethnic associations have always served these functions for working class Poles, who formerly constituted the bulk of Polish immigrants (ibid.: 364). Helena Znaniecki-Lopata makes similar argument to explain the survival of Polish ethnic institutions in the USA, the same institutions whose disappearance had been forecast by her father (the Thomas-Znaniecki team) fifty years earlier. She argues that ethnic institutions provide a convenient forum for status competition in the community, given that it still has difficulty competing in the wider host society (1976: 47-63).

Polish professionals in Canada today, argues Matejko (1982), do not need ethnic institutions as much as working class Poles because, being more successful and better adapted than their compatriots, they have sufficient possibilities for self-fulfillment acting in the society at large (1982: 364-365). Another reason given by Matejko for the low interest in institutional life is the general reluctance of post-war immigrants to

participate in formalized structures and activities, since institutional participation was frequently imposed on them by the communist regime in Poland.

### **Polish identity in Canada**

Works on Polish identity in Canada usually distinguish between Polish national identity and the identity of Polish Canadians. This distinction has its reflection in terminology. The Polish group in Canada is usually referred to as *Canadian Polonia* (*Polonia Kanadyjska*), both by its own members and by their compatriots in Poland. The term *Polonia* is derived from the Latin name for Poland, but it has come to designate Polish groups in diaspora and is widely used in both popular and official discourses. Thus, one can speak of the *Canadian Polonia*, the *American Polonia*, the *Australian Polonia*, etc. (Radecki and Heydenkorn, 1976). With these names there also goes a sense and recognition of distinct identities (cf. Brzezinski, 1974: 21-25). Helena Znaniecki-Lopata defines Polonia in the following way:

Polonia is the ethnic community itself; it encompasses all those who identify with it and are engaged in some form of interaction and activity contributing to its existence. The members can be scattered in a variety of work and residential centers; the community is maintained through superterritorial organizations, mass communications, and personal contact (Znaniecki-Lopata, 1976: 44).

In many respects, Polonia is an “imagined community” in the sense described by Benedict Anderson (1983). Yet, the fact of it being “imagined” does not preclude the reality of its existence. The organizations are real and the bonds, even if they are imagined, are real. And when it comes to action, as for example help to Poland in times of need, the community can make quite tangible efforts and muster considerable resources, the materiality of which cannot be doubted.

If there is indeed a distinct identity of Canadian Polonia, it nevertheless has strong roots in Polish national identity. Historically speaking, people from the first phase of Polish immigration to America did not form a self-conscious and unified group. Many of them did not identify with Poland nor with the Polish nation. The first had not been in existence for a good hundred years, while the second was an abstract idea of little

relevance to illiterate peasants who identified more with their primary communities in the Old Country (Thomas and Znaniecki, 1920: 99). It is argued that for many immigrants the consciousness of being Polish grew only after they came to America, through the fact that they were immersed into a linguistically and culturally different environment and as a result of vigorous agitation by Polish nationalist leaders (Radecki and Heydenkorn, 1976: 78; Thomas and Znaniecki, *ibid.*: 93-165). From the beginning of Polish mass migration to North America, strong pro-Polish propaganda was spread by patriotically inspired individuals and groups. In this respect, the Canadian situation did not differ much from developments south of the border. At the end of the nineteenth century, most Polish organizations propagated strong Polish national sentiments. Allegiance to the Polish nation had to be sworn by all members, and celebrations of national symbols and holidays were strictly observed. Many nationalist organizations based in Poland were recreated on North-American ground (cf. Znaniecki and Thomas, *ibid.*).

It is hard to determine at which time the Polish group in Canada became a group *sensu stricto*, conscious of its own existence and separate interests. Thomas and Znaniecki argue that the very progress of organizational life increased immigrants' self-consciousness as a separate community (*ibid.*: 114-115). Based on developments in organizational life, Poles in Canada would have developed a consciousness of belonging to a distinct Polish-Canadian group before World War One. Not that the sentiment for Poland disappeared among them. When the hopes of regaining Polish independence were rekindled during World War One, volunteers from all over North America went to Polish "Blue Army" that was being organized in Niagara-on-the-Lake. The army soon swelled to twenty thousand soldiers and was shipped to Europe to take part in the French campaign and later in the struggles for the newly restored Polish state (Brzezinski, 1974: 18).

Without relinquishing its interest in Poland, the Canadian Polonia slowly developed a sense of self. Problems of gaining material well-being and securing its own position in Canadian society have gradually become more important than politics in Poland. A growing interest in the problems of Canada and acceptance of Canadian values is

discernible over the years in the discourse of Polish organizations and press (Adolf, 1974; Stachniak, 1991). Both have propagated the idea of *Polonia* as a Polish community that constitutes a segment of the Canadian nation. At an early date, this awareness was formalized in the constitutions of major Polish-Canadian organizations (Heydenkorn, 1974a and 1974c; The Canadian Polish Congress, 1983). It would require a separate study to determine to what extent the identity of *Polonia* has also been produced by this discourse. In the meantime, one can observe how the names of organizations have changed in this respect. Names like “Sons of Poland” have gradually disappeared, replaced by the ones with such modifiers as *Canadian (Kanadyjski), ...in Canada* and *...of Canada*. Today the words *Polonia* and *Kanadyjski* are found in the Polish name of the largest Polish organization in Canada – *Kongres Polonii Kanadyjskiej (Canadian Polish Congress)*.

Throughout the history of *Polonia*, concerns with its own interests have been intertwined with concerns for the problems of Poland. The latter have always come to the fore in times of crises, mainly wars, political turbulence, natural disasters. During such periods in the past, *Polonia* mobilized its financial and often human resources to help Poland. The organizations lobbied the Canadian government in matters of admitting Polish refugees, demanding statements in favor of Polish independence or diplomatic notes protesting human rights abuse in Communist Poland, etc. (Brzezinski, 1974; Heydenkorn, 1974c: 167-173). Between the periods of crises, the interest of *Polonia* in the matters of the Old country has usually subsided as its members turned their attention to their own problems (Stachniak, 1991; see also Matejko and Matejko, 1974: 49-53).

### **Patterns of personal identification**

On the level of personal identification, the question of Polish identity is more complicated. Organizational politics cannot give us a full picture here. After all, only about 7% of Poles in Canada participate in the institutional life of *Polonia* (Heydenkorn, 1986). On the other hand, as mentioned earlier, low participation in ethnic institutions does not necessarily mean a low level of ethnic commitment. The ability to speak Polish is also a poor criterion for establishing Polish identity (around 30% of Poles in Canada

speak mostly Polish at home [Matejko, 1982]). It has been argued that inability to speak Polish can be counterbalanced by a thorough awareness of Polish culture and history, by personal identification with the Polish group, and even by membership in ethnic organizations (Radecki and Heydenkorn, 1976: 206-217; cf. Chrisman, 1981).

Matejko (1974; 1982) argues that, at least with regard to some members of Canadian Polonia, a double identity would be an appropriate classification. In his study of the Polish intelligentsia (1982), he found that subjects were able to harmoniously reconcile their Polish and Canadian identities. Similar arguments have recently been made with regard to other immigrant groups (cf. Meintel, 1992; Catani, 1986).

### **Relations with the majority: facing prejudice and discrimination**

Prejudice against Poles was from the beginning an aspect of the general attitude that the dominant society expressed towards immigrant groups. At least as late as the 1920's, negative images of immigrants, Poles among them, could still be found in scholarly literature in Canada and the United States. Immigrants were portrayed as illiterate, mentally deficient, undesirable, immoral, criminally minded, dirty, inwardly clannish, unable or unwilling to assimilate, as "balkanizing" Canada, etc. (Avery-Fedorowicz, 1982: 9). Even W. I. Thomas himself is known to have been negatively biased against Polish immigrants (Znaniiecki-Lopata, 1976: 71). The images of Poles and other Slavic peoples as primitive and backward were still present in Canada after World War Two (cf. Niesiobedzka, 1976). It is not within the scope of this paper to explore the origins and functions of these attitudes, derived from the asymmetrical distribution of social, economic, political, and cultural power in North American society (cf. Driedger, 1989: 259-323).

One of the better-known aspects of anti-Polish prejudice were so-called "Polish jokes". They already existed in the 1930's but showed a dramatic increase during the late 1960's and 1970's, at a time when most Polish Americans and Canadians could be found in the upper segments of the working class and the middle class strata of society (Znaniiecki-

Lopata, 1976; Dunin-Markiewicz, 1976: 68). The reasons for this increase have been attributed to social mobility itself. When Poles reached a higher social status, they also became more visible to the majority that felt threatened in its privileged position (Kapiszewski, 1978: 86-91; Znaniecki-Lopata, *ibid.*: 76). It has also been pointed out that Polish jokes replaced the previously more popular Black and Jewish jokes, when the latter became no longer socially acceptable. Poles are potentially good targets for ethnic jokes because they possess more identifying features (known to the majority) than many other white ethnic groups (Brunvand, 1970: 138). Greeley (1974), commenting on general anti-Polish prejudice, argues that ever since overt expressions of anti-Semitism or racism became taboo, Catholics, and particularly Polish Catholics have become ethnic scapegoats of the majority (1974: 109, cited in Kapiszewski, *ibid.*: 88).

For its part, American Polonia reacted vigorously, even if with delay, to the increase in ethnic slurs and to other anti-Polish expressions. It established its own Anti-Defamation Committee, and organized protests and a series of public relations campaigns in mass media designed to change the image of Polonia in North American society (Znaniecki-Lopata, 1976: 72-81). It remains to be determined to what extent this campaign has been successful. For one thing, Polish jokes have largely disappeared from public discourse, sharing the fate of other outward expressions of social prejudice that have become “politically incorrect” in recent years.

Despite generally acknowledged prejudice and discrimination against Poles in North America, there were no studies on the subject until the 1970’s (cf. Dunin-Markiewicz, 1976: 68). A number of studies dealt with stereotypes of Poles in the United States but interestingly enough, they displayed contradictory results, including the existence of a positive stereotype (cf. Kapiszewski, 1978: 81-85). Kapiszewski (1978). In a study conducted among American students belonging to various ethnic groups, researchers found that, except for Black students, all groups in the studied population had a positive stereotype of Poles.



In 1976, Dunin-Markiewicz published a systematic study of prejudice against Poles among Canadian high school students and American college students. The author also studied the perception of prejudice among Polish high school students in Ontario. One of the goals was to determine whether the victims' perception of prejudice would affect their aspirations and educational achievements. She found that students and their parents were aware of prejudice against Poles, but that it did not affect children's aspirations or school performance. She concluded that, if anything, the life achievements of Polish students could be thwarted by outside discrimination but not by the subjects' perception of it (1976: 117-119). Dunin-Markiewicz did not explore the sources of prejudice against Poles, but she pointed out to the general importance of ethnic differentiation in the socio-economic stratification of Canada (ibid.: 68-70).

Some years later, Driedger and Mezoff (1981) found discrimination against Poles among high school students in Winnipeg. About half the Polish students reported cases of discrimination against them, mainly in the form of ethnic jokes, verbal abuse and language ridicule (see also Driedger, 1989: 352-363). However, the authors' findings also indicate that on the Bogardus social distance scale Poles rate rather high (i.e. less distant). They were placed in the fifth place, among twenty-one groups covered in the study, preceding, among others, the French, the Germans and the Italians (ibid.).

### **Attitudes towards the majority**

Despite the history of prejudice and discrimination, the attitude of Poles towards Canada in general is reported as very positive. Polish Canadians are said to identify with the wider Canadian society, its laws and institutions (Radecki and Heydenkorn, 1976:187-188; cf. Znaniecki-Lopata, 1976:69-70). All large Polish organizations embrace the dominant social and political system, especially since the introduction of the policy of multiculturalism in the 1970's (The Canadian Polish Congress, 1983). Adolf's analysis of the Polish ethnic press in the 1970's found that it perpetuated the dominant myth of Canada. The press presented Canada, among other things, as a land of choice, a free country, a country of equal rights, a safe place to live, and a land of opportunity and economic security (1974: 109-110). Newspapers also defined Polonia's relationship with

Canada in terms of Canadian patriotism and an obligation to participate in public life and to contribute to the prosperity of the land (*ibid.*: 11-112). One can discern a general eagerness in the papers to construct a model of a Polish Canadian who combines Polish and Canadian identities. Twenty years later, Stachniak (1991) would still report similar tendencies in the Polish press. As Adolf argues, these tendencies reflect both the desires of the editorial boards and their contributors, and tendencies in Polonia (*ibid.*: 111). His views are supported by the findings of Dunin-Markiewicz (1976). The Polish students and their parents studied by Dunin-Markiewicz had a generally good opinion of Canadians (*ibid.*: 95). Unfortunately, her study does not differentiate between ethnic categories, other than Polish and Canadian.

However, there are also negative accents in the Polish opinion about Canadians, as reflected in the existing literature on the subject. The most often repeated criticisms relate to the general prejudice of Canadians against Poles and immigrants, and to Canadians' ignorance of the value and achievements of immigrants. The subjects of Dunin-Markiewicz's study, for example, thought that Canadians did not give Poles the credit they deserved (*ibid.*: 95). The same concern is repeated in immigrants' memoirs and reminiscences, and in the discourse of Polonia's leaders (cf. papers in Matejko, 1979; Niesiobedzka, 1974; Kawczak, 1984: 57). At the same time, the middle class Poles who arrived in Canada after World War Two expressed their shock at what they perceived as a low level of education, general uncouthness and lack of sophistication among the Canadian population (cf. Jablonska, 1979; Niesiobedzka, *ibid.*). Women who arrived from post-war Poland, complained about the unequal treatment of women, as compared to their country of origin (Rappak, 1979).

### **Relations with other ethnic and racial groups**

The relations between Polonia and other ethnic groups on this continent are usually described in terms of mutual tolerance and cooperation, particularly with other immigrant groups from Central Europe (Radecki and Heydenkorn, 1976: 178; cf. Znaniecki-Lopata, 1976: 80). Likewise, the official discourse of Polonia's leaders propagates the principles

of cooperation, mutual understanding and support for other ethnic groups (Gertler, 1983: 31).

There have been a few documented cases in the past of mutual animosities and conflict situations between Poles and a few other groups in Canada, namely Ukrainians and Lithuanians. The nature of these conflicts will be briefly discussed, but it should be stressed that none of these situations had its roots in the Canadian context. In both cases, conflict was rooted in political and military events in Europe in the 1920's and 1930's. Historical events in Poland, particularly during World War Two and in the aftermath, are also regarded as the main reason for the somewhat strained relations with the Jewish community. In contrast to these cases, it may be worth having a look at the situation in the United States, where the Polish community has been implicated in the racial conflict and where the background of the conflict is said to be largely socio-economic.

Polish-Ukrainian relations in Canada were initially rather friendly and cordial. The first waves of Polish and Ukrainian migration contained large numbers of peasants whose national identities had not yet been developed. The two groups had coexisted for centuries in the southeast regions of Poland (known as Galicia) and many spoke a dialect that was a mixture of the two languages. Both Ukrainians and Poles began immigrating to Canada at the same time. They both came to settle in the Prairies and suffered the same deprivations of early immigrant life (Matejko, 1974). The Poles, who were a minority among the Galician immigrants, often settled in the larger Ukrainian communities. Despite the difference in religious denominations (Ukrainians were mostly Orthodox, while Poles were Roman Catholic), there were many cases of cooperation in the building and sharing of churches and community centers. (Matejko, 1982; Radecki and Heydenkorn, 1976: 190-191). The reminiscences of immigrants from this period stress the friendship and cordiality in relations between the two groups (see papers in Matejko, 1979: 349-353).

The developments in Europe at the end of World War Two and shortly after affected these established relationships. Fighting broke out between the newly restored Polish

State and Ukrainian nationalists in Galicia. It ended with the establishment of Polish control over the disputed territories. The Ukrainian community in Canada resented and protested the new political arrangements. Accusations against Poland in the Ukrainian-Canadian press were quickly answered by local Polish newspapers with nationalist inclinations. The deterioration of relations was exacerbated by the arrival of new Polish and Ukrainian immigrants who transplanted their nationalist sentiments and mutual antipathies onto Canadian ground. As a result of these developments, relations between the two groups remained strained well into the middle of the 1940's (Matejko, 1982; Radecki and Heydenkorn, 1976: 190). After World War Two, the disputed territories in Europe went under Soviet control and mutual animosities lost their ground.

Polish-Lithuanian relations in Canada have followed a very similar pattern. The two groups were initially very close. For about three centuries, until the end of the eighteenth century, Poland and Lithuania formed a Commonwealth in which Poles and Lithuanians constituted what in Canada are the two charter groups, without marked animosities.<sup>3</sup> After the partition of the Commonwealth, both groups cooperated in anti-Russian insurrections. Even today, both nations share many national heroes and historical figures. In Canada, Polish and Lithuanian immigrants maintained friendly relationships, where they chanced to live or work together. There existed Polish-Lithuanian clubs, the two groups shared priests and parishes, and many Lithuanians spoke Polish (Radecki and Heydenkorn, 1976: 190).

Events taking place in Europe at the end of World War One ended those friendly relations. Poland and Lithuania were restored as independent, but separate states and a dispute broke out over the city of Wilno (Vilnius). Relations between the two countries soured and so did those between the two groups in Canada. They would never regain the initial level of friendliness, even after World War Two, when the conflict was "resolved"

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<sup>3</sup> The official name of the state was, translated into English: *The Commonwealth of Poland and Lithuania*. The friendly coexistence of the two peoples prior to the partitions is not a myth and is a rare case in European history (cf. Davies, 1981).

for the two nations by the Soviet annexation of Lithuania (Radecki and Heydenkorn, *ibid.*).

Today, old grievances have lost their ground and Poland and Lithuania maintain friendly relations. However, the existence of a large Polish minority in Vilnius, currently under the threat of forcible Lithuanization, is a source of concern to many Poles and is still affecting relations (Zubek, 1993). If the situation in Vilnius becomes more dramatic, it may also spark a reaction by Polish-Canadian organizations that belong, together with Polish associations in Lithuania, to the *World Federation of Poles Abroad*.

It should be stressed that the conflict between Polish immigrants and their Ukrainian and Lithuanian counterparts never assumed explosive proportions in Canada. Also, mutual accusations were limited to the events taking place in Europe and did not focus on the communities in Canada. Perhaps, it should also be mentioned that until the end of the 1980's, the Canadian Polish Congress cooperated with both Lithuanian and Ukrainian organizations in the *Council of Captive European Nations* (Gertler, 1983: 31).

In contrast to these past conflicts, Polish-Jewish relations in Canada present a contemporary subject that unfortunately, to the best of my knowledge, has not been studied by social scientists. Polish-Jewish relations in general represent an extremely complex and sensitive subject, both in Poland and in North America, especially in the United States. It is not within the scope of this paper to even superficially discuss the historical developments leading to the present day situation, especially given that the discourses of both groups usually present them in different ways. Today, relations between both groups are somewhat strained and, as in the other two cases, past events that took place in Europe are the focus of these differences.

A short look at the situation in the United States should throw some light on the nature of this situation. In the United States there are frequent accusations of anti-Semitism levied by the Jewish community against Poles. While studies on the subject have indeed revealed a relatively high level of anti-Semitism among Poles in the United States, the

latter throw back accusations of anti-Polish sentiment among Jews (Kapiszewski, 1978: 76). In the 1970's, the Polish press in the United States attributed the increase in "Polish jokes" in the media to this anti-Polish sentiment and to deliberate efforts of the Jewish community, many of whose members hold prominent positions in the mass media, to give Poles a bad image (Znaniiecki-Lopata, 1976: 76, 79; cf. Kapiszewski, *ibid.*: 90).

Much more common arguments in Polish discourse today pertain to the very issue of anti-Semitism. Poles are particularly offended by what they see as a besmirching campaign by the Jewish community, accusing them of active participation in the Holocaust. They see those accusations as unjustified and as doing a great injustice to their nation, which, as they often emphasize, suffered no fewer losses at the hands of Nazi and Soviet oppressors than did the Jewish people (Kapiszewski, *ibid.*: 91; Znaniiecki-Lopata, *ibid.*).

Based on my observations, Polish-Jewish relations in Canada have followed similar patterns as in the United States, although (probably) to a lesser degree (cf. Radecki and Heydenkorn, 1976: 189). This issue will be treated in Part II of this study, where I examine how Poles in Canada represent these relations on the level of discourse. It should be emphasized, yet again, that whatever differences and disagreements there are between Poles and Jews, they have had little to do with the conditions that the two communities have met on this continent. Therefore, it is relevant, in the context of this study, to examine the one case where relations between Poles and another group have been largely determined by the socio-economic conditions that each has experienced on this continent: Polish-Black relations in the United States.

Polish-Black antagonism in the United States was first reported in the 1920's (Radzialowski, 1982). Later, in the 1930's, Polish parochial schools in Chicago were reported to refuse admission to Black children. In 1968, racist sentiments among the American Polonia were much publicized when its members voted for the candidates described as "racist," while ignoring candidates of Polish origin (Kapiszewski, 1978: 70-

71). In Greeley's studies, Poles were in first place on the racist scale, before Italians, French, Germans, and Irish (1971; see also Znaniecki-Lopata, 1976: 79-80).

Taking an historical perspective, Radzialowski (1982) examines the development of Polish-Black conflict in the 1930's in Detroit. He demonstrates how the conflict arose in the context of competition for jobs and housing between the two underprivileged groups, both plagued by poverty and discrimination. Prior to the thirties, there was no marked antagonism between Detroit's Polonia and the city's Blacks. Competition for work was limited to a small number of jobs on docks and in a few trades (Radzialowski, *ibid.*: 196). There was also very little competition for housing. At the turn of the century, Detroit's Black community numbered only about 4,000, i.e. only one-twelfth of the size of the Polish population. In a few older neighborhoods the two groups coexisted without any reported friction. By the end of the 1920's, however, Blacks were already arriving in Detroit in great numbers, escaping poverty and oppression in the South. Soon, their numbers rose to about 120,000, or almost one-half of the Polish population at that time. By the time of the Great Depression, the stage was set for the first major Polish-Black conflict.

Radzialowski (*ibid.*) further points out that both groups brought into the conflict a strong sense of oppression and memories of persecution and injustice. The problems of Blacks need not be explained: they have been widely publicized. Poles had behind them the tragedy of a partitioned country, the struggles for independence and the poverty and discrimination suffered in the United States. In the 1920's, they were only a little better off than Black Americans. The Depression hit the two groups more or less equally. Poles and Blacks found themselves pitted against each other in the struggle for scarce jobs. Polish workers, already highly unionized, often found themselves facing Blacks who were recruited to break their strikes. Severe confrontations occurred until the early 1940's and at times erupted in violence (*ibid.*: 202).

At the end of the 1930's, the conflict was further intensified by a growing competition for housing. Detroit's rapid population growth was not matched by an increase in housing.

Soon, the swelling Black population began moving in on the edges of Polish neighborhoods. The first clashes began when the city of Detroit decided to build housing projects for Blacks in Polish neighborhoods. The projects put the undesirable Blacks away from the dominant group and but amidst the Poles who were in need of subsidized housing, too. They lobbied the city to transfer housing to them. The ensuing strife was an occasion for outside groups with interest in racial conflict, such as Ku Klux Klan, to step in with leaflets and burning crosses (Radzialowski, 1982).

Today, competition for housing and a perceived threat of a so-called “Black expansion” still continue to be the main reasons for Black-Polish antagonism in the United States. Znaniecki-Lopata (1976) argues that Poles see “Black expansion” into their neighborhoods as threatening the value of their painfully acquired property, which for many immigrants, is proof of upward mobility. The value of property diminishes due to panic selling and moving. What the immigrants usually do not realize is that Blacks may be moving in because the neighborhood has already been deteriorating and becoming more affordable to the poor. It is worth adding that similar situations develop in other ethnic neighborhoods as well, and the attitudes of the Polish are not exceptional in this respect. For example, Ginsberg (1981) found similar patterns of development in racial relations in Jewish-Black neighborhoods.

To the economic competition Kapiszewski (1978) adds also status competitions as another reason for the Polish-Black conflict. The apparently improving status of the Black group is regarded as threatening to other ethnic groups that like to place themselves higher in the social hierarchy.

### **Towards analyzing Polish immigrant discourse**

This look at the Polish group in Canada from a historical and contemporary perspective should help us understand many aspects of Polish discourse, as analyzed in Part II. In many ways, the Canadian Polonia is a minority on the ascent in terms of economic position and social status. There is no doubt that Poles are still a minority in Canada, both in terms of numbers and access to social privilege and power. However, from the time of



being unskilled laborers belonging to the “non-preferred” category at the beginning of the century, they have considerably improved their lot, and a large proportion of the group belong to the Canadian middle class today. Their position places them in a particular relationship to Canadian society in general and to its constituent groups. All this, as well as the particular multiethnic context of Montreal influences the images that Poles in this city form of other groups constituting Canadian and Québécois societies.

From this situation follow certain concerns, ambitions, and dilemmas that find their way into the kinds of discourse produced by the subjects in this study. Some of these themes are still the same as they were over a hundred years ago when poor Polish peasants began arriving in the New World. Analyzing Polish immigrant discourse, it is evident that the specter of an “unwanted” category stills haunts these people, as they try to make sense of their place and of their identity in the host society and as they compare themselves to “others.”

The main concerns of Polish immigrants are still largely determined by economic factors and social status. The same factors have always borne heavily on the patterns of ethnic commitment, self-identification, and on Polish relations with the rest of Canadian society. No large sections of the Polish group in Canada ever found themselves directly pitted against another ethnic or racial category, as has been observed in the United States. However, the example from across the border tells a lot about the importance of socio-economic interests in intergroup relations.

At the same time, the other cases of interethnic conflict that were briefly discussed in this chapter remind us that there is no simple one-to-one relationship between economic interests and people’s behavior. Past antagonisms offer convenient examples of how ideology and politics work as forces in themselves, shaping intergroup relations across stretches of space and time, even in the absence of visible conflict of interest in the local context.

Nevertheless, this study will demonstrate that the discourse of informants reflects, above all, the contemporary situation of Poles in the city and the province in which they live. Their discourse is strongly determined not only by their status of a “minority on the ascent,” but also by the specificity of Quebec in the contemporary North American context, and the specificity of the Montreal context within Quebec, both of which will be examined in more detail in Part II. Polish discourse is also ideological, I will argue, to the extent that it legitimates and supports the dominant position of some groups against others in the local context. But it is also the discourse of people who try to forge a place for themselves in this same context.

## **Part II**

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### **Case Study: Minority Discourse in Action**

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## **Immigrant Discourse in the Canadian Context**

To talk about society requires the use of a common language to name and characterize objects in the social landscape, and to sort out their distinctive features, similarities and differences. Using this common idiom we make sense to ourselves and to others, but in effect we also participate in the reification of socially produced versions of reality. In other words, we participate in the process of “social construction.”

In this chapter Polish immigrant discourse in Canada and about Canada is presented. The particular focus is the discourse of ethnicity as an important idiom of social relations in this country. Immigrants coming to Canada find the social landscape largely pre-defined through the discourse of ethnicity. Like other Canadians, they use this discourse to make sense of many aspects of Canadian social reality. I argue that Poles use the language of ethnicity as a critical idiom to describe and explain Canadian society, often at the expense of other possible idioms. It is important to realize that all orderings of society are usually constructed against alternatives. Among other things, ethnicity in Polish discourse largely replaces race and class as a principle of social organization.

Polish discourse will also be examined in relation to its social context. Ethnicity has become an important aspect of social classification worldwide. It has come to govern social relations, both on the global scale and in the local context of Canada, where the federal government has institutionalized it as part of the political make-up of the country.

A critical question for this chapter concerns the relationship between discourse, human experience and the social reality that this discourse produces. Insofar as Polish immigrants are members of Canadian society, they participate in the discursive processes that constitute the reality of life in this society. Simultaneously, that reality “acts back” on their discursive constructions, in the sense that people experience it in many ways and not

only through discourse, and this experience shapes the representations that they produce. Despite the constructionist approach that taken in this study, it is important to remember that there is a reality outside of discourse. Society acts upon us even as we act upon society.

One of the goals in this study is to present members of a minority as active subjects – players in the game that is society – rather than passive objects of the game, as they are often presented in social research. But it is also important to realize that they have to respond to the rules and realities of the game, which place them in a particular position with regard to other players. Polish representations reflect Polish experiences of life and discourse in Canada – a society structured by ethnicity, where the subjects’ status as part of an immigrant minority is constantly accentuated. All this gives their discourse a certain general orientation the nature of which will be outlined here.

The factors of context and the speakers’ status in that context play critical roles as far as the social functions of discourse are concerned. Another goal of this study is to identify the ideological effects of social discourse, as defined in Part I. Here some of these ideological effects will be touched upon to demonstrate how a **minority’s responses** to a particular social environment structure its representations of the social landscape. While the main body of this study deals with the ways in which the language of ethnicity is employed to construct the social landscape in Canada, the focus of the present chapter is to introduce the basic outlines of that landscape as it already exists (even though it is constantly in the making) and as Polish immigrants face it, and situate their discourse within it. This should make the analytic tasks of the subsequent chapters somewhat easier to accomplish.

### **Ethnicism of Polish representations**

Observations in the Polish community as well as the analysis of interviews reveal that the discourse of ethnicity is a very important idiom among Polish immigrants, who use it to describe and make sense of social reality in Canada. Indeed, one may speak of a considerable degree of “ethnicism” with regard to the discursive constructions of

Canadian society among the study group. Bourdieu (1975) employs the term “*economisme*” to describe an excessive use of models based on material and utilitarian interests to explain social phenomena. Similarly, “ethnicism” indicates an overall stress on ethnic divisions, an excessive use of ethnic categories and the casting of social relations as ethnic relations, often at the cost of ignoring other dimensions of social life.

Polish discourse on topics related to Canadian society displays a striking abundance and recurrence of ethnic categories and themes that are conventionally regarded as belonging to the domain of ethnicity. Ethnic categories are used abundantly in many different contexts of talk and to explain a variety of social phenomena. Ethnic categories and topics related to ethnicity are often the first to appear when Polish immigrants are asked questions about people in Canada – even the most general questions. See the following examples:

**1.**

Interviewer: (...) Uh, what do you think about people in Canada?  
 Izabela: About people in Canada. Who do you mean? Canadians or Poles?  
 Izabela, housewife, age 36, resident of Ottawa for the last 7 years.

**2.**

Interviewer: What do you think about people in Canada?  
 Anna: The ones I have met? Well, they are very nice and polite. Whether it's a Fren-French Canadian or an English one, an anglophone, they are friendly people.  
 Anna, college student, age 44, resident of Montreal for the last 7 years.

**3.**

Interviewer: 0416 Do you see any differences among people in Canada?  
 Helena: 0417 Uhm, in what sense?  
 Interviewer: 0418 Well, what sense do you have in mind?  
 Helena: 0419 I mean, differences between nations, between, you know...  
 Helena, age 34, self-employed, resident of Montreal for the last 9 years.

When the talk is about Canadian society in general and about differences between people in particular, ethnic categorizations are more likely to be used than any other. More often than not, groups and other social divisions in Canada are represented as ethnic groups and divisions. The same goes for social relations, which are often interpreted as ethnic relations. Issues of critical importance to society, such as employment, education, and health care are likewise explained by reference to ethnicity. Witness the following examples:

## 4.

- Interviewer: 0069 Do-do people in Canada differ from each other?  
 Anna: 0072 (...) Yes. There are groups, it's related to nationality, that separate themselves  
 0073 into closed circles and you won't get to them. We won't get to them because we  
 0074 just happen to be Polish. So, let's say, Italians stick together and Asians  
 0075 stick together. And you can see that. For example, if you have a company,  
 0076 it employs only its own. I, for instance, have no chances ever to get to a  
 0077 Canadian firm managed by someone who [is Canadian].  
 0078 He won't hire anyone like me, for example. For a menial job, yes,  
 0079 but not for any serious position, not even a modest one.  
 Anna, college student, age 44, resident of Montreal for the last 7 years.

## 5.

- Joanna: 0459 So, there is a problem of illiteracy in Canada. Which is strange,  
 0460 considering, considering that people have access to [free] education, up to the  
 0461 age of seventeen, I think. (...)  
 Interviewer: 0465 What are the reasons for that?  
 Joanna: 0466 The reasons, eh, you know, the diversity has certainly a lot to do with that, hm,  
 0467 different nationalities. The schools receive children who often just begin  
 0468 to learn the languages when they enter the classroom. They don't make it. They  
 0469 drop out. One hears about the high percentage of drop-outs.  
 Joanna, in her fifties, engineer, resident of Montreal for the last 8 years.

## 6.

- Ewa: 0518 But I think, when one speaks, for example, one touches upon the problems  
 0519 of employment, of which we spoke a moment ago, the problems of education,  
 0520 health care, right, everything goes into the same bag. I mean,  
 0521 it is not the immigrants, let's say, I don't know, from Vietnam or Haiti  
 0522 who are responsible for this or that situation but, eh, the people who are in 0523  
 high positions. And most of the time they are, they are Québécois, if not, not  
 0524 Québécois de souche, then people who have been here for a very long time and  
 0525 who, who simply, ha, ha, ha, take all the blame, right.  
 0526 And I think that, that really, if we made a cross-section of, lets say the  
 0527 provincial government, the municipal government, right, the cabinet of our,  
 0528 our, ha, ha, ha, mayor Bourque contains mainly, it contains mainly the  
 0529 francophones, right? I don't say, exclusively, but-but, but mainly. So,  
 0530 I think there is such a tendency. There is also a tendency among, among  
 0531 Poles, and I actually agree with this, I think really that  
 0532 if someone who has a very Polish-sounding name and a very strong Polish  
 0533 accent, if that person is looking for a job, they, people of that kind often say that  
 0534 they would have a much easier time finding it, if they changed their name,  
 0535 than now, when it's evident right away, that they are not Québécois.  
 Ewa, age 45, university professor, resident of Quebec for the last 17 years.

The ethnicism of Polish discourse about Canada takes place at the cost of other orderings of society, such as those based on class, and even race. Compared to the widespread use of ethnic themes and categories, the discursive material studied contains very few features that could be identified as references to social class or be “translated” into such (particularly, if class is defined in terms of Marxist theory – on the basis of people’s relationship to the means of production). This scarcity concerns even such vague

references as the divisions into “rich” and “poor,” etc. Assuming that the notion of race relies on the classification of people as biological objects it is apparent that Polish discourse about Canada contains relatively few references to race.

Not that such other discourses are altogether absent among Poles – they do take place, occasionally. Class discourse, including the usage of typically Marxist concepts, can be elicited from some educated Polish immigrants. As for racial discourse, it is familiar to most, if not all Poles. However, as far as everyday talk is concerned, compared to the widespread use of the ethnic discourse, the discourses of race and class seem to play a minor role in the everyday practice of talking about Canadian society among Polish immigrants.

Even more significant is the fact that, when the notions of race or class relations are actually introduced by the speakers (and with reference to Canada, too), they generally end up being mixed-up with or incorporated into the discourse of ethnicity:

## 7.

Rafal            0054    (...) So, you see, this whole racial problem  
                      0055    or whatever, is simply because there is competition for jobs,  
                      0056    right? When someone sees that an immigrant has a better job, he envies  
                      0057    him. If you buy a better house or whatever, you can sense, uh, in  
                      0058    those small, pure towns that they look at you in a more or less  
                      0059    unfriendly way, right. They can envy you, but envy is a human trait. It can  
                      0060    happen anywhere. It just happens that you are an immigrant, so you look at  
                      0061    these matters in this way, right. But (...) uh, on the Island, in Montreal we have  
                      0062    what we have. There has always been a division into the French and English.  
                      0063    Now, many people have moved to the suburbs, out of the Island. The  
                      0064    immigrants who come to the Island live in kinds of enclaves, kinds of  
                      0065    communities. The first, uh, first generations of immigrants feel torn off their  
                      0066    roots and somehow cannot get over it. They live here, you could say, against  
                      0067    themselves, because they have a better life here and for this reason only, right?  
                      0068    That’s my opinion, right? Whether they are Italians or Greeks or,  
                      0069    perhaps, there are less of them first-generation Greeks or Italians.  
                      0070    There are still some left, because they were coming here in the fifties,  
                      0071    mostly in the sixties. So, one can say, they are still the first generation, right?  
                      0072    So, they-they are, uh, more united, because they prefer to live in their  
                      0073    own communities, right, and-and, whether they stay in groups or not,  
                      0074    they will always stick together and will always prefer each other, right.  
                      0075    And you have divisions, uh. And you can say that every immigrant looks at the  
                      0076    Canadian society in such a way that, if he wants to do something with anyone,  
                      0077    or help anyone, or give him a job, he will look after his  
                      0078    own compatriot first, then after the other immigrant and at the very, very end  
                      0079    after a Québécois. And the same, and it is the same the other way around. If-if-if  
                      0080    it is a Québécois who hires, uh, not necessarily as the employer, but for  
                      0081    example, as a placement officer, for example, in a given company, he



0082 will always favor, you know, Québécois. I would say, a great majority, let's  
 0083 say, up to ninety percent of people would look at this matter this way. (...)  
 Interviewer: 0100 You mentioned the racial problem, at one point. What did you have in mind?  
 Rafal: 0101 Racial, I don't know. I did not have color in mind. Race means color, that's  
 0102 true, right? But I think, generally speaking, what I had in mind were the nations,  
 0103 as such, right?  
 Rafal, age 36, electronics technician, residing in Montreal for the last 10 years.

## 8.

Alicja 0207 And there are differences in treating people because of the skin color in Canada.  
 Interviewer: 0208 Racial differences.  
 Alicja: 0209 Yes.  
 Interviewer: 0210 In Quebec, too?  
 Alicja: 0211 Especially here, more than out there [in Manitoba].  
 Interviewer: 0212 Why more here?  
 Alicja: 0213 Because here, there are more French people who approach other nationalities  
 0214 differently, particularly the skin color, even though they are mixed themselves.  
 Interviewer: 0215 So, how do they approach them?  
 Alicja: 0216 They don't like the coloreds. At my factory, for example, one didn't hire the  
 0217 coloreds. And not because they didn't come and apply, but simply because they  
 0218 were not accepted.  
 Interviewer: 0219 You mean, racism.  
 Alicja: 0220 Yeah, there is one. There is great racism. Ha, ha, ha, what are we talking  
 0221 about? There is great racism. In my opinion, there is great racism, here.  
 Interviewer: 0222 Yeah, so  
 Alicja: 0223 For example, at the metro, the STCUM, a big company, they would hire one or  
 0224 two ["coloreds"], so that people could see that they work there. But ninety-five  
 0225 or ninety-seven percent of the employees are white or French, whole families.  
 0226 Because they love to hire family members, at factories or big companies.  
 0227 There comes a cousin, a cousin, a husband, a child, and that's how it looks to  
 0228 me. Wherever there is a better position available, nobody can get it but the  
 0229 family. They accuse the Jews of doing that. No, it's not the Jews. They do  
 0230 that, too. They all do that. Whenever they are in a majority, they simply do that.  
 Interviewer: 0231 Who do you mean by "them"?  
 Alicja: 0232 Them, the other nations. It was the same in Austria and Germany. It's all the  
 0233 same. The whole world is the same. If you are different, from a different  
 0234 country, if you are not born here, you will always be rejected.  
 Alicja, in her thirties, embroidery technician, resident of Montreal for 10 years,  
 in Canada for 15 years.

Marxist scholars have argued for a long time that race **and** ethnicity function as ideology through displacing class as a social category and basis of social inequality (Larrain, 1980: 17; Miles, 1987). More recently there have been arguments that ethnicity might in turn be displacing race in this respect. Research into race relations indicates significant shifts from hierarchies based on race to ethnic hierarchies, and from race and class exploitation to ethnic marginalization through cultural, social, political and economic disempowerment (Essed, 1991: 15; Oriol, 1979; Wetherell and Potter, 1992:117-148).

One of the indications of this process is the fact that the notions of biological difference and biological determinism that used to structure racial discourse have given way to notions of cultural difference and cultural determinism. In other words, “ethnicism” in discourse may not only mean an excessive use of ethnic categories and the casting of social relations as ethnic relations, but may also carry an ideological function by promoting an ethnic hierarchical order. The existence of ethnic hierarchies can actually be spelled out explicitly in the discourse of Polish immigrants:

**9.**

Alicja:	0023	As a nation, we Poles are ranked somewhere ahead, ahead, eh, of the
	0024	Indians. Because the first in this province are the French, then come the English,
	0025	then the Italians in the third place, and so on, in order. They classify us
	0026	somewhere ahead of the Indians.

Alicja, in her thirties, embroidery technician, resident of Montreal for 10 years,  
in Canada for 15 years.

### **Polish ethnicism in the global context**

To some extent, ethnicism in Polish discourse reflects the convictions and experiences that Polish immigrants brought from their country of origin. Themes of ethnicity and interethnic relations were an inescapable aspect of Poland’s politics and social life during much of the twentieth century.

The rebirth of independent Poland in the territorial shape that it obtained after World War One took place among political and armed struggles with competing nationalisms of various peoples who claimed portions of the same territory, particularly Ukrainians, Lithuanians, and Germans (Zieba, 1991). Poland emerged from those struggles containing numerous members of those groups, together with sizeable Byelorussian and Jewish populations, as well as several other smaller groups. All these became ethnic minorities in a country dominated by ethnic Poles. In the short period between the world wars, Poland was rife with anti-Semitism and plagued by conflicts between its larger ethnic groups (Zubek, 1993; Zychiewicz, 1992).

During World War Two and immediately afterwards, the region of Central Europe was a scene of genocide and considerable ethnic cleansing. Most of the parties involved in ethnic cleansing had the dubious honour of alternating roles at different times as victims

and perpetrators. Ethnic Poles were not an exception, although their nationalistic ethos tends to celebrate the story of Polish sacrifices during the period (Kowalski, 1991).

It should not be surprising, then, that Polish immigrants who came to Canada in the years following World War Two were already well versed in the discourse of ethnicity, knew many of its potential implications and took ethnic divisions seriously. The same should be said of the more recent immigrants who arrived during the post-Solidarity period (i.e. after 1981). Postwar Polish society lived through outbursts of state-sponsored anti-Semitic campaigns and deliberate efforts at the “polonization” of Poland’s remaining few minorities (Kazaniecki, 1991, Zubek, 1993: 671-672).

The ethnicism of Polish discourse in Canada should also be cast against the global trends in postindustrial societies, where ethnicity has increasingly played an important role in social relations. Various developments during the twentieth century, including World War Two, decolonization and large-scale migration movements have resulted in a situation where few countries today have culturally and linguistically homogeneous populations (McLellan and Richmond, 1994). Plural societies have also experienced a considerable increase in ethnic activity and discourse, particularly since the 1960’s and 1970’s, as various segments of their populations have increasingly organized their identity around the symbols of what they perceive as their distinct origin, culture, and language. In North America, the increased salience of ethnicity has been exemplified by the so-called “rise of unmeltable ethnics” in the U.S. (cf. Novak, 1973), and the multiculturalism movement in Canada (Del Balso, 1984; Laczko, 1994). Similar developments have also been observed in other countries around the world (cf. McLellan and Richmond, *ibid.*; see papers in Plattner and Maybury-Lewis, 1982).

Ethnicity has become a regular business of politics as ethnic groups seek greater control over their interests, immediate territories and local governments. Ethnic nationalism has already contributed to the disintegration of a number of larger political and territorial units. The most well known examples are the Soviet Union and the Yugoslav Federation. While ethnicism can be regarded as a pressure countervailing globalization, it has also

contributed to the proliferation of civil wars in many parts of the globe, resulting in the nearly total disruption of social life and genocide in such places as Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo, or Rwanda. “Ethnic cleansing” in those places is a fresh example of ethnic nationalism pushed to the extreme and one of the new ways of actively shaping reality in the ideological framework set by ethnicism.

In many ways, ethnicism resembles nationalism, one of the most prominent systems of ideas in the modern world. Ethnicity and nationality are closely related phenomena, and even as social scientists try to invent the criteria to distinguish one from the other, they are often forced to collapse one into the other, or to combine them (consider, for example, such terms as “ethno-national”), in order to make sense of particular historical realities. What concerns us at this point is the expansion of the two systems of ideas – ethnicism and nationalism – in the global social consciousness. One of the central tenets of nationalism holds that the world is divided into nations, each with its own character and destiny and everyone must belong to a nation (Smith, 1994: 379). By the same token, it appears (at least in countries with culturally heterogeneous populations) that everyone must belong to some ethnic group. Not only do people identify themselves through membership in ethnic groups, but they also categorize others accordingly. This “ethnic absolutism” (Fortier, 1992) concerns all plural societies. In many countries, questions concerning ethnic origin, or ethnic identity have become standard census questions (cf. Pryor *et al.*, 1992).

### **Polish immigrant discourse in the Canadian context**

The global trends in social categorization and the experiences brought from Poland form an important background against which Polish representations are cast. No less important in this respect is the local context of Montreal, Quebec and Canada at large. Ethnicity forms a system of signification on the global scale; nonetheless, particular discourses of ethnicity are locally produced and are related to the “here-and-now” situation of the speakers. Indeed, understanding the “ethnicism” of Polish-Canadian discourse is not possible without taking into account two other factors: the local context in which this discourse operates and the status of the immigrant minority in this context. Even if back

in Poland some of them could still take their own ethnicity for granted, it is no longer possible in the new context. In the context of the host country immigrants acquire the status of a minority and as a result, they become strongly aware of the notions of ethnicity.

## 10.

- Interviewer: 0001 (...) Popular view has it that Montreal is a nice place to live in?  
 0002 Eah, do you think so, too?
- Stefan: 0003 Yes.
- Stefan: 0005 (...) I think, it's because I feel very free, uninhibited in the  
 0006 sense that there are no restrictions of movement, I don't know. People look at  
 0007 you, people look at you in a friendly way and the places are nice. [Montreal] is  
 0008 very, very homely, in the sense that I even like the architecture here, living  
 0009 here, people's attitude towards us, towards you.
- Interviewer: 0010 "Attitude", in what sense?
- Stefan: 0011 Eah, in what sense, hm, in the sense that they simply treat me,  
 0012 in most cases, let's say, I deal with  
 0013 people who treat me as an equal. They don't take me for an immigrant,  
 0014 for an inferior who came here to destroy their culture, that I destroy  
 0015 whatever is theirs and whatever they achieved as a state or as a province, but  
 0016 [they take me] for their social equal. In that sense.
- Interviewer: 0017 Who, which people do you have in mind?
- Stefan: 0018 Which people, most of the time, eh, there are two categories of people [that I  
 0019 deal with]. I am not talking about the people at my workplace as the  
 0020 friendly ones, but about the people who I meet out of work, when I go out.  
 0021 You want to relax, to go downtown, to a restaurant  
 0022 or a shopping mall, you even go to a park and everybody is friendly, has a  
 0023 friendly attitude. It's an entirely different matter at work, where they know  
 0024 where you come from and they know, eh, when you show that you are different  
 0025 in terms of food that you eat, clothing, and the way of thinking. That's an  
 0026 entirely different story. But I try to stay away from such people. I try to have my  
 0027 own life, while the job is a different story.
- Stefan, age 30, hospital technician, resident of Montreal for the last 8 years.

For the last forty years or so, Canadian social landscape has come to be defined through the discourse of "ethnicity." A large portion of public discourse concerning social and political issues in Canada has been devoted to so-called "ethnic relations." Social scientists are not an exception to this tendency and many of them have come to see Canadian society as ordered by ethnicity. Notions of "Canadian pluralism," "cultural diversification," and the image of the Canadian "ethnic mosaic" have been constructed out of this discourse (e.g., Driedger, 1985; McLellan and Richmond, 1994; Pryor *et al.*, 1992).

The notion of the Canadian mosaic, which is often contrasted with the American "melting pot," stipulates that ethnic groups retain their cultural characteristics and identity without

being assimilated into one dominant socio-cultural body (Driedger, 1985; Laczko, 1994).

Some of our informants have become well versed in this kind of discourse:

**11.**

Ewa:           0607    But in my opinion, it is, it is natural,  
                   0608    I think, because every every nation, eh, right, every  
                   0609    ethnic group has its characteristic features that differentiate it  
                   0610    from others. So, I think it's great that that people hold on to their  
                   0611    language, to their traditions, to their culture. Eh, this is probably where we  
                   0612    can see the greatest difference between, between Canada's multiculturalism  
                   0613    and the American *melting pot* where in order to survive, you have to become  
                   0614    American.

Ewa, age 45, university professor, resident of Quebec for the last 17 years.

The themes of ethnicity and cultural diversity have been particularly prominent in the rhetoric of multiculturalism that developed as a social movement in Canada in the 1960's and eventually found official recognition by the State, through the policy of *Multiculturalism within a Bilingual Framework*, introduced in 1971. In the rhetoric of multiculturalism, ethnic diversity is a defining factor of Canadian society. This diversity is itself defined in terms of cultural and linguistic differences in the population (House of Commons Debates, 1971: 8545-6; Laczko, 1994; McLellan and Richmond, 1994). The discourse of multiculturalism also speaks of tolerance for ethnic differences, defined as cultural differences, and about public support for cultural expressions and values of the ethnic groups. Extracts from Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau's speech concerning the government's objectives with regard to multiculturalism spell it out in the following way:

A policy of multiculturalism within a bilingual framework commends itself to the government as the most suitable means of assuring the cultural freedom of Canadians. Such a policy should help to break down discriminatory attitudes and cultural jealousies. National unity if it is to mean anything in the deeply personal sense, must be found on confidence in one's own individual identity; out of this can grow respect for that of others and a willingness to share ideas, attitudes and assumptions. A vigorous policy of multiculturalism will help create this initial confidence. It can form the base of society which is based on fair play for all.

The government will support and encourage the various cultures and ethnic groups that give structure and vitality to our society. They will be encouraged to share their cultural expressions and values with other Canadians and so contribute to a richer life for us all (House of Commons Debates, 1971: 8545).

The same themes are revealed in many accounts of Canadian social reality by Polish immigrants. Many Poles cite ethnic diversity in particular as a positive facet of Canadian society and link it to the tolerant attitude of Canadians towards minorities. Such accounts reflect the speakers' concerns arising from their own status in Canada. However, many of

these accounts reproduce certain features that cause those very same concerns. See the following example:

## 12.

Interviewer: 0001 What do you think about people in Canada?  
 Konrad: 0003 (...) what struck me from the very beginning was the diversity.  
 0004 There are different nationalities here. I had lived in England for a long time  
 0005 and, despite my rather good English, whenever I started talking to anyone  
 0006 they always pointed out to me, oh, you are not English. Ha! Ha! They  
 0007 recognized that I was a foreigner. While here, I met with a saying that,  
 0008 well, "You don't worry about your accent, because everybody  
 0009 speaks with a foreign accent, here" [Engl.] Ha! Ha! It goes to prove that there  
 0010 are many different nationalities here and anyone can have a different accent  
 0011 and it doesn't bother anybody in Canada.

Konrad, age 77, retired navy officer, veteran of World War Two,  
 Montreal resident for 40 years.

Konrad evidently intends to present a favorable image of the social environment in Canada. Reproducing certain popular opinions about Canadian society, he argues first that *ethnic diversity is an inescapable aspect of social reality in Canada*. Then, he uses this fact to explain another commonplace: *Canada is a country of tolerance for difference* – exemplified here as tolerance for foreign accents. Diversity and tolerance are obviously appreciated by Konrad, who is a “foreigner” and who already experienced a less tolerant social environment.

Questions arise: what is there to tolerate in the first place and why? Why does a person who displays a linguistic difference have to be tolerated? Whose is the privilege of being tolerant? What kind of tolerance is meant? Is this a tolerance to mutual differences – as between parties on an equal footing?

Notions of diversity and tolerance are used in this account in particular ways. They are presented as striking features of the social environment, as opposed to the “usual” things that one might expect. The way the notion of tolerance is used makes the object of tolerance somewhat problematic – it implies that the object represents deviance from the norm. Tolerance in this context also carries particular connotations: it is not something to be taken for granted. Even in the abstract, the notion of “tolerance” is not exactly the same as, for example, that of “respect,” “understanding,” “sympathy,” or even

“indifference.” Tolerance is also qualified as unavoidable – not a result of generous choice but a necessity, given the inescapable diversity of Canadian society.

Set against these contingencies, taken for granted and treated as a matter of fact is the supremacy of a particular linguistic expression. Competence in and use of English appears as a norm and a positive standard in the Canadian context. Linguistic competence is also a factor of exclusion or marginalization (even if only a potential one). The level of English competence determines who is a member of society and who is a “foreigner.”

Fortunately, “foreigners” are tolerated in Canada, given that there are so many of them. The diversity of Canadian society helps Konrad “pass” without major stress. Compared to England where he stood out as a “foreigner,” here he may see himself as one “foreigner” among many. The difference between Canada and England appears to lie in the degree of tolerance and the amount of normative pressure put on “foreigners” to abide by the norm, rather than in the norm itself.

Any analysis such as this one that questions common sense becomes a hair-splitting operation. The efficiency of common-sense versions of reality stems from their transparency, which in turn depends on people’s familiarity with the notions and ideas that they use and on which they rely. Those versions can “make sense” as long as their premises are not questioned. One of the purposes in this study is to make such common-sense versions of reality and their premises appear as “strange” – so that they can be treated as objects of study instead of being reified as reality.

Explicit norms of tolerance and equality within diversity are part of the discourse of cultural pluralism, which provides the ideational foundations of Canadian multiculturalism. Cultural pluralism is also popular in many other Western societies with substantial minority populations, such as Australia, New Zealand, the U.S., the Netherlands, etc (Laczko, 1994). Essed argues (1991: 17) that the current discourse of cultural pluralism in Western societies implicitly assumes a hierarchical order of cultures: it is founded on the presupposition that tolerance and equality are possible as long as the



minorities accept and internalize the values and norms of the dominant groups. Deficiency in this respect – a deficiency that, one might add, is inevitable in the case of immigrant minorities – leads to accusations of social inadequacy and to marginalization. It justifies social inequality disguised as “cultural differences” (Fortier, 1992; Oriol, 1979).

So, in a way, Polish common sense both reflects and reproduces certain elements of the power structure in Canada. However, it is the contention of this study that there is more to common sense discourse than ideology. In addition to implicit ideological messages, other messages (often quite explicit) are being constructed in this discourse and should not be disregarded. For one thing, in order for the ideological messages of the kind identified above to be functional, they have to exert some sort of pressure on minorities, a pressure that should in turn elicit a response from them. Returning to the initial observations made with regard to accounts such as that of Konrad it becomes evident that those accounts reflect the speakers’ minority status in Canadian society as a form of response to the pressures exerted on immigrants.

From this perspective, the other side of the coin is apparent, showing Konrad as asserting his right to be “different” in Canada. Constructing an account about cultural diversity is a way of questioning the hegemony of any cultural expression. Arguments in discourse are built against alternatives, both explicit and implicit and the alternative to “diversity” in this account is “uniformity.” It is also important to remember that, whatever the ideological implications of cultural pluralism, it offers minorities a positive alternative to such doctrines as assimilationism and nativism, not to mention racism (cf. Driedger, 1985; Laczko, 1994). These aspects of Konrad’s “sense-making” cannot be overlooked and should be regarded as the non-ideological side of the discourse in question.

If, despite their intentions, members of minorities produce some ideological effects in their narratives, it is because the meanings produced in their discourse are contextually determined by the existing order of Canadian society. Poles depict the reality of Canadian society from their point of view as an immigrant minority. For immigrants coming to

Canada, the dominant groups with their norms and standards become highly accentuated as legitimate aspects of the local reality. At the same time their minority status is obvious to them, too. Poles take it for granted (and it shows in their discourse in many ways) that they are not part of the Canadian mainstream and that this society does not “belong” to the likes of them. It is only unfortunate that in doing so, they may even arrive at justifying such ugly phenomena as discrimination:

**13.**

Pawel:           0077    Generally speaking, Canadians, I don't know. There may be some kind of  
                       0078    discrimination. It's such a big word. But I think that Poles  
                       0079    would behave in the same, exactly the same way, if they had to deal with such  
                       0080    rates of immigration, as Canadians have to deal with on everyday basis.  
                       0081    That's what I think. Everybody defends his own backyard, so to speak. I think  
                       0082    that it's understandable to some extent.  
                                   Pawel, in his thirties, financial clerk, unemployed, resident of Montreal for 9 years.

Breton (1984) isolates language, collective identity and culture as the principal components of the *dominant symbolic order* of Canadian society. He argues that members of the society tend to expect a certain degree of congruence between these three elements and their own individual identity, cultural usages and linguistic competence. The degree of this congruence determines the extent to which individuals feel that the society is “their” society (just as the language, for example, is “their” language). The question is: why cannot Polish immigrants speak about Canadian society as “their” society?

### **The Order of Canadian Society**

Historically, the prevailing representation of Canadian society was unitarian and oriented towards cultural homogeneity. It involved the construction and imposition of the British model of society, as reflected in the dominant culture, language, public institutions, way of life, customs, and the dominant symbols of state. English-Canadian nationalism, represented by the largest and most influential part of the population, called for the unity of State and nation, where the latter was based on the marriage of the British and North American models of identity. It embodied the socio-cultural, linguistic and racial properties subsumed under the label of “Englishness” (Breton, 1984; Grant, 1965: 3; Muszynski, 1994: 11-12). Efforts to establish English supremacy and cultural unity meant, among other things, that the institutions and cultural practices of other groups

were looked upon with suspicion, and in some cases effectively suppressed. Examples include the abolition of the bilingual school system, the virtual elimination of French from the public institutions outside of Quebec at the beginning of the twentieth century, and the suppression of the so-called “foreign” languages press at the end of World War One (Bausenhardt, 1972; Zieba, 1991: 110).

For most of Canadian history since the Conquest, French Canadians have been a minority with regard to English Canada. Their nationalism developed in opposition to British domination and to the growing supremacy of English culture and language. However, it proposed a model of society that was in principle very similar to the one embraced by English Canadians (Driedger, 1985: 166). It also called for a unity of nation, culture, language, and (at least with regard to Lower Canada and later Quebec), state. The main difference was that the symbolic order of society proposed here was “French,” or French Canadian – embodying the linguistic, socio-cultural, religious and for some time the racial characteristics as well of the descendants of the “ancien régime” in French North America (Breton, *ibid.*; see, e.g. Huguenin, 1914: 533-536; Groulx, 1931, Siegfried, 1906: 304-308; papers reprinted in Bouthillier and Meynaud, 1972). Many pragmatically oriented members of the French intellectual elite called for some degree of integration of French Canadians with the political institutions of the Canadian State and for a peaceful coexistence of its French and English constituents (see e.g. Bourassa, 1902).

For the first hundred years after Confederation, the English and French Canadian representations left very little, if any place for ethnic diversity in Canada. At best, they grudgingly acknowledged the traditional dualism of the country (Bausenhardt, 1972; Breton, 1984; Driedger, 1985; Muszynski, 1994: 11-13). Yet, diversity had been surpassing that dualism from the beginning, given the presence of aboriginal peoples. It also grew steadily with the swelling numbers of immigrants and their descendants who had roots outside Britain and France. If at the time of the Confederation (1867) only 8% of Canadian population were of non-British and non-French origin, that figure reached 33% in 1981 (Laczko, 1994: 29). Throughout most of this period (1867-1971), it was taken for granted that the only choices for immigrants were to assimilate into either the

English or French group, or to remain on the margin of Canadian society (Driedger, 1985; see also Siegfried, 1906: 304-308; papers reprinted in Bouthillier and Meynaud, 1972). Much the same fate was projected for members of the First Nations (Frideres, 1988).

This situation was reflected in the policies of the Canadian government that, prior to the 1960's, were oriented towards the assimilation of immigrant minorities. In line with this orientation, Canada employed highly discriminatory immigration policies, giving preference to some immigrants, while screening out others who were judged "too different" to assimilate. Preference was given first to immigrants from Britain, followed by those from northern Europe (Del Balso, 1984: 63). For a time, people coming from southern and eastern Europe were classified as "non-preferred" (Avery and Fedorowicz, 1982; Laczko, 1994: 30). Efforts were made to discourage some "non-preferred" categories, such as immigrants from Asia, from coming at all (Li, 1988; Li Zong, 1994). It was not until the 1950's and 60's that the policies of assimilation began to be questioned (Del Balso, 1984).

It could be argued that until the 1960's and to some extent the 1970's, studies of society in Canada and Quebec reflected the dominant approach to immigrant ethnicity and regarded assimilation as the natural destiny for immigrants. Studies of ethnic groups in Canada were still scarce and for the most part were focused on the issues of assimilation and identity (Clairmont and Wien, 1979; Del Balso, 1984; Palmer, 1977).<sup>1</sup> There were

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<sup>1</sup> Although this bias could partly be explained by the influence of the American social theory on the formative years of Canadian sociology, that fact only reflects on the constructed character of those formulations of reality. In the 1960's and early 1970's American social studies were still dominated by the "melting pot" perspective. Characteristically, by the 1970's they also lost interest in ethnicity. With the numbers of new immigrants dropping and the remaining ethnics assumed to be quickly "melted" into the mainstream, American social science focused its interests on race relations. In much of American sociology intergroup relations became synonymous with race relations. A survey of American sociological journals in the 1970's showed that as much as 70% of articles dealt with Blacks, while no more than 6% of the articles dealt with any other group (Lavender and Forsyth, 1979). It was as if ethnicity had disappeared from the American social scene. And yet, few people would argue today that the American society was ever less "ethnically" diversified than it is today [cf. Laczko, 1994: 28]. So complete was the sway of the prevailing racial idiom that the upsurge of ethnic activity and the discourse of ethnicity – the so-called "rise of the unmelted ethnics," after the title of a popular book (Novak, 1973) – took American scholars completely by surprise. Some of them came to question the authenticity of the "emergent ethnicity," labeling it

signs of adopting more pluralist perspectives: for example, some authors argued that the cultural diversity brought by immigrants had left its mark on Canadian society (Clark, 1962). However, in general, there was still little in academic discourse that reflected diversity and still less that favored it.

For example, Porter's book "The Vertical Mosaic" (1965), described the "ethnic mosaic" while giving a critique of this Canadian form of pluralism. According to the author, the "mosaic" actually functioned as a social hierarchy based on ethnic differences and thus engendered social inequality. Indeed, the overall thrust of Porter's book favored assimilation, although for motives different than those behind the traditional hegemonic discourse.

The perspective offered by French-Canadian academics was hardly an alternative to the prevailing approach to immigrant ethnicity at that time. Until well into the 1970's, their studies of immigrant groups were few and mostly focused on the problems of integration of immigrants with Quebec's society. Preoccupied with the problems of their own group's survival in North America, French-Canadian scholars focused on the linguistic choices of immigrant groups and on what they perceived as the problem of excessive integration of immigrants into the anglophone community in Quebec (Del Balso, 1984).

It was actually the federal and provincial governments that began to stimulate research in the areas of ethnicity and ethnic diversity in the 1960's and 1970's (del Balso, *ibid.*). This happened at the time when the Canadian multiculturalism movement was already in full swing and mostly after ethnic diversity had obtained a certain degree of official recognition as an aspect of Canadian society.

Official recognition of ethnic diversity and the reordering of Canadian society towards "multiculturalism" emerged from a process full of tensions and political contingencies. It is important to note that at the beginning of the process, the intentions of the power

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"symbolic," as opposed to "real" (e.g., Gans, 1979, 1994). For others, however, this was an occasion to discover the constructed nature of such forms of categorization (e.g., Allen, 1979).

holders were clearly directed towards entrenching the traditional “biculturalism” of Canada in its laws and institutions, rather than recognizing immigrant ethnicity and the country’s diversity. What ended up as the “multiculturalism policy” had actually begun with the works of the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism (better known in Quebec as the Laurendeau-Dunton Commission) that operated between 1965 and 1970. The principal task of the Commission was to find ways to better integrate the French-Canadian element into governing structures as well as the political, economic and cultural institutions of Canada (Laing, 1985). The gains of French-Canadian nationalism and the growing alienation of French-Canadians, particularly those in Quebec, from the institutions and symbols of Canadian society finally forced political power holders to recognize them as the second majority in Canada.

The policy of multiculturalism was introduced as a government response to the work of the Royal Commission and to movements among “other” ethnic groups that demanded that their existence in Canada and their contribution to Canadian society also be recognized. This was a critical period of reconstruction for Canadian society, which brought a redefinition of its symbolic order and the redistribution of status among its linguistic and socio-cultural groups. The very name and character of the Royal Commission, focused on bilingualism and biculturalism, as well as its discourse about “charter groups,” “founding peoples,” and the two-nation society were sending a clear message about the direction this process was taking. In the context of long established Anglo-Saxon domination, redefining the French-Canadian population – hitherto one of many minorities – as the second majority caused a considerable anxiety among immigrant groups. They feared that their minority status would be further accentuated and thus reacted by calling for the protection of their own rights (Breton, 1984; Laczko, 1994; Laing, 1985).

The dominant symbolic order of Canadian society has changed considerably since the 1960’s. However, a question should be asked whether the changes have significantly altered the position of immigrants and other minorities. Although Canada has officially been declared a multicultural country, substantial changes concern mainly the relative

status of English and French Canadians. Not that the supremacy of the “English” element has disappeared; on the contrary, it has remained largely untouched in most of Canada, except in Quebec where French Canadians (or Franco-Québécois) have become a majority on the provincial scale. They have come to dominate Quebec’s political, social and cultural scene and have succeeded in replacing English by French as the dominant language in the public sphere. Today, they hold the reins of political power in the province and, with or without the strong separatist movement spearheading their nationalist ambitions, they are shaping the future of the province in ways that will also determine the future of Canada.

At the federal level, the “cultural dualism” of the country has obtained a degree of official recognition and steps have been taken to make it real. Among other things, national symbols have been changed, moving away from their formerly British character, and the francophone presence has increased considerably in the federal government institutions. But most importantly, the French and English languages have been institutionalized as the official languages of Canada (French in Quebec, and English and French in varying degrees in other provinces), and as the principal components of the Québécois and Canadian national identities. All these changes, together with the recognition of Quebec as a “distinct society” have considerably altered the relative status of French Canadians, at least in Quebec (Breton, 1984).

Compared to the gains of French Canadians, the relative status of “other” ethnic groups has not changed much. True, multiculturalism has brought a certain degree of public recognition to immigrant ethnicity, but critics argue that the policy is merely a symbolic concession of the political power holders to the ethnic diversity of the country (McLellan and Richmond, 1994). Political power and social influence still remain out of reach for non-French and non-English groups, while principal norms, values, institutions and symbols of Canadian society reflect the culture of the two “founding peoples.” Some scholars have argued that multiculturalism has actually served to strengthen Anglo-Saxon dominance by diverting the attention and efforts of ethnic minorities towards specifically

defined cultural activities and away from the struggles for political power and influence (Laczko, 1994; McLellan and Richmond, 1994; Onufrijchuk, 1988).

Whatever the overall balance of power between the two “charter groups,” it would be difficult to question today the reality of the dominant status of French Canadians, or Québécois, in Quebec and that of English Canadians in the rest of Canada vis-à-vis any and all “other” groups.

These themes will be taken up again in the following chapters, in the discussion of various facets of Polish immigrant discourse. The main purpose at this point is to set a background against which this discourse can be reinterpreted, including the kinds of features that have been identified in Konrad’s account, cited above (Example 12, page 149). These features would actually “make sense” to most people in Canada insofar as they reflect the kind of social arrangement that everyone in this country is expected to accept by default.

The following account reflects the contemporary situation in Montreal where immigrants find themselves facing two dominant linguistic and cultural expressions. Montreal is inhabited today by two dominant groups, the descendants of the French and the British, but, at the same time, 27% of people making their home in the city claim ethnic origins other than either of the two “founding peoples” (Anctil, 1984; Linteau, 1982; Meintel 1991). Because of that, Montreal is generally regarded as a cosmopolitan city, even by Canadian standards, a fact to be appreciated by immigrants (See also Konrad’s account, Example 12, page 149).

#### 14.

- Interviewer: 0023 You mentioned [Montreal’s] cosmopolitan atmosphere. In what sense?  
 Marta: 0024 It doesn’t bother anyone in Montreal that you have an accent. You speak with an  
 0025 accent and everyone thinks, “he must be an anglophone,” when you speak  
 0026 French, or “he must be a francophone,” when you speak English. It’s normal to  
 0027 speak with an accent. Uh, you have the biculturalism. Uh, there are lots of  
 0028 restaurants, lots of ethnic stores of different kinds. It’s as if, uh, those-those  
 0029 ethnic groups that live here, contributed each in their own way to-to this city.  
 0030 This city is neither English, nor French, today.  
 0031 It is very *mètèque*, very complex.

Marta, age 55, civil servant, residing in Montreal for the last 17 years.



Montreal's cosmopolitan character has often been attributed to a peculiar balance of power between its two dominant groups (Anctil, 1984; Meintel, 1991). Neither majority has ever been absolutely dominant in the city without its hegemony being challenged by the other. The descendants of the British, at one point a numerical majority in Montreal and for a long time the social, economic and political majority in Quebec have since lost on both fronts to the francophone Québécois. However, they still represent a considerable economic and cultural force in the city, a position they partly owe to the continuing integration of immigrant minorities into the anglophone community and to the fact that they are still the majority on the North American continent.

The hegemony of the Québécois, on the other hand, is quite recent and still somewhat problematic even to themselves (Meintel, 1991). For almost two centuries, the descendants of the French settlers were a political, economic and cultural minority. Today, the balance of power in the city is on their side, but their status as a majority is still somewhat precarious because they remain a minority on the scale of the continent and are under a considerable cultural pressure from "anglophone" Canada, and even the neighboring United States.

Researchers have suggested that this special *rapport de force* between the two majorities may have been conducive to the retention of minority ethnic traits. As a noted fact, Montreal has had one of the highest rates of minority language retention in the country (Anctil, 1984: 446; Painchaud et Poulin, 1983). Anctil argues that confronted by the "double majority," the other groups in the city have been under considerably less assimilatory pressure than if they had to face one majority alone (Anctil, *ibid.*: 449).

Marta's account, cited above (Example 14, page 158), testifies to a common sense interpretation of this situation. Once again, an immigrant notices and appreciates the complexity of the socio-cultural and linguistic environment in Montreal. Yet, the way this account is constructed evidently confirms and legitimizes the dominant position of certain groups. The same topics and concerns and the kinds of contingencies that have already been identified in Konrad's account re-emerge here. Marta speaks about diversity

and tolerance but within a framework of anglophone and francophone dominance: she mentions “biculturalism” and identifies the two dominant groups repeatedly and “matter-of-factly.”

Tolerance in this extract is explained as a phenomenon contingent upon the confusion caused by the existence of two dominant norms. The type of reasoning that Marta is using to explain the tolerance to foreign accent is a cliché among Polish immigrants in Montreal: “*You can “pass” as either one of the two dominant groups.*” This is exemplified by Stefan’s account (Example 10, page 147), where he states that life is enjoyable in Montreal as long as people do not recognize who he “really” is... In fact, it seems that what is at play here is the benefit of a doubt in a “case of mistaken identity,” rather than with tolerance per se. Marta also sets limits to ethnic tolerance: at least with regard to language use, immigrants are acceptable as long as they fit into one of the two available templates.

Nevertheless, these ideological features notwithstanding, Marta’s account, like Konrad’s, also carries a message of pluralism. It should be noted that the initial subject matter of this argument is the cosmopolitan character of Montreal. Truly, Marta implicitly confirms the dominant status of the French and English communities in Montreal, but she also states explicitly that the city is “neither English nor French, today” and that the other ethnic groups are also legitimate contributors to its cultural landscape.

### **Minority discourse: a patchwork of messages**

Different, sometimes opposing messages are produced by these common sense accounts. On the one hand, ideological messages are woven into Polish ways of making sense. On the other hand, the immigrants try to assert their right to be different and to establish a degree of legitimacy for their existence in this country. In the following chapters similar processes will be demonstrated taking place in various spheres of discourse. As the minority responds to the realities of the Canadian social environment, some of the latter’s features, including elements of the power structure, are reproduced in the process, regardless of the intentions and interests of the speakers.

That some ideological messages might coincide with the interests of the minority should also be acknowledged. Different goals are pursued through discourse, both collective and personal, and the outcomes are sometimes surprising. The complexity of the social environment in Canada, and particularly in Montreal, and the fact that it has two dominant groups creates a situation where certain strains of discourse may serve the interests of one dominant group against the other. The minorities can take sides in this “game of ethnicity,” in the pursuit of what they believe to be their own good or the society’s common good.

This will become evident in the chapters that follow. The main purpose in the next chapter will be to see whom the members of Polish minority identify as the principal players in this game, what they perceive as the rules of the game, and where they question and disregard those rules in their discourse.

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## **Constructing the Social Landscape: The Logic and Uses of Ethnicity in Discourse**

In the preceding chapter, Polish discourse of ethnicity in Canada was introduced and placed in its social context. I argued that Polish immigrants use ethnicity as an important idiom to describe and interpret the social reality in Canada. How this discourse is shaped by their perspective as a minority in response to the realities of the surrounding social context was also demonstrated.

In this chapter, I examine how the image of ethnic Canada is constructed in Polish discourse. Generally speaking, social categorization is about classifications and divisions of society. The chapter begins by identifying the principal categories used in Polish discourse of ethnicity in an attempt to establish how Poles divide up Canadian society, who they perceive as its principal constituents, and what the resulting classifications and divisions imply. The focus then shifts to the logic of everyday descriptions and categorizations, including the principles and broad premises that are used to describe the social landscape and to differentiate between social categories, as well as the principles that in Polish eyes guide social relations in this country. How does the idiom of ethnicity guide people in the course of interpreting their social environment and constructing their version of it? What model of society does this type of discourse encourage?

Ethnic discourse speaks of nations and ethnic or cultural groups, treating them as natural phenomena. This chapter is based on the premise that such categories are social constructs and discursive products with a traceable history that reaches beyond Canada in time and space, rather than natural phenomena or straightforward representations of reality (cf. Anderson, 1983; Muszynski, 1994). The discursive account of the Canadian

mosaic is related to current political and social arrangements, although parallels can be found in other parts of the world (cf. Wetherell and Potter, 1992: 117-148).

This is not to say that social construction is an exclusively discursive achievement. Polish discourse exemplifies one of many processes that constitute the current social formation. Canada or Quebec, as they are perceived today, have come into existence through the interplay of social, economic, political and even military forces. They have a history that involves military conquests, establishing an economic infrastructure, large-scale migrations, political and social struggles and numerous other social practices. Those forces are real and can influence discursive representations of society.

At the same time, however, these forces and the reality they produce are cast in discourse, or various discourses, that give them sense and logic in the eyes of ordinary men and women, as well as scholars. Discursive categorizations, such as those of nation, ethnicity, and culture are known to organize social action and influence political and economic decisions, and thus bear on the fates of people in Canada and elsewhere (Pryor *et al.*, 1992; cf. Wetherell and Potter, 1992).

The analytical line pursued here has been strongly influenced by the work of Anderson (1983) on nation, Barth (1969) on ethnicity, and Wetherell and Potter (1992) on the discursive construction of social categories. Anderson and Barth's views on social categorization complement each other in the constructionist perspective that is adopted here. As Wetherell and Potter point out, Anderson's idea of "imagined community" "undermines the seductive view that acts of categorization are simple descriptions of what is really out there" (1992: 147). "Imagining is part of construction." Barth's perspective helps us understand some of the processes involved in the actual construction of ethnic groups. According to Barth, ethnic groups are categories of self-ascription (by actors themselves) and ascription by others for the purposes of social organization and social relations. Combining the three perspectives, ethnic and national categories can be understood through the theoretical lens of an "imagined community" that is constructed through discursive acts of categorical ascription.

Although Anderson uses the notion of “imagined community” to define the nation, this notion applies to ethnic groups as well. In fact, Anderson notes that all communities larger than the primordial groups of face-to-face contact are “imagined” ones. What distinguishes them from one another is the style in which they are imagined. One of the critical factors distinguishing the nation is the notion of political self-determination involved in its construction: the nation is imagined as *sovereign*, either in reality or in project (1983: 15). This distinction can have critical social implications, particularly in multi-ethnic societies like Canada confronted with separatist tendencies and the issue of legitimate rule.

Implications of discursive constructs for social stratification present another issue for this study. My task is to establish how social stratification is reconstructed in the discourse of a minority. To this end, Breton’s (1984) concept of the *dominant symbolic order* of society is used. Breton sees the dominant symbolic order as a form of “symbolic infrastructure” that reflects the distribution of status and prestige in society. It determines which is the dominant collectivity in the local context, answering the question “whose” society is Canadian society. It also provides criteria for inclusion in that collectivity, in effect creating conditions for a social hierarchy. The concept of dominant symbolic order is adopted here, with the understanding that its social implications go far beyond the “symbolic” domain and into the domains of politics, economy and social relations. Unlike Breton, I consider any radical separation between the material and symbolic domains as untenable, especially in a society like Quebec where culture and language form such important parts of the political enterprise.

Polish usages of the discourse of ethnicity in Canada result in a constructed ordering of society that among other things:

- Identifies some groups as part of the Canadian and Québécois mainstream, while placing others on the margin.

- Reproduces a social hierarchy where positions are ascribed on the basis of membership in ethnic groups and reproduces the conditions for the existence of that hierarchy.
- Explains and justifies competitive and discriminatory practices among people, practices that place minorities at a particular disadvantage when it comes to the access to privilege and power in society.

In other words, the ordering of Canadian society re-produced by Polish immigrants reinforces the dominant status of the two charter groups – French Canadians and English Canadians – against the interests of minorities. It places the latter in an underprivileged position in the competition for valuable social resources in the local context.

However, it is the continuing purpose of this study to demonstrate that there is more to ethnic discourse than ideology, and that it can also carry non-ideological functions. Discursive studies of ideology have a tendency to omit this other aspect of ethnic discourse, which may lead to conclusions that ideology is the reason for existence and reproduction of discursive forms based on ethnicity. Besides the ideological effects of Polish everyday talk, efforts to counter forms of domination and to forward the interests of minorities can also be discerned. Even the very activity of sense-making through the discourse of ethnicity can be considered as non-ideological, since forms of ethnicity can also be employed to construct counter-ideological statements. Polish discourse contains features whose status as ideology is highly dependent on the local context of social relations.

In the previous chapter, the manner in which ideological and non-ideological aspects coexist in a somewhat parallel manner in discursive accounts was demonstrated. In this chapter, how those aspects of discourse combine in the everyday construction of social reality will be examined. In this way, the extreme complexity and contradictory nature of everyday discourse will become apparent. The logic of this discourse (if it can indeed be called by such a term) is highly fragmented and frequently broken as it reflects various

and often contradictory strands of common sense circulating in the community under study.

A related leitmotif, continuing directly from the previous chapter, is that the focus is on the discourse of a minority concerned with its status. This fact gives the discourse in question a particular bias and must bear on the portrait of Canadian society that emerges from it.

### **Canadians and “others”:** mapping out the principal categories

The discourse of ethnicity is a discourse of categorization, of making generalized classifications of people. From a constructionist point of view, even a minimal discursive instantiation involving social categories of people can have consequences on a social scale. Aside from cases of irony, the fact of naming someone “Canadian” or “Québécois,” where any of these labels is assumed to stand for a community of people, is already an act of construction. We identify that person as a representative of the community of “Canadians” (or “Québécois”) and therefore reify that community for us and for our interlocutors. In a way, people who are spoken of “come into existence” for the people involved in discourse.

The discourse of categorization is at the same time a discourse of inclusion and exclusion. Whoever is not included in is left out, as belonging among the “others.” The resulting categorizations have different social implications for the categories involved. Including some groups in the mainstream places them in the majority position with regard to those who are excluded and consequently framed as the minority (Moghaddam *et al.*, 1994).

The analysis of ethnic categorizations in Polish immigrant discourse focuses on the category distinctions used to represent the relation of various groups to Canadian and Québécois societies. It is assumed that the categories “Canadians” and “Québécois” represent the mainstream society in the local context (cf. Lalonde *et al.*, 1992;



Moghaddam *et al.* 1994); what one must determine is what kind of relationship these two have with other ethnic categories reproduced in Polish discourse.

For analytical purposes, two modes of categorization in Polish discourse of ethnicity have been distinguished, called “implicit” and “explicit categorizations” respectively. They have been analyzed separately, beginning with the “implicit categorizations”: the categorical distinctions produced habitually and “matter-of-factly” in the course of talk, without the subjects engaging explicitly in defining or explaining the categories in question. I have tried to determine the basic relationship of inclusion-exclusion these distinctions imply. Consider a typical, “matter-of-fact” handling of category labels:

**1.**

Interviewer: Uh, what do you think about people in Canada?

Izabela: About people in Canada. Who do you mean? Canadians or Poles?

Izabela, housewife, age 36, resident of Ottawa for 7 years.

**2.**

Interviewer: What do you think about people in Canada?

Anna: The ones I have met? Well, they are very nice and polite. Whether it's a Fren-French Canadian or an English one, an anglophone, they are friendly people.

Anna, college student, age 44, resident of Montreal for 7 years.

Technically speaking, the mechanism of differentiation involved in these acts of categorization is very simple, perhaps even neutral. Categories, as used here are entities based on difference. Given a semiotic system in which the meaning of one unit is constituted through an opposition to other units of the same order, someone is an “X” by virtue of not being a “non-X.” In other words, unless there is some clear indication of inclusion or incorporation of any two categories of the same order, placing them next to each other implies that one is what the other is not. This principle is the same whether the differentiation is made between the “French Canadians” and the “English Canadians,” or between “Canadians”<sup>1</sup> and “Poles” (or any “other” category of the ethnic order).

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<sup>1</sup> The concern here is with major social distinctions and not with exact category labels in the Polish language, which can vary depending on the speaker and context of use. For example, Poles in Canada can use two different terms in Polish language, either referring to Canadians as *Kanadyjczyk* (pl. *Kanadyjczycy*), or using a slightly derogatory term *Kanadol* (pl. *Kanadole*). Both these terms however, refer to the same person or category of people.

The two extracts presented above are examples of the two most common types of category distinctions found in Polish discourse, as far as the ethnic and national categories are concerned. One implies a distinction between “Canadians” and “non-Canadians.” Even without knowing anything else about these categories, when “Canadians” are juxtaposed with any other category of the same order, the “others” are by implication “non-Canadians.” By contrast, the other distinction implies an internal division in Canadian society. The “French Canadians” and the “English Canadians,” even though differentiated from each other, are still included in the category “Canadian.” So, it is evident that while one distinction implies inclusion among Canadians, the other implies clear exclusion.

These two general types of category distinctions – “Canadians” *versus* “non-Canadians” and “English Canadians” *versus* “French Canadians” – were found to recur the most consistently of any distinctions throughout Polish discourse of ethnicity in Montreal. In fact, as far as Canadian content is concerned, ethnic categories in this discourse are for the most part organized along the lines set by these two types of distinctions.

The distinction “Canadians” *versus* “non-Canadians” is by far the most common, being in regular use in both study groups, in Montreal and Ottawa. It is safe to assume that it is a regular feature of Polish discourse across Canada (There is also a corresponding, although considerably less common distinction between “Québécois” and “non-Québécois” that will be discussed below.). When it comes to more detailed distinctions, “non-Canadians” are usually represented, with very few exceptions, by “immigrants” as a general category, or by some particular immigrant group, such as, for example, “Chinese,” “Poles,” etc. In other words, when distinctions are being made between ethnic categories – as in the examples above – and the category “Canadians” is in use, any “non-Canadian” category is most likely to be an “immigrant” category.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> One should keep in mind that the focus here is on the discourse covering the “internal” context of Canadian society. Outside that context, Polish discourse uses other *non-Canadian* categories such as, for example, *Americans*, *Germans*, etc.

Significantly, the subjects of this study do not use, to any noticeable extent, categorical expressions that would clearly identify any particular ethnic group other than the two “founding nations” as a constituent part of Canadian society. The use of categories such as “Polish Canadians,” “Chinese Canadians,” etc., or any corresponding descriptive expressions, is rare in Polish everyday discourse. There is some use of the Polish term “*Polonia kanadyjska*,” which translates into English as “Canadian Polonia.”<sup>3</sup> However, judging from the use of this term, the adjective “Canadian” seems to refer to the place where that Polonia lives, rather than to any form of association with the Canadian nation. In the same vein, Poles use the terms “*Polonia montrealaska*,” or “*Polonia ottawska*,” to refer to the Polish communities in Montreal and Ottawa respectively.

The distinction between “English Canadians” and “French Canadians”<sup>4</sup> is another frequent and apparently important type of categorical distinction in Polish discourse. The terms “anglophones” and “francophones” are also used, often interchangeably with the terms “English Canadians” and “French Canadians,” respectively. They all seem to refer to the same two groups of people.

It should be noted that this distinction was found in everyday use among Polish Montrealers only. This is in contrast with usage in Ottawa, where “Canadians” are generally employed as a straightforward category, without internal divisions or qualifications. This significant difference reflects the more complex social environment facing Poles in Montreal. Consequently, the picture of ethnic divisions they produce is considerably more complex. When talking about Canadians, Poles in Montreal often find it necessary to specify “which” Canadians they mean (in much the same way as Anna does in the previous extract).

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<sup>3</sup> As noted in Part I of this study, the term *Polonia* refers to Polish groups in diaspora.

<sup>4</sup> With respect to nomenclature, the terms in popular usage are “French” (in Polish: *Francuz* or pl. *Francuzi*) and “English” (in Polish *Anglik*, or pl. *Anglicy*). These terms are sometimes qualified descriptively (i.e. the French “from here” as opposed to the ones “from France”) or with an adjective to mean “Canadian” in a way of clarification (i.e. *francuski Kanadyjczyk*, or *kanadyjski Francuz*, meaning “French Canadian”).

There are indications that the two categories, “English Canadians”/“anglophones” and “French Canadians”/“francophones”, are treated as two distinct ethnic, rather than linguistic groups. For one thing, they are placed in opposition to “immigrants” or particular immigrant categories, such as, “Armenians,” “Chinese,” “Poles,” etc. It is very unusual to hear about any of the immigrant categories being referred to as “anglophones” or “francophones,” let alone “English Canadians” or “French Canadians.” In this respect, the subjects in this study follow the general convention in Montreal that treats the categories in question as representing the two “founding nations” of Canada (cf. Meintel, 1991).

Another significant feature of Polish discourse in Quebec is its ambivalence with regard to the categorizations of the francophone community and its relationship with “Canadians.” Three different labels are used, seemingly with reference to the same people: “the French (Canadians),” “francophones,” and “Québécois.”<sup>5</sup> For one thing, they are never placed in opposition to each other. The first two are usually qualified as subcategories of “Canadians.” In any case, they are rarely placed in opposition to “Canadians,” which would qualify them as “non-Canadians.”

The label “Québécois,” on the other hand, is normally not included with “Canadians,” even though the two are rarely juxtaposed in everyday talk, in a way that would imply a clear differentiation. In fact, this is a discursive strategy commonly used by people in various social contexts in order to avoid apparent contradiction or controversy (Potter and Wetherell, 1987: 147-154). The two categories in question tend to appear separately in Polish discourse, being used in different contexts of talk. A strong regularity can be observed in this respect, even notwithstanding the fact that the category “Québécois” does not appear in Polish discourse with the same frequency as “Canadians” (The latter seems to be the prevailing category used to designate members of the host society).

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<sup>5</sup> The terms in popular use are either the expression *Québécois* (with French pronunciation), or Polish common term *Quebek* (pl. *Quebecy*). Occasionally, one can hear a more derogatory Polish term *Quebol* (pl. *Quebole*), which seems to have originated among Polish immigrants in Quebec..

Notwithstanding the ambivalence, the categories “Québécois,” “francophones” and “French Canadians” always appear as straightforward and exclusive – representing only the francophone community in Canada. Thus, for example, the categories “English Quebecker,” “anglophone Quebecker” (fr. *Québécois anglophone*), which are used in the mainstream political and media discourse in Quebec and Canada, are practically absent from Polish everyday categorization. For the most part, in Polish discourse “anglophones” remain invariably included among “Canadians.” Likewise, there seems to be a total absence in Polish discourse of category labels indicating any degree of inclusion of immigrant groups in the Québécois or francophone community. For example, the concepts of “Polish Québécois” or “Italian Québécois” are practically “impossible” among Polish immigrants (even though Polish language allows such collages). In general, any category placed next to “Québécois”/“francophones”/“French Canadians” clearly implies “non-Québécois”/“non-francophones”/“non-French Canadians”. This rule applies not only to ethnic categories but also to categories such as “immigrants”:

**3.**

I think that when it comes to the Québécois  
who live here, near immigrants on-on the Island, (...)  
(elsewhere)  
I know that M. [his son] will become Québécois here, in a couple of years.  
But I don't want him to be Québécois. I want him to be Polish.  
Rafal, age 36, electronics technician, resident of Montreal for 10 years.

**4.**

Oh, yes. If you have a typically francophone district, not an immigrant one, you ...  
Anna, college student, age 44, resident of Montreal for 7 years.

**5.**

Wladek: 0623 What bothers me is the xenophobia. What bothers me is,  
0624 I won't say racism because I haven't suffered from it personally. Although  
0625 I heard about the racism of the Québécois against the immigrants.  
0626 Perhaps there is racism. I am not convinced that Parizeau's comment  
0627 [after the referendum] was an expression of racism, of course not.  
0628 I gave it a lot of thought. But one can feel some xenophobia. One feels  
0629 the difference between “us” and “them.” I have felt it for some time now.  
Interviewer: 0630 Who are “we” and who are “they”?  
Wladek: 0631 Québécois *de souche* and the rest.  
Wladek, age 29, university student, resident of Montreal for 6 years.

As far as the opposition “Québécois” *versus* “non-Québécois” is concerned, Polish discourse seems to follow the same patterns, as with the distinction “Canadians” *versus*

“non-Canadians.” For the most part the “non-Québécois” are represented by “immigrants” or particular categories representing immigrant groups. “Anglophones”/“English Canadians” are the other categories most frequently juxtaposed with “Québécois” in this discourse.

### **The social implications of categorization: checking regular patterns against variations**

The main categorical distinctions that are used by Poles have been identified here, as far as everyday, implicit classifications of Canadian and Québécois societies are concerned. There is every reason to assume that those implicit, matter-of-fact categorizations rule in Polish discourse. Their use can be observed on a regular basis in the course of everyday conversations. They are for the most part taken for granted by the subjects of the study and also follow relatively regular patterns, the variability surrounding the “francophone” categories notwithstanding.

These classifications display relatively simple patterns of exclusion and inclusion. Assuming that the categories “Canadians” and “Québécois” represent mainstream society in the local context, the frequency and consistency of distinctions separating them from immigrant groups suggest that Polish discourse both reflects and confirms the minority status of the latter. These distinctions clearly imply the exclusion of immigrants from the mainstream Canadian and Québécois societies, as they identify them as “non-Canadians” and “non-Québécois” respectively.

On the other hand, the inclusion of “French Canadians”/“francophones” and “English Canadians”/“anglophones” among the mainstream categories suggests that Polish discourse in Montreal reflects (and therefore confirms) the dominant status of these groups in the local context. An additional indication of this emerges when Polish discourses produced in Montreal and Ottawa are compared. As noted earlier Polish discourse in Ottawa does not seem to “acknowledge” the francophone/anglophone division among Canadians to the same extent as the Polish discourse in Montreal does. It is hard to imagine, though, that Poles living in Ottawa could simply be ignorant of the

presence of francophones in their hometown, let alone across the river in Quebec, or refuse to acknowledge this presence. A more plausible explanation is that the division in question does not carry the same weight for them as it does for their compatriots in Montreal, where the double majority is the reality (Anctil, 1984; Linteau, 1982).

Different levels of social importance accorded to categories explain the considerable scarcity of racial categories and the categories designating the aboriginal peoples in Polish discourse. It was remarked in the previous chapter that Polish discourse (about Canada) is relatively free of racial content. The scarcity of aboriginal categories is all the more striking, because, even their traditional racial content aside, they could still be present as ethnic categories. An absence or scarcity of usages of certain categories in discourse can be just as significant as any particular patterns of presence. Just as people spoken of on everyday basis “come to existence,” people who are not spoken of do not “matter” and are practically “non-existent.”

This is not to imply that aboriginal categories are completely absent from Polish discourse. They appear occasionally, and when they do, it is as “non-Canadian” categories (as far as the implicit categorizations are concerned). It will become apparent in the course of this study that they sometimes play important and quite unexpected roles in the discourse of categorization.

With regard to the categorizations that prevail in Polish discourse, the fact that speakers classify some groups as part of the mainstream, while excluding or ignoring others carries rather obvious ideological implications. However, Polish discourse of categorization also contains considerable variations from these patterns, variations that should not be disregarded. Variations in discursive patterns are generally considered by analysts to be critical points in construction. They indicate that there is a possible difference between versions of reality and that this is an issue subject to contention (Potter and Wetherell, 1987: 32-53; 122-126). In this case, the effects of variations are not always clearly ideological and can even contradict some of the ideological effects that have been identified.

In this respect, the classifications of the francophone community present a particular problem. There is an obvious variation with regard to the use of categories designating the francophone community in Canada. They are at times included among “Canadians” or excluded from among them as a separate group of “Québécois.” The particular use of the category “Québécois” may indicate that Polish discourse partakes to some extent of the construction of the separate group of francophone Québécois, possibly as a nation in its own right and separate from any other. On the other hand, the inclusion of francophones among Canadians can be regarded as a tendency in the opposite direction, as it frames the objects as a sub-group of another nation.

There are also other significant variations in the patterns of Polish categorization. They occur in the course of what I call here *explicit categorizations*. These represent a different mode of making distinctions among people, which occurs when the subjects explicitly define, describe or explain categories and categorical distinctions. Instances of explicit categorizations in discourse are generally less frequent than implicit ones. People do not engage in defining or explaining social categories each time they employ them. Nevertheless, instances of explicit categorization play an important role in discursive construction, because they present cases where categories are actually conceptualized by the speakers, often during argument and debate.

Studying explicit categorizations in Polish discourse, I found numerous accounts that confirmed the patterns that were identified in implicit categorization. In other words, many people drew the same schemes of ethnic distinctions in Canadian society that they and other Poles produced habitually and matter-of-factly during everyday talk. However, explicit categorizations also appeared that contradicted these patterns entirely. In the first extract below, Canadians are clearly differentiated from immigrants, while in the second one, Canadians **are** immigrants:

## 6.

- |              |      |   |
|--------------|------|---|
| Interviewer: | 0190 | Who in your opinion are Canadians?                                      |
| Ewa:         | 0191 | Canadians? Hm, Canadians are first of all, eh, first of all             |
|              | 0192 | the people who were born here, eh, well, I mean, for sure born here,    |
|              | 0193 | because this is the first condition. [People] who are, hm, first of all |



0194 either anglophones or francophones. I mean, I will have to explain it.  
 0195 But the absolute condition *sine qua non* is that the person  
 0196 be born here, and hasn't come from elsewhere, especially  
 0197 as an adult.

Ewa, age 45, university professor, Montreal resident for 17 years.

## 7.

Interviewer: 0003 Who in your opinion are Canadians? (...)  
 Wladek: 0004 Canadians. Well, let's say, the last two generations, they are  
 0005 mainly immigrants. They are from different parts of the world, depending on the  
 0006 migration trends. Those trends depend on the politics in different regions.  
 0007 So, one can say that the Canadians of the 1980's are represented  
 0008 by the immigrants from the East; then, during the period between the world wars  
 0009 they would be the immigrants from Italy. The current situation in the world  
 0010 determines the character of immigration to Canada and who Canadians are.

Wladek, age 29, university student, Montreal resident for 6 years.

The variations of this kind occur for the most part with regard to the general distinction “Canadians” *versus* “non-Canadians.” More specifically, certain categories may be classified at times as “Canadians” and at times as “non-Canadians.” This concerns mainly the general category “immigrants” and the categories representing particular immigrant groups. It also concerns the categories “French,” “francophones” and “Québécois”. The ambivalence surrounding these latter categories repeats itself throughout the implicit and explicit categorizations. The other classifications identified above maintain a strong consistency in Polish discourse.

The variability affecting the “problematic” classifications is observable both between the accounts of different individuals and between the accounts of the same individuals. Ewa, the first of the speakers cited immediately above (Example 6, p. 174), continues on the subject of the anglophone/francophone division among Canadians:

## 8.

Ewa 0216 So, at the end of the sixties,  
 0215 Eh, they began to differentiate the term “Canadians.” That is,  
 0216 the term was used to mean the anglophones and Québécois,  
 0217 that is the francophones.  
 Interviewer: 0218 That is, that is they [Québécois] are seen here as francophones. Right?  
 Ewa: 0219 Yes, francophones. Even though, I know that there are, of course, anglophones  
 0220 who also define themselves as Québécois, because they are attached to this  
 0221 province, I mean, particularly to Montreal, right? Because it is mainly  
 0222 Montreal, Sherbrooke or *Cantons de l'Est*. It is (...) a result of historical  
 0223 developments. And maybe, a small, tiny group in the East,  
 0224 somewhere in Gaspésie. The rest are francophones, who define

- 0225 themselves as Québécois. Yes, absolutely not as Canadians. Or, maybe  
 0226 first as Québécois and only secondly as Canadians.  
 Ewa, age 45, university professor, Montreal resident for 17 years.

As mentioned above, variations represent critical moments in discourse. Different accounts mean different, potentially conflicting versions of reality – arguments are generally produced against immediate or potential alternatives. If one assumes that the regular, taken-for-granted notions form the dominant representation of reality, the variations open a window on a “counter-discourse” of sorts.

It would be a gross oversimplification, however, to classify regular patterns of discourse as ideology, while regarding variations as counter-ideology. The issue is rather between different and conflicting versions of reality. Whether the effects of particular representation are ideological or not depends on many factors, both within and outside discourse. As parts of the process of social construction, inclusion and exclusion may have different social implications, depending on the context and the categories involved.

Exclusion of immigrant groups from among Canadians and Québécois francophones has ideological effects because it frames them as minorities and suggests a lack of integration with mainstream society. On the other hand, inclusion among Canadians brings them closer to majority status (Moghaddam *et al.*, 1994: 113). Consequently, any forms of discourse that challenge this exclusion function for the good interest of immigrant groups and should be considered a non-ideological aspect of discourse.

It is a much more complex problem with the classifications of Quebec’s francophones, who are at times classified as a sub-category of “Canadians” and at other times as a separate category of “Québécois.” The external context of this discourse shows that when the Québécois are classified as a group separate from Canadians, the discourse of nationality and the questions of distinct status are invoked; i.e., sovereignty and political rights to control over the territory of Quebec and the destiny of peoples within that territory. Classifying the same people as a sub-category of another nation sends a different message, invoking the discourse of equal status with other groups, subordination to an overarching political authority and limited rights to Quebec’s territory and its

inhabitants. These questions have been at the center of political struggles and public debates for much of Canada's recent history.

Considering the matter in terms of the relative political and social status of various ethnic components of Canadian society, the first classification (i.e. "Québécois" as a group separate from "Canadians") can be assumed to work for the good interest of Quebec's francophones, who are those most clearly identified as Québécois in Polish discourse. Regarding them as a separate nation lends some legitimacy to their claims for a distinct status vis-à-vis other groups. It can eventually open a way for them to become the absolute majority in the local context, particularly if the sovereignty project succeeds in Quebec. On the other hand, the second classification (i.e. "Québécois" as a sub-category of "Canadians") can be assumed to function against the particular interests of the Québécois francophones, as it can serve to question their special status and their claims to sovereignty.

Hypothetically speaking, all discursive forms that function for the best interests of the majority can be considered as ideological as I am using the term. At the same time, the forms that function to the contrary can be considered as counter-ideological. However, when it comes to the categorizations of the francophone community, any such distinctions become highly relative. Even though Québécois francophones are a majority in the local context of Quebec, they are at the same time a minority in the context of Canada at large. So, whatever makes any of these classifications ideological in one context may have counter-ideological or non-ideological effects in the other. Ultimately, both classifications in question must perhaps be considered as ideological, because they place Québécois francophones in a position of majority with regard to immigrant groups. But are they only ideological?

Understanding these complexities requires a more comprehensive analysis, one that goes beyond the basic categorical distinctions that have been analyzed here. In the following sections, other features of Polish discourse that play a critical role in the patterns of categorization will be examined. The ways of reasoning and explanations involved in

categorization will be investigated to detect some of the “reasons” and explicit logic behind categorical distinctions, in order to understand how the latter make sense to the people who use them. Certain breaches in this logic will become apparent at a later point in the analysis.

It is not possible to sort out all the complexities of this common sense discourse in the course of one study, nor is that the actual purpose here. Rather, the goal is to begin to unravel these complexities and to demonstrate that something more than ideology exists behind these ethnic categorizations. They send different and often contradictory messages, reflecting the diverse, sometimes conflicting interests of the various sectors of society.

### **Ethnicity as a matter of culture**

Traditionally, ethnicity is about culture. This general view is perpetuated in all kinds of discourse, not only common sense and political, but also academic. Conceptions of ethnicity are continually contested in social science and much of the contention is about the role of culture in ethnicity. Essentialist approaches see culture as the very substance of ethnicity, and define ethnic groups as distinct “units of culture” (Despres, 1982; Isajiw, 1974; Naroll, 1964). Opposing this view is the constructivist orientation that sees culture as a symbolic resource used in the construction of ethnic groups (Barth, 1969; Despres, *ibid.*; Glazer and Moynihan, 1975; Wetherell and Potter, 1992). However, both orientations regard culture as a critical aspect of ethnicity.

Popular and political discourse in Canada draws excessively on the notion of culture to explain ethnic phenomena. Culture is also the central concept of Canadian multiculturalism. This is best illustrated by the use of terms “multiculturalism” and “cultural communities,” where the first term is assumed to reflect the ethnic pluralism of Canadian society and a national project embedding cultural differences between parts of the population, and the second term is treated as synonymous with ethnic groups (Government of Canada, 1987; House of Commons Debates, 1971: 8545;

Multiculturalism and the Polish Community, 1983). Many Polish immigrants have become well-versed in this type of discourse:

**9.**

0607 But in my opinion, it is, it is natural,  
 0608 I think, because, eh, every every nation, eh, right, every  
 0609 ethnic group has its characteristic features that differentiate it  
 0610 from others. So, I think it's great, eh, that that people hold on to their  
 0611 language, to their traditions, to their culture. This is probably where we  
 0612 can see the greatest difference between, between Canada's multiculturalism  
 0613 and the American *melting pot* where in order to survive, you have to become  
 0614 American.

Ewa, age 45, university professor, resident of Montreal for 17 years.

Culture shows itself to be the central concept used to construct ethnicity in Polish everyday talk in the present study as well. Two different strands in culture discourse – two interpretative repertoires – have been identified. For reasons that will become apparent, they have been named “the repertoire of cultural determinism” and “the culture as heritage repertoire,” respectively. Each of the two repertoires offers a different social theory and different approach to ethnicity (cf. Wetherell and Potter, 1992: 129-130).

### **Cultural determinism**

The discourse of cultural determinism treats culture as the “substance of difference” and the reason for making categorical distinctions between people. It provides semantic meaning to ethnic categories, so that the kinds of distinctions that were discussed above make sense to people who use them. Different cultural traits are assumed to characterize people from different ethnic groups, and thus serve as the basis for ethnic divisions. Characteristically, the emphasis is on establishing difference, while little is said about what the particular cultural traits (the alleged “substance of difference”) really are. This seems to confirm Barth's theory, according to which ethnic groups rely for their existence on the establishment and maintenance of symbolic difference by their members, a boundary separating them from other groups rather than on the actual possession of any distinct, unique traits (Barth, 1969; see also Wallman, 1979). The following example reconstructs the difference between Canadians and immigrants and also represents one of the most common applications of the repertoire of cultural determinism:

**10.**

Interviewer: 0027 You used the term “Kanadole.” Who are Kanadole?  
 Edward: 0028 Kanadole, well, it's a [local Polish] slang expression. Let's say, in our language

0029 it's Kanadole. In the other, they are called differently by other immigrants.  
 0030 One may not want it at the beginning, coming from a different country and all.  
 0031 You want to strike roots in this country, somehow blend in with these  
 0032 people. But there is always a distance. Maybe it's a question of having been  
 0033 born in a different place, of having received a different upbringing, a different  
 0034 cultural influence. Somehow, it is difficult to transplant it onto this soil. But  
 0035 these [Canadian] people were born here, they struck roots here. (...)  
 0037 Coming from a different country, it is sometimes difficult to get us-  
 0038 to acc-accept it, get used to it. We may get used to it to some extent.  
 0039 Sometimes, let's say, we also act the way they do. We act the way they do.  
 0040 But still, somewhere inside, let's say, usually, I say,  
 0041 Poles st-stick together. They mostly stick together. Of course, they have  
 0042 Canadian friends, too. They have different nationalities, uh, friends of  
 0043 other nationalities. I would even say that they generally have a better  
 0044 understanding with Europeans – immigrants like themselves – than with  
 0045 Canadians as such. Although, Canadians, in general are very nice, very,  
 0046 you might even think, warmhearted. When you get closer, it may turn out to be a  
 0047 different story.

Edward, age 37, small business owner, resident of Ottawa for 7 years.

The same mechanism of differentiation isolated in the previous section is apparent here; i.e., categories are based on difference. What people regard as the “substance of difference,” that is, certain traits that make them who they are, and who other people cannot be are also revealed. Edward speaks of differences of origin, differences in socialization and cultural background as the main reasons that separate members of different groups from each other. Further down, he will add language to the list, which almost always accompanies cultural factors in this strand of discourse.

Origin and place of birth is often cited together with culture, because they are assumed to determine the cultural make-up of a person. This assumption is apparent in Ewa's account (Example 6, page 174) when she argues that Canadians can only be the people born in Canada and not others “who came here” and who are by implication non-Canadians. There is of course a range of opinions among Poles as to how many generations it takes for the descendants of immigrants to become Canadians. For some it takes two or more generations born in Canada for a person to be a “real” Canadian:

### 11.

Interviewer: 0117 You used the word “Canadian.” Who, in your opinion are Canadians?  
 Anna: 0118 Canadian? It takes a little bit more than being born here It's best if his  
 0119 parents were born here, ha, ha, ha. Because even someone who was born here  
 0120 but from immigrant parents is not yet a full Canadian.

Anna, college student, age 44, resident of Montreal for 7 years.

Nevertheless, there is a strong unanimity among informants that the cultural milieu of socialization determines people's ethnic identity, often regardless of family background and against the will of their parents:

**12.**

0361 ...I know that M. [his son] will become Québécois here, in a couple of years.  
 0362 But I don't want him to be Québécois. I want him to be Polish.  
 0363 Maybe, I am too much  
 0364 of a Pole, you know. That's what I think. I think so.  
 0365 I think, I am too much from there. It is important for  
 0366 me that he be Polish. It would be difficult for me to come to terms with it  
 0367 [M. becoming Québécois]. When I observe the children of our friends,  
 0368 they speak French among themselves, even among brothers and sisters.  
 0369 I know it has to be that way, why should they speak Polish?  
 Rafal, age 36, electronics technician, resident of Montreal for 10 years.

A deterministic social theory is presented in the foregoing whereby cultural influence is regarded as unavoidable and as determining group membership. People have no choice as to what cultural background they receive and consequently over what they can or cannot become. Cultural background is seen to shape people's values, character and critical faculties in ways that are difficult to overcome. It makes it difficult for people from different groups to become like each other. In this strand of discourse, ethnic differences appear as absolute and insurmountable.

**13.**

Interviewer: 0028 So, people at work know where you come from and this badly affects your  
 0029 relations [with them]?  
 Stefan: 0030 Aah, if I wanted to accept their way of thinking and their, uhm, way of being  
 0031 and their their their values, I think you could do that, but I would lose a part  
 0032 a part of what is uniquely mine. And when I show that I am different,  
 0033 when I don't want to become like them, eh, it leads to conflict.  
 0034 conflict in the sense that I must be careful at times. I must explain a lot  
 0035 of things, why I think this way and not the other. Because they  
 0036 see that I am different. They look differently at certain things.  
 0037 They are shaped in a different way.  
 Stefan, age 30, hospital technician, resident of Montreal for 8 years.

**14.**

0264 People come here looking, you know,  
 0265 for a better life. That's for sure, right? For the most part it is looking  
 0266 for a better life and they find it one way or another. And you know, they stick  
 0267 together because as the first generation they can't, they are unable to cut the  
 0268 ties. They are different. They have a different temperament, eh, different  
 0269 language, so they don't have the same way of understanding things. Because  
 0270 even if you learn the language and understand those Québécois, you understand  
 0271 only the language but you don't understand the nuances...  
 0272 eh, [It is] simply not the same sense of humor, you don't grow up in the same  
 0273 conditions, you don't grow up in [the same] school, you don't go to school with  
 0274 the same people, you don't laugh at the same things. You simply grow up in

- 0275 different conditions. It is impossible for you to have the same point of view.  
 0276 These differences are really minimal but they are enough  
 0277 to make it impossible for you to live together with these people.  
 0278 It does not work for you. And it is known that Italians, for example, dislike  
 0279 Québécois. I think that most immigrants rather dislike Québécois.  
 Rafal, age 36, electronics technician, resident of Montreal for 10 years.

The logic and semantics of cultural determinism offer a particular sense to relations between ethnic groups. Because of cultural differences, empathy and understanding between members of different groups are difficult or downright impossible. The resulting system of oppositions positions groups in “us” *versus* “them” relationships. This distinction is an important measure of social relations in ethnic discourse. Edward elaborates on it in his account of differences between Poles and Canadians:

### 15.

- Interviewer: 0048 You did say, uh, “we” and “they.” Who are “we”?  
 Edward: 0049 I mean “we,” uh, as I explained, as I said, something like that emerges.  
 0050 Maybe, maybe not with everyone, let’s say. But in a given  
 0051 group, a community that immigrated, came here, let’s say, to Canada.  
 0052 It may begin with a better understanding. Let’s say, a Pole will understand  
 0053 other Pole better than he will understand a Canadian. Although, it may not  
 0054 always hold true. But it usually seems so. Maybe it’s a question of a language  
 0055 barrier, the impossibility to communicate the emotions with words.  
 0056 Unfortunately, a second language is hard to master to such  
 0057 an extent as to be able to feel it. One can speak it but, I think, it is more  
 0058 problematic to be able to feel it. And that’s why a group formed, the so-called  
 0059 “we.” It is “we,” let’s say, who came from the same country.  
 Edward, age 37, small business owner, resident of Ottawa for 7 years.

From cultural similarities within ethnic groups and differences between them, follow, in Polish perception, two basic principles governing the practice of ethnic relations: **solidarity** within groups and **opposition** between different groups. Cultural factors make people “stick” with their own and keep apart from others. Poles speak about “sticking together,” “cohesion,” “solidarity,” “a sense of community,” “affinity,” etc. within groups and about “differences,” “problems,” “conflict,” “aversion,” “animosity,” “discrimination,” etc. between different groups.

The determinism of cultural differences bears heavily on social relations, so opposition and conflict are natural and inevitable. Looking at the initial subject matter of Edward’s account (op cit. lines 0027-0047), it is apparent that the speaker is trying to justify ethnic name-calling. Ethnic name-calling appears as inevitable to Edward because ethnic distinctions are inevitable. “One may not want it at the beginning,” he argues, “One



wants to become a part of this land, blend in with the people...” Cultural differences make it impossible and people have no choice but to “stick” with their own and in opposition to others.

The principles of group solidarity and intergroup opposition lead to hierarchies of preference in important areas of social life. People favor members of their nationality and discriminate against others. Polish discourse in Canada contains references to such hierarchies in many areas of social life and particularly in work relations, business relations, housing (particularly rental practices), patterns of socializing and friendships.

## 16.

Interviewer: 0069 Do-do people in Canada differ from each other?  
 Anna: 0072 (...) Yes. There are groups, it's related to nationality, that separate themselves  
 0073 into closed circles and you won't get inside. We won't get to them because we  
 0074 just happen to be Polish. So, let's say, Italians stick together and Asians  
 0075 stick together. And you can see that. For example, if you have a company,  
 0076 it employs only its own. I, for instance, have no chances ever to get to a  
 0077 Canadian firm managed by someone who [is Canadian].  
 0078 He won't hire anyone like me, for example. For a menial job, yes,  
 0079 but not for any serious position, not even a modest one.

Anna, college student, age 44, resident of Montreal for 7 years.

## 17.

0014 I think that when it comes to the Québécois  
 0015 who live here, near immigrants on-on the Island and near the Island  
 0016 particularly on South Shore, even the North Shore, right, there is,  
 0017 one can say, there is some, some aversion, sometimes indifference, right,  
 0018 when it comes to immigrants, right.  
 0019 Most of the time it is rather an aversion, right.  
 0049 (...) Uh, so you know, this problem is most serious here in Drummondville,  
 0050 Drummondville, St-Hyacinthe and the whole of South Shore, right.  
 0051 And since these people here have, uh, there is the greatest competition  
 0052 for work and everything, right, there is the greatest friction  
 0053 between-between immigrants [and Québécois]. Because there is the largest  
 0054 accumulation of them [immigrants] here. So, you see, this whole racial problem  
 0055 or even any other, or whatever, is simply, because there is competition for jobs,  
 0056 right. When someone sees that an immigrant has a better job, he envies  
 0057 him. If you buy a better house or whatever, you can sense, uh, in  
 0058 those small, [ethnically] pure towns that they look at you in more or less  
 0059 unfriendly way, right. They can envy you, but envy is a human trait. It can  
 0060 happen anywhere. It just happens that you are an immigrant, so you look at  
 0061 these matters in this way, right. But (.) uh, on the Island, in Montreal we have  
 0062 what we have. There has always been a division into the French and English.  
 0063 Now, many people have moved to the suburbs, out of the Island. The  
 0064 immigrants who come to the Island live in kinds of enclaves, kinds of  
 0065 communities. The first, uh, first generations of immigrants feel uprooted  
 0066 and somehow cannot get over it. They live here, you could say, against  
 0067 themselves, because they have a better life here and for this reason only, right.  
 0068 That's my opinion, right. Whether they are Italians or Greeks or,

0069 perhaps there are less of them first-generation Greeks or Italians.  
 0070 There are still some left, because they were coming here in the fifties,  
 0071 mostly in the sixties. So, one can say, they are still the first generation, right.  
 0072 So, they-they are, uh, more united, because they prefer to live in their  
 0073 own communities, right, and-and, whether they stay in groups or not,  
 0074 they will always stick together and will always prefer each other, right.  
 0075 And you have divisions, uh. And you can say that every immigrant looks at the  
 0076 Canadian society in such a way that if he wants to do something with anyone,  
 0077 or help anyone, or give him a job, he will look after his  
 0078 own compatriot first, then, after the other immigrant and at the very, very end  
 0079 after a Québécois. And the same, and it is the same the other way around. If-if-if  
 0080 it is a Québécois who hires, uh, not necessarily as the employer, but for  
 0081 example, as a placement officer, for example, in a given company, he  
 0082 will always favor, you know, Québécois. I would say, a great majority, let's  
 0083 say, up to ninety percent of people would look at this matter in such a way.  
 Rafal, age 36, electronics technician, resident of Montreal for 10 years.

The account cited directly above contains an example of another common tendency in Polish-Canadian discourse: competition in important areas of social life is presented as ethnic competition. This reflects a general view that nations and ethnic groups strive to acquire power in the world and are naturally in competition with each other. This notion is not always stated explicitly, yet it can be discerned as one of the premises on which the speakers' arguments are based. In the two extracts presented below, competition is taken for granted as the speakers produce hierarchies of ranking among ethnic groups and cultures respectively. This shows how natural the idea of interethnic competition has become for the participants in this study:

**18.**

0023 As a nation, we Poles are ranked somewhere ahead, ahead, eh, of the  
 0024 Indians. Because the first in this province are the French, then, come the  
 0025 English, then, the Italians in the third place, and so on, in order. They classify us  
 0026 somewhere ahead of the Indians.<sup>6</sup>  
 Alicja, in her thirties, embroidery technician, resident of Montreal for 10 years,  
 in Canada for 15 years.

**19.**

Helena: 0056 Do I like it here in Montreal? I like it a lot in Montreal. It is my opinion that,  
 0057 uh, as I mentioned at the beginning, the fact that there are the French here and  
 0058 that their culture prevails over the anglophone culture. Uh, it resembles more  
 0059 Europe to me, which I find closer to heart than the anglophone culture.  
 Helena, age 34, self-employed, resident of Montreal for 9 years.

It is not always clearly expressed in Polish discourse what the struggle is all about, but there are numerous indications that it is about power, influence, status and economic affluence. These factors as well as the principle of ethnic solidarity are expressed in the

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<sup>6</sup> Meaning the Native people of North America.

exchange cited below. This principle has a great explanatory power for Polish immigrants and is repeated in many contexts. A group's success in its struggle for power and status greatly depends on cooperation and solidarity among its members.

**20.**

- Wladek: 0812 Damn it, Polish achievements are mediocre. Not only in Montreal,  
0813 but in Diaspora everywhere.
- Interviewer: 0814 In what sense?
- Wladek: 0815 Well, in terms of money, uh, social position, some kind of I don't  
0816 know, progress. I don't see any famous, they constantly talk, you know, big  
0817 names. Let it be Malinowski here, or some engineer there, who did something,  
0818 constructed something, or some metallurgist, you know, and so on.  
0819 But I think all these are mere slogans that confirm that the majority [of Poles]  
0820 still belong to Jackowo, to Greenpoint,<sup>7</sup> that they don't make the middle class.
- Interviewer: 0821 Why?
- Renata: 0825 (...) Perhaps because we lack some kind of, I don't know,  
0826 solidarity? Some kind of, uh, just looking at the other cultures, say-say, I don't  
0827 know, the Chinese, or the Italians, or the Hindus, they all help each other.  
0828 The Jews, they all help each other (...).
- Wladek: 0829 Italians are such a symbol of, you know, cooperation,  
0830 national solidarity.
- Renata: 0831 And this-this builds a nation's might.

Renata and Wladek, both aged 29, university students,  
residents of Montreal for 5 and 6 years respectively.

Renata and Wladek's argumentation is based on the premise that nations strive to obtain power in the world. The nation's power, or "might" as Renata calls it, is measured by achievements in terms of economic affluence ("money"), social position, class (in this excerpt nations were ranked in a class hierarchy), professional achievements and (however unspecified) progress. There are also references to prestige, contained in the talk about "big names."

In general, the discourse of cultural determinism offers a rather fatalistic and sometimes gloomy vision of ethnicity and ethnic relations in Canada. Culture closes people into groups, separating and opposing them to others. It prevents empathy and understanding between different peoples. The overall emphasis on difference leads to isolationism, conflict and social hierarchies. However, not all culture discourse among Polish immigrants is so pessimistic. Quite a different vision of culture and ethnicity emerges when the subjects of this study begin to speak of culture as heritage.

## Discourse of culture as heritage

When people begin to speak of culture as heritage, the focus shifts from group memberships, identity, solidarity and conflict to art, music, holidays, customs, rituals, culinary recipes, national dress, etc. Understood in these terms, culture becomes “user-friendly,” and a thing to be displayed and shared with others. The mood lightens up considerably. The emphasis is no longer on establishing difference or on problems stemming from cultural diversity but on peaceful coexistence between different groups and on benefits stemming from that diversity.

The view of culture as heritage is the preferred notion in discourse and policy of multiculturalism, not only in Canada but also in other countries where such policies have been introduced, such as Australia and New Zealand. During the 1970’s, the political elites in those countries came to a conclusion that internal cultural differences should be treated as a national resource, rather than a source of conflict and stumbling block to social integration (cf. Wetherell and Potter, 1992: 129-130; 134-135). Hence, diversity is discussed as part of “Canadian heritage.” To speak of culture as heritage is first of all to speak about tolerance and acceptance of cultural difference:

### 21.

Interviewer: 0264 Uh, Canada is a place of coexistence of peoples from different parts of the  
0265 world, speaking different languages, etc. What do you think of this situation?  
Józef: 0266 It’s the tolerance. It’s great that Canada tolerates it. It enriches Canada’s culture.  
0267 I mean, for example, every group has its own culture, and they have shows  
0268 during the national holidays, national outfits, and so on. So Germans have theirs,  
0269 the Czech and Ukrainians have theirs, I mean dance groups and so on. Great.  
0270 What would Canada be worth, if it had only one community, for example the  
0271 French or the English? But here you are, because of that [diversity],  
0272 Canada is an interesting country.  
Józef, age 77, retired oil industry worker, resident of Montreal for 50 years.

### 22.

Jacek: 0226 Canada is in my opinion a very tolerant-tolerant country. It does not force  
0227 anything upon you. You can wear your national costume,  
0228 the way you like it, you can pray to whatever god you want.  
0229 Of course, there are certain basic principles. One has to obey the Canadian law,  
0230 which is normal for me. Still, I think, Canada is a fantastic country in this  
0231 respect. You couldn’t find that anywhere in Europe.

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<sup>7</sup> Jackowo and Greenpoint are colloquial terms designating two traditionally Polish neighborhoods in Chicago and New York respectively. For many Poles in North America, they have come to symbolize the Polish ghetto and generally carry pejorative associations.

Jacek, in his forties, chauffeur for the Diplomatic Corps,  
resident of Ottawa for 9 years.

The picture of social relations that emerges from this kind of discourse is more optimistic than the one emerging from the discourse of cultural determinism. Culture as heritage can be a source of pleasure and excitement. It is not about conflict and competition but rather about feeling positive about difference. In the extract below, immersion in a culturally diversified environment makes Helena feel like a “citizen of the world.” She opposes the ethnocentrism stemming from uniform cultural background with the openness and widening of the horizons offered by cultural diversity in Montreal.

**23.**

0484 It’s nice when you go out and you momentarily hear five, ten different  
0485 languages, you see people of different color, you have the choice of fifteen  
0486 different restaurants that offer you fifteen different dishes from fifteen different  
0487 countries.  
0488 (...) I think Montreal is a sort of Mecca, so to speak, where you, standing in the  
0489 center can feel like a citizen of the world.  
0497 (...) It’s very exciting, the fact that you can live in the milieu where, for  
0498 example, on my street where you can meet people who come from different  
0499 countries. I find that is enriching.  
0500 It’s a lesson for me. I can learn about other cultures, other customs,  
0501 or even, the culinary art, in the simplest way,  
0502 all that kind of stuff. It’s simply something that enriches you.  
0503 It gives you wider horizons and-and point of view. It doesn’t get you  
0504 enclosed within certain boundaries and it doesn’t impose any lens on your  
0505 vision, as it often happens, for instance, to most Poles or even,  
0506 I suspect many French people, who are so conservative that  
0507 they think what they created, their culture, their customs, are  
0508 the universally accepted norm and that everybody should [abide], should have  
0509 the same point of view, or look through the same lens they do.

Helena, age 34, self-employed, resident of Montreal for 9 years.

Culture as heritage poses an alternative to cultural determinism in many ways. Cultural difference is no longer a source of conflict, a limitation on social relations. Culture becomes harmless, an exchange commodity and a source of enrichment. Empathy and rapprochement between people belonging to different groups become possible and people can even learn from other cultures. Cultural influence is no longer ascribed, determined by birth, either: it can be a matter of personal choice and acceptance.

**24.** (Helena continues)

Interviewer: 0514 Have you ever profited from such opportunities of self-enrichment as, for  
0515 example an exchange of culinary recipes?  
Helena: 0516 A lot. I mean, when I talk to people from other countries, I take a lot of  
0517 interest in learning their history. I don’t claim to be an authority on the  
0518 history of other countries, but roughly speaking,  
0519 I have some knowledge and I always try to expand it.

- 0520 It's also about culture, about the way of celebrating  
 0521 certain holidays, and the like. [Comparing] how they celebrate and how  
 0522 I celebrate, how they, you know, what they prepare and how I like to  
 0523 prepare. It can be a cultural exchange, can be a discussion about music or  
 0524 or their culture, their customs, eh, that kind of thing.  
 0525 For me, this is a general enrichment. I don't  
 0526 have to do the way they do, I don't have to accept their way. I am simply  
 0527 enriched by it. And if anyone asks me my opinion,  
 0528 it's my private matter at this point. .  
 Interviewer: 0529 Does it ever happen that you hate [other peoples' cultural practices]?  
 Helena: 0530 Hm, I must say that rarely. They are exotic to me, and the  
 0531 exotic attracts. So you can give it a try, from time to time.  
 0532 Later, if I don't like it, I don't have to practice it  
 0533 or perform it, and if I like it, it becomes part of me.
- Helena, age 34, self-employed, resident of Montreal for 9 years.

## 25.

- Interviewer: 1351 Isn't the cultural diversity one of the reasons that [Montreal] is such an  
 1352 interesting city?  
 Renata: 1353 Yes, of course.  
 Wladek: 1354 Yes, yes.  
 Renata: 1355 I think, I haven't learned so much anywhere else, eh, I mean,  
 1356 how to say that...  
 Wladek: 1357 Sure, sure, it does enrich you a little. But I am not a fanatic of self-enrichment  
 1358 through experiencing different cultures. I am not a fan of that. I am not open on  
 1359 those other cultures. So I say that Canada hasn't  
 1360 brought anything new into my life.  
 Renata: 1361 I, on the other hand, I like that.  
 Wladek: 1362 Renata, on the other hand, yes. She is open to all the novelties, to exotic  
 1363 cuisines, you know.  
 Renata: 1364 Yes. I even wanted,  
 1365 I told Wladek that I would like to move in  
 1366 with a typical Jewish family, for example, a typical, eh, eh,  
 1367 orthodox [family], to learn about their their customs,  
 1368 so I could form an opinion on the subject. Because, I have never really  
 1369 had an opportunity to do any in-depth reading on the subject. Or to move in  
 1370 with a Lebanese family, simply move in and live for two weeks or so,  
 1371 so I can get a better picture of that culture.  
 1372 It is very interesting to listen to what a Lebanese woman has to say about her  
 1373 religion, about that culture. This is extremely interesting.  
 1374 I am very sensitive and very open to those other cultures  
 1375 and I am very happy at school. (...) For example in the French language  
 1376 school I had a cross-section of society, because there were fourteen people in the  
 1377 class and fourteen different nationalities. It was a very positive  
 1378 experience.  
 Wladek: 1379 My dad liked that, too, when he came to visit. The world on the palm of your  
 1380 hand. All those costumes, like a folk festival.  
 1381 It's not bad. It's not bad.

Renata and Wladek, both aged 29, university students,  
 residents of Montreal for 5 and 6 years respectively.

### **Culture discourse as ideology**

Considering the social implications of culture discourse, it has a strong potential to serve the interests of dominant groups at the expense of minorities. This concerns both repertoires that have been analyzed here, despite the obvious differences in conceptualizing culture and the approach to ethnicity that they display.

The case of cultural determinism is perhaps more striking in this respect, as it quite obviously fosters ethnocentrism and discrimination. Taking this discourse in the abstract, it becomes apparent that it gives sense to distance and separation between different sectors of the population. It obtains a particular ideological thrust when one part of the population that it relates to represents the majority or majorities, while the other parts represent the minority or minorities. The notions of ethnic solidarity and interethnic competition that stem from cultural determinism give sense to social hierarchies and rationalize discrimination between members of different groups. The potential of this discourse to legitimize social hierarchies becomes obvious, once it is noted that in the given social context, the balance of power is not equal for all the parties involved in the competition. From the outset, some groups have a structural advantage over others.

Culture understood in terms of this repertoire can become a liability for immigrants. In analyzing everyday discourse in the Polish community, I found many instances where cultural difference was posed as a stumbling block on the way to full integration of immigrants with Canadian and Québécois societies. In fact, it is mainly through using this type of discourse that informants place immigrants on the margin of mainstream society.

Furthermore, the logic of cultural determinism can lead to the construction of arguments that speak against ethno-cultural diversity and Canadian multiculturalism, and that can blame the immigrant minorities for the alleged lack of unity in Canadian society. In the extract below, the speaker builds a critique of what he calls “multi-nationalism” in Canada, but he is clearly referring to multiculturalism:

## 26.

- Wladek: 0037 There is no patriotism [in Canada], because this is not an integrated society. It  
0038 has different roots. Everybody is, you know, they are the first generations in  
0039 Canada. I don't know how it looks in terms of statistics, but most people I  
0040 know are the first or second generation of immigrants. So, how can you  
0041 speak about patriotism, you know, about any sentiment of belonging to  
0042 Canada, if my mom is in Italy, in Poland, in China, or, or even,  
0043 you know, I myself was born in China, or in Italy,  
0044 or in Japan (...)
- Interviewer: 0055 But, you have the same situation in the United States.
- Wladek: 0056 Yes, but the policy of the States puts more stress on, exactly on [American]  
0057 patriotism, on the fact that you are an American and that's it. But Canada has a  
0058 policy of multi-nationalism, you know, multi-multinational. You have the  
0059 cultivation of the cultural roots, the cultivation of all cultures, and let us say,  
0060 the illusion of coexistence of all cultures. I don't believe in the  
0061 coexistence of all cultures. So, in my opinion, this is an illusion and it creates  
0062 that lack of integration. (...)
- 0067 From my own experience, I see that [multiculturalism] is impossible. (...)
- 0070 There is patriotism [in the US], because there is no coexistence of cultures. The  
0071 coexistence of cultures is not favored. Because the coexistence, the policy of  
0072 multi-multi-nationalism is something opposite to patriotism.
- 0073 You can be Polish in Canada, you can be Chinese, Italian and you can cultivate  
0074 your culture and still have that sentiment of belonging, "I am Italian, an that's  
0075 it," even though I have the Canadian passport. Not so in the States.
- 0076 You are first of all American in the States and you better forget about being  
0077 Italian. That's how it is. In reality, no one cares that  
0078 you are Italian (...).
- 0081 You are allowed to be Italian in Canada, you are allowed to be Polish, Russian,  
0082 and it is actually well seen, because there are the cultural centers, there are  
0083 government programs, and foundations. There is money allocated to these ends.  
0084 [The differences] are constantly on display. Less and less, though, I think,  
0085 because it does not work. (...)
- 0088 It is a beautiful idea, but I think it doesn't work, and it already misfired a couple  
0089 of times. I don't know whether they are going to continue with that policy.
- 0090 You can already see that Québécois have discontinued it, because  
0091 the referendum showed them that multi-nationalism,  
0092 multi-nationalism can cost them a lot and can hinder them in their policies. They  
0093 can't attain their goals.

Wladek, age 29, university student, resident of Montreal for 6 years.

The ethno-cultural diversity of Canada makes many Poles question the existence of the Canadian nation. They see the heterogeneity of immigrant cultures and the policy of multiculturalism as factors that prevent the full integration of Canadian society and the reason for the lack of national sentiment in Canada. This is an "inescapable" conclusion based on premises that cultural background equals group identity and loyalty. People who build such arguments fail to notice (or it does not seem to bother them) that in the present climate the alternative to multiculturalism and ethno-cultural diversity is the assimilation



of minorities and the submission of all parts of society to one dominant source of national values.

Ironically, certain strands of multiculturalism have also been criticized for having an ideological thrust. Critics speak about the “objectification,” “carnivalization,” even the “burial” of ethnicity defined through cultural heritage (Handler, 1988: 16; Onufrijchuk, 1988). Defined as customs, folk dances, crafts, ethnic cuisines, etc., ethnic culture is reduced to the folkloric level and publicly consumed in ethnic restaurants or during such events as “Caribana,” “Oktoberfest” and other folk festivals. As a result, ethnic culture becomes trivialized and separated from mainstream culture.

The discourse of culture as heritage can limit and contain ethnicity and particularly immigrant ethnicity, on which it usually is concentrated in Polish everyday talk. The trivialized forms of culture become the designated channels of ethnic expression – the immigrant groups’ “contribution” to society. Meanwhile, aspects of culture that are of real consequence in the local context remain the contribution of the two charter groups. This separation is well illustrated in the extract below. Despite the speaker’s effort to assert the value of immigrants’ contribution, there is an obvious contrast between the taken-for-granted and the “exotic,” which runs along the line of the majority-minority division.

## 27.

Marta:           0024    It doesn’t bother anyone in Montreal that you have an accent. You speak with an  
                       0025    accent and everyone thinks, “he must be an anglophone,” when you speak  
                       0026    French, or “he must be a francophone,” when you speak English. It’s normal to  
                       0027    speak with an accent. Uh, you have the biculturalism. Uh, there are lots of  
                       0028    restaurants, lots of ethnic stores of different kinds. It’s as if, uh, those-those  
                       0029    ethnic groups that live here, contributed each in their own way to-to this city.  
                       0030    This city is neither English, nor French, today.  
                       0031    It is very *métèque*, very complex.

Marta, age 55, civil servant, resident of Montreal for 17 years.

It is such aspects of culture discourse in Canada that feed Onufrijchuk’s (1988) critique of Canadian multiculturalism. Onufrijchuk sees multiculturalism as a strategy used by the power holders to control ethnic minorities in Canada. Characteristically, similar points have been expressed with regard to Australia and New Zealand, where multiculturalism

has been dubbed the “preferred capitalist strategy” for dealing with ethnic minorities and for the “servicing of diversity” (Wetherell and Potter, 1992: 138).

Multicultural policy and discourse, with their emphasis on cultural heritage, provide legitimacy for the distribution of power and privilege among the two charter groups in Canada, at the disadvantage of other ethnic groups. As Onufrijchuk reminds us: “multiculturalism was introduced as a context for the specification of French and English as the languages (cultures) of Canada” (1988: 5). While legitimizing the existing power structure, multicultural discourse and policy have had a pacifying effect on the immigrant groups, by providing a certain appeasement of their demands for recognition, and by diverting their efforts from socio-economic affairs into specifically defined cultural affairs. Finally, the vision of ethnic culture as inheritance contains all growth and development in the sphere of ethnicity. Ethnicity defined as inheritance, rather than a “project,” is limited to the repetition of traditional forms brought over from the “old country” with no clear venues for growth and development on the local turf (Onufrijchuk, *ibid.*).

In the final run, the following questions should be asked: what place does culture discourse assign ethnicity in the symbolic order of Canadian society? If ethnic groups possess culture, then who possesses the society?

Ethnicity defined in terms of cultural heritage is neatly separated from social relations, politics and economy in Canada. Problems, grievances, or claims of ethnic groups become irrelevant in this kind of discourse (Wetherell and Potter, 1992: 129). Sterilized and harmless (“exoticism” renders it harmless as it happens in Helena’s account above, lines: 0525-0524), ethnicity is a thing to practice in the privacy of the home or observe and enjoy on special occasions, but a thing without real consequence for the mainstream society. Any attempt to change that and to institute ethnic culture into the mainstream society can be regarded as a transgression of Canadian norms.

In the extract below, the dominant norms and symbols of Canadian society and state are clearly separated from and pitted against ethnic symbols. The speaker refers to the 1990 decision of the Supreme Court of Canada to allow corporal Baltej Singh Dhillon, a Sikh Officer in the Royal Canadian Mounted Police to wear a turban instead of the traditional “Mountie” hat. The decision was surrounded by much controversy and debate at the time it was passed, and the whole affair has since become an oft-repeated example of conflict between minority rights and the national standard in Canada.

**28.**

- 0422 Multiculturalism is a good thing, but it can be a bad thing, too  
 0423 because I can give a couple of examples, eah.  
 0424 For example, some Sikh from India, who is in the RCMP and wears a turban,  
 0425 even though the [RCMP] uniform was firmly codified two hundred years ago,  
 0426 or hundred and fifty years ago. This means that the government of Canada gave  
 0427 in to the needs of an individual who came from Punjab  
 0428 and didn't want to change his beliefs in order to become  
 0429 an officer in that organization. I don't mind someone  
 0430 fulfilling his cultural needs, the way he dresses, or eats, etc.,  
 0431 when he does it within the four walls of his house and doesn't take it outside.  
 0432 There are certain conditions, certain norms that are accepted  
 0433 and binding on everyone and I don't have to give in  
 0434 or tolerate anything that is not normal from my point  
 0435 of view.  
 Interviewer: 0436 And what was not normal in that case?  
 Helena: 0437 I don't know, but the fact that the Supreme Court of Canada permitted  
 0438 the man, I don't remember his name, to wear a turban with the emblem  
 0439 of the Canadian state.  
 Interviewer: 0440 Well, Sikhs are part of Canada.  
 Helena: 0441 That's right. But Canada is a conglomerate of different cultures, people from  
 0442 different countries who speak different languages, represent different cultures,  
 0443 and different customs. And in principle, this country was created by  
 0444 francophones and anglophones. The rest came here at the beginning or rather  
 0445 the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century.  
 0446 Their needs were slightly different, so the English and French cultures imposed  
 0447 certain norms. Why do we have to give in to some Sikh group, and give in to the  
 0448 [demands] of a person who knew exactly that he wouldn't be permitted to wear  
 0449 a turban when he entered the [RCMP] training? It's not racism what I mean  
 0450 here, because I don't care what a person wears on his head. It's an example of  
 0451 extreme inconsistencies of democracy in this country,  
 0452 if you can call it a democracy. I don't think that it is democratic  
 0453 and law abiding to break the rules that were imposed  
 0454 in concrete historical circumstances.

Helena, age 34, self-employed, resident of Montreal for 9 years.

Once again, the contrast between the “normal” and taken-for-granted and the “exotic” is used against the immigrant ethnicity and to the advantage of the two dominant host groups. Anglophones and francophones are assigned the “normal” mode here, while immigrants represent the “exotic” mode. At the same time, the “exotic” mode is seen and

criticized as a threat to the norm. Accounts like this confirm the status quo, providing clear answers to the question: “whose” society is Canadian society? They virtually assign Canadian society, state, and culture to the two dominant groups, while reducing immigrant groups to exercising their cultures in the private sphere.

Although most of these observations suggest that culture discourse in Canada functions to the disadvantage of immigrant groups, it can also work against the nationalist agenda of the Québécois, particularly the way it is incorporated into the policy of multiculturalism. Québécois nationalists are known to oppose the policy of multiculturalism on the grounds that it threatens to relegate their culture to the level of folklore, too, while they would rather see it as a national culture, if not **the** national culture (McLellan and Richmond, 1994: 675). The doctrine of multiculturalism denies special status to the Québécois and the sovereignty rights devolving from that status. Under multiculturalism, Québécois become (at least theoretically) one of many cultural groups in Canada. This raises a question of relevance to minorities everywhere under the current world system: What happens when people are defined as a cultural group rather than as a nation?

The distinction can play a role in the hierarchy of power and prestige in society. When a people is defined as a nation, they can lay political claims and even claims to sovereignty. As Anderson notes, “nation-ness is the most universally legitimate value in the political life of our time” (1983: 12). The modern concept of nationhood incorporates the idea of popular sovereignty – that the right to rule is vested in the people – and relates to the idea that rule by “alien” people can be considered as illegitimate (Smith, 1994: 378-379). On the other hand, when a people is defined as a cultural group, they can be made a (subordinate) part of someone else’s nation. The ideological connotations of this type of distinction are visible in the popular usages of the terms “ethnic” and “national.” The former term is often applied to minority groups in a larger society, while the latter is reserved for the dominant group that holds political control of the state (cf. Despres, 1982: 13-14; Juteau-Lee, 1983: 43-44).

## **The logic of ethnic discourse and variations in the use of cultural repertoires**

There are many indications that discourse about culture constitutes a very important resource that Polish immigrants use to paint the picture of ethnic Canada. The two cultural repertoires are an inescapable feature of Polish discourse of ethnicity –they were apparent in many contexts of text and talk. They were applied in critical areas of ethnicity and social relations. Each of these repertoires has vast explanatory powers and many appearances of a common sense theory shared by the subjects of this study. Each contains broad generalizations and references to general laws governing the nature of ethnicity and society and, in case of the culture-as-heritage repertoire, specifically defined “cultural relations.” Even the language style of culture discourse is mostly impartial and seemingly objective. Polish immigrants use this kind of discourse to make general statements on subjects related to ethnicity and to say: *“This is the way things are in society.”*

However, despite these features, one should not assume that the culture repertoires constitute a universal system of signification governing meanings for the whole of Polish discourse of ethnicity. That should be evident in considering that Poles use two radically different cultural repertoires that in many ways contradict each other. The logic of culture discourse is applied selectively and “differentially,” which is typical when dealing with interpretative repertoires – rhetorical devices applied to produce particular senses in particular contexts (Gilbert and Mulkay, 1984; Potter and Wetherell, 1987:138-155).

Even if the two cultural repertoires were combined, their logic would not be absolutely binding on Polish discourse of ethnicity. In the course of this study I have found numerous instances that contradict the logic of culture discourse and where other repertoires are used in place of the cultural ones. In particular, the repertoire of cultural determinism is frequently replaced by other interpretative repertoires to construct categories or the distinctions between categories. In other words, factors different than culture can also be used to perform those functions. This variability generally concerns the categorizations of the dominant groups, particularly “Canadians” and “Québécois.” The factor of political orientation is frequently introduced in such instances, which

contradicts the determinism of culture in at least two ways. First, because factors other than culture are used to define difference, and second, because it appears that difference can also be a matter of choice:

**29.**

Wladek:           0104    No, no the patriotism of the Québécois is, it is known that it stems from a  
                       0105    complex, from a complex and from a will to differentiate themselves from  
                       0106    Canada, no matter what. I am putting history, you know, two religions, two  
                       0107    languages, all that stuff aside. It is first of all fed by a sentiment and-  
                       0108    -and a will to be different from Canada, no matter what. So, [they say] “let’s be  
                       0109    Québécois patriots. Let’s not be Canadian patriots.”

Wladek, age 29, university student, resident of Montreal for 6 years.

When politics is added to the picture of ethnic relations, it may even lead to a radical redefining of group memberships. Elsewhere, Wladek continues:

**30.**

                      0751    You know, here, an immigrant is regarded as  
                       0752    Canadian, while a Québécois is not Canadian. He is  
                       0753    Québécois, the Québécois *de souche*. Here, I think,  
                       0754    is the division between federalists and separatists...

Wladek, age 29, university student, resident of Montreal for 6 years.

Generally, when for one reason or another new factors are introduced in a consistent manner in discourse to explain phenomena that otherwise lie within the domain of an established interpretative repertoire, discourse analysis speaks of a “contingent repertoire” (Gilbert and Mulkay, 1984; Potter and Wetherell, 1987: 148-155). In the extracts reproduced above, the factors of political orientation appear to explain the difference between ethno-national categories, which is “normally” the task of a cultural repertoire (that of cultural determinism).

Another feature of these two excerpts that is important to an understanding of the logic of common sense discourse is that elements of two interpretative repertoires appear here side by side in the same context. In order to explain this phenomenon, the general rules governing the use of interpretative repertoires that have already been identified elsewhere by critical discourse analysis need to be recalled (Gilbert and Mulkay, 1982; 1984; Potter and Wetherell, 1987: 138-155). They govern Polish discourse as well.

Usually, different interpretative repertoires that explain the same types of phenomena are kept apart in discourse and rarely appear together in the same accounts or contexts of

talk. This “rule of avoidance” has long been explained in discursive studies to be one of the means through which a relative integrity of arguments is maintained – otherwise the speakers are faced with immediate and sometimes striking contradictions in their discourse. Normally, every repertoire has its own focus and a domain in which it prevails, that is, a context in which it appears and particular phenomena that it explains. This results in relative internal consistency and predictability of arguments that are produced through the application of the repertoire. Studies of discourse also observe that if for any reason the “rule of avoidance” is broken and two repertoires appear side-by-side in the same account or context of talk (and are applied to explain the same phenomena), one of the repertoires must “prevail” over the other (Gilbert and Mulkay; *ibid.*; Potter and Wetherell, *ibid.*). In other words, in order to make sense, the speakers make choices between different versions and approaches to reality. An example of this is portrayed in Helena’s account (Examples 23 and 24, pages 187-88), where she prefers the approach to culture as heritage over the one stemming from cultural determinism. Another example is shown in Wladek’s criticism of multiculturalism in Canada (Example 26, page 190), where the repertoire of cultural determinism “prevails.” In Wladek’s explanation of Québécois patriotism (Example 29, page 196), cultural factors are in turn shoved aside in favor of political orientation.

This mechanism is important for analysis because it indicates that the subjects treat the repertoires as separate explanatory systems and make choices between them. Wladek knows that language and religion can also be considered as the appropriate reasons for difference, but he chooses to set them aside. If, by contrast, he mixed the cultural and political factors indiscriminately, two separate explanatory systems could not be identified (Potter and Wetherell, 1987: 149). This mechanism also explains something of the extent to which interpretative repertoires are flexible explanatory systems that can act as rhetorical devices, rather than rigid systems of signification.

Such features of Polish discourse show that despite certain shared general views on ethnicity and culture, the subjects possess a relative flexibility for producing meanings. This flexibility is related to the variations in discursive patterns. If there is any logic to

this common sense discourse, it is highly fragmented and full of contradictions. Even though the speakers try to maintain a relative consistency in building their arguments, the emerging discourse is full of conflicting versions of reality. These patterns of discourse reflect the fragmented and conflicting evidence of people's knowledge and senses, but they also reflect other variables that emerge when the speakers debate issues of critical importance to themselves and to society.

### **The functions of ethnic discourse**

The fact that the discourse of ethnicity displays a considerable variability of form and content is important to our understanding of its real and potential functions. Among other things, it supports the hypothesis that the discourse of ethnicity is not inherently ideological. Fragmented, contradictory, and without any central logic or dominant code, ethnic discourse does not bind people to always produce the same kinds of forms, contents, and meanings, whether those forms be ideological or otherwise. In their studies of racism Wetherell and Potter argue and demonstrate that discourse only becomes ideological "in argument, debate and application" (1992: 139). Taking a wider sweep, this study demonstrates that discourse obtains all its social functions – ideological and otherwise – through particular applications in particular contexts.

Even the cultural repertoires alone cannot be regarded as an "ideological matrix" that turns any talk about culture and ethnicity into forms that serve the dominant groups in society. In building their versions of reality, people use the interpretative resources that they see at their disposal in a given context, but they also apply those resources with considerable flexibility. Just as the repertoires can be switched, their applications can also vary, creating quite unexpected effects, at times. No matter how high the ideological potential of certain strands of discourse, they can be used to various ends. For example, the repertoire of cultural determinism that otherwise has such a high potential for ideological effects (in the Canadian context), can also be applied in a counter-discourse of sorts. Once again, "culture-as-the-substance-of-difference" is not only an obstacle to full integration. It can also be a source of resistance for minorities. See the following example:



## 31.

- 0355 You know that problem. I know  
 0356 from the old immigrants that not long ago, forty, fifty years ago  
 0357 this place was dominated by the British, also by the Irish, etc.  
 0358 They behaved as if they were superior to others.  
 0359 They happened to be in a privileged position, because they knew the language.  
 0360 It's normal and it's important, but they thought they were our betters. And the  
 0361 old immigrants who don't really support Québécois and who sometimes  
 0362 even complain: "What the hell is their [Québécois's] problem?" tell me  
 0363 that there were still very unpleasant social relations here as late as the 1950's.  
 0364 Some elderly people were sitting in a pub or a coffee shop, talking in  
 0365 Polish and a guy would come up and say: "This is Canada and we speak  
 0366 English, here." It doesn't happen any more. If anyone tried to pull a thing like  
 0367 that, he might get a punch in the face, or you could tell him *fuck you*,  
 0368 end of story. So, I am glad that the British domination was brought down.  
 Interviewer: 0369 So, it was brought down?  
 Jacek: 0370 Of course. They are just, it has been brought down. They are just another group,  
 0371 now, and nothing more.  
 Interviewer: 0372 How did it happen?  
 Jacek: 0373 Pardon me? I think, it has simply been watered down by the influx of  
 0374 immigrants. Listen, I don't have any ties with either one, or the other group.  
 0375 We are the third group that does not have the sentiment of belonging. (...)  
 Interviewer: 0377 We, the third group, meaning who?  
 Jacek: 0378 Third group, meaning Poles, Germans, people from Africa, Asia, etc. The third  
 0379 group that came here to make a living. It does not have any common roots with  
 0380 the French tradition or, I don't know, with the British or the English one.  
 0383 (...) In terms of religion and culture. I think it's great.  
 Jacek, in his forties, chauffeur for the Diplomatic Corps,  
 resident of Ottawa for 9 years.

Accounts like this one show that the logic of cultural differences does not absolutely oblige subjects to always produce the same or similar messages (as it would, if it were a matrix or a semiotic code). Rather, the rules can be bent to suit the moment's needs. Jacek uses cultural factors here to place immigrants in opposition to the French and English Canadians. In effect he constructs a "supranational" category of "immigrants" in total disregard for cultural differences among its members!

The non-ideological functions are not restricted exclusively to counter-discourse. There are features of Polish discourse of ethnicity that can be regarded as neither ideological, nor speaking directly against forms of domination. The function of sense-making, for instance, can be clearly isolated from ideology, since the same ways of sense-making can be used to build both ideological and counter-ideological statements. Certain features of Polish discourse of ethnicity that made its ideological potential highly relative were also found. Certain representations could actually serve the interests of the speakers, i.e.

members of a minority, even though they could have ideological effects as well – in the sense that they ultimately served the interests of one or both of the dominant groups. This could be related to the short-term interests of the minorities and the long-term interests of the majorities, although that distinction might prove relative as well. A look at the ways Poles construct the images of national communities in Canada will illustrate this point.

### **Imagining national communities**

The image of Canadian society that emerges from the overall patterns of Polish everyday talk is complex, fragmented and full of contradictions. Those contradictions in many ways reflect the interplay of different functions in this discourse. There are many features of Polish discourse that support the dominant symbolic order of Canadian society and serve the interests of the two dominant groups in that society. At the same time, there are also features in this discourse that challenge the symbolic order and could be judged as serving the interests of the minorities.

Incidentally, a similar image of Canada is present in the explicit accounts of Canada produced by informants. They frequently point out the “lack of integration” of Canadian society. It has been noted that many Polish accounts put in doubt the existence of the Canadian nation. They attribute this situation to the ethno-cultural heterogeneity of the Canadian society that has replaced the dominant source of national values.

Characteristically, similar comments have been voiced in the wider Canadian public, including intellectuals and academia (Angus, 1988: xi; McLellan and Richmond, 1994; Davetian, 1994).

Undoubtedly, such representations have a high ideological potential, especially when they present the issue of ethnic diversity as a problem, considering the alternatives that exist in the present context. Nevertheless, I argue that such imaginings can provide some gratification for the informants, too. For example, the latter can obtain a measure of positive identity from the fact that, as Poles, they come from a country with long national traditions and with “unquestionable” national unity. Polish immigrants make numerous comparisons between Canada and Poland in that respect. The image of Canadian society

as lacking in overall integration can also ease up the assimilatory pressure on immigrants and make their alienation from the mainstream somewhat easier to bear. Marginality becomes questionable in the context of a social environment that lacks a dominant source of national values.

These images of Canadian society could be seen as serving the short-term interests of minorities, which could be opposed to the long-term interests of the majorities that the same representations may serve. But from this emerges a paradox: in the present socio-political climate and the world order endorsing nation states, lack of national integration can be regarded as a problem, an “abnormality.” Such a discourse can evidently be turned against immigrants and contribute to their marginalization. Among the oft-repeated remedies are various forms of rejection of minorities – closing door to immigration, shutting down the existing channels of minority expression and the assimilation of the minorities – *à la* “melting pot” (Davetian, 1994). However, this is the realm of discursive construction and, if the vision of Canada as a “country without the nation” survives long enough, it could become a part of “normality,” or even be reified through practice. The nationalist formula proposing the idealistic union of people, culture and country is not a necessary condition for any country’s existence (Anderson, 1983; cf. Smith, 1994). There are other idealistic formulas that could unite and regulate society, some of them readily available in Canadian context, such as the multiculturalist formula of “unity in diversity,” or the “joint commitment to democratic values.” And they might eventually work, too. In fact, numerous Polish accounts evoke democratic norms as the mechanism that regulates the relations between different cultural groups in Canadian society.

### 32.

Jacek:           0226   C-c-Canada is in my opinion a very tolerant-tolerant country. It does not force  
                       0227   anything upon you. You can wear your national costume,  
                       0228   the way you like it, you can pray to whatever god you want.  
                       0229   Of course, there are certain basic principles. One has to obey the Canadian law,  
                       0230   which is normal for me. Still, I think, Canada is a fantastic country in this  
                       0231   respect. You couldn’t find that anywhere in Europe.

Jacek, in his forties, chauffeur for the Diplomatic Corps,  
 resident of Ottawa for 9 years.

In this perspective, I wish to advance an argument that the vision of Canada as a country divided into many groups, without **the** nation and without the dominant source of

national values has a potential to serve the interests of immigrants, after all. Such a vision bears a potential to challenge the marginal status of immigrants. It is easier to fight marginality in a country that is not monopolized by any nation. Such a country could even be “imagined” as one’s own. Many Poles evoke that kind of pluralism (even if inadvertently) and generalize Canada, in one way or another, as the “country of immigrants”:

### 33.

- Interviewer: 0511 Montreal, Canada and Quebec are places where people come from different  
0512 parts of the world, people speaking different languages, etc. What do you  
0513 make of this situation?
- Anna: 0514 I like it, ha, ha, ha, It’s funny, entertaining, ha, ha, ha. I like it. But a country  
0515 in my opinion is a place where there is one nation and one people, one and the  
0516 same people. People who have many features in common. That’s a country for  
0517 me. That is what I call a country, while this here is a cocktail.
- Interviewer: 0518 What do you mean by that?
- Anna: 0519 What we have in Canada is a Molotov cocktail, a *mix* and everything in one.
- Interviewer: 0520 With the same effects as the Molotov cocktail’s?
- Anna: 0521 Ha, ha, ha, ha, No, it’s just a mix. How can you call it a country? We are all  
0522 gathered here, with some established norms that we all follow.  
0523 While in our country there is one culture, people of the same religion. That’s  
0524 when you have a harmony in the country. Like in Poland.
- Interviewer: 0525 So, there is no harmony in Canada?
- Anna: 0526 Oh, no. [Québécois] want a separation and British Columbia says: “If they  
0527 separate, we may do the same, because we are better off than the rest.” This is  
0528 an artificially created country. Poland has a history, not only Poland, for  
0529 Germany and others, too. You couldn’t divide Germans, because [the division]  
0530 was artificial. Germans will be Germans, Hungarians will be Hungarians. That is  
0531 a country and a nation, as one. But what nation do you have in this country?  
0532 Many nationalities, multi-multinational. This is an artificial entity, right? It is  
0533 such a country, the country of immigrants.
- Anna, college student, age 44, resident of Montreal for 7 years.

### 34.

- 0745 In my opinion, the future is in people mixing together, if the humanity doesn’t  
0746 bring itself to extinction first. One day, you know, the only barriers will be the  
0747 ethnic ones, based on culture, purely conventional, eh, [kept] for the sake of  
0748 tradition, you know, for, eh, for the sake of cultivating our roots, right. We  
0749 grew up in different countries, in different environments, different systems, with  
0750 different perspectives, etc. But there is one common ideal of humanity: To live  
0751 in harmony with each other, regardless of the skin color, regardless of  
0752 political views, etc., to be able to notice others, to not blindly impose our views  
0753 on others. (...)
- 0756 That we have to learn how to talk to each other. Canadians are not exactly ready  
0757 for this, you know, even though, this is the future of Canada, in my opinion.  
0758 Because Canada is a country of immigrants. It is a hodgepodge of nationalities  
0759 from all over the world. The natives here are the Indians who are kept in scorn  
0759 and pushed to the margin.

Piotr, in his sixties, engineer, resident of Montreal for 10 years.

The function of the immigrants' interest in maintaining the overall diversity of the social environment may also play a role in the image of Quebec's society that emerges from Polish discourse. It is actually difficult to distinguish this image from the overall image of Canada, since Poles unanimously treat Quebec as part of Canada, both implicitly and explicitly. Even the anglophone-francophone division that is present in Polish representations in Montreal is generally regarded as the "Canadian issue." One significant difference is that Polish immigrants do not explicitly question the existence of the Québécois nation – the way they do it for the Canadian one (at least such arguments did not surface during this research). However, the way the Québécois nation is "imagined" in Polish discourse prohibits it (in Polish eyes) from becoming the dominant source of norms and values for the rest of Quebec society.

There is significant ambivalence in the construction of the Québécois nation in Polish discourse. On the one hand, there are many features of this discourse that construct the Québécois as a nation, but on the other hand, there are others that undermine that construction as well. In order to explain this ambivalence, it is pertinent to briefly recall Anderson's (1983) concept of modern nationality. Anderson proposes a definition, according to which the nation is:

"an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign." (...) The nation is imagined as *limited* because even the largest of them (...) has finite, if elastic boundaries, beyond which lie other nations. (...) It is imagined as *sovereign* because (...) nations dream of being free (...). The gage and emblem of this freedom is the sovereign state. Finally, it is imagined as a *community*, because (...) the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship. Ultimately, it is this fraternity that makes it possible (...) for so many millions of people, not so much to kill, as willingly to die for such limited imaginings " (1983: 15-16, italics in the original).

The various aspects of Polish sense-making contain features that construct the Québécois as a nation, according to these criteria. To begin with, the Québécois are imagined as a homogeneous and limited community, simply because in most Polish discourse they are equated with francophones or even with Québécois *de souche*, while all the other groups are clearly differentiated from them. Québécois are also categorized with the use of cultural repertoires, suggesting the unity of culture and people (Anderson stresses the importance of "cultural roots" of nationality, too [ibid.: 17-41]). Furthermore, what

brings them even closer to nation formula is the fact that they are also frequently categorized through the use of political factors, a feature of discourse that frames them as a political community, and not only a cultural group.

This image of the Québécois as a nation emerges mostly from the overall patterns of sense-making that have been identified in Polish discourse. This can be one of those “inescapable” reflections of reality in discourse. Poles may indeed see the francophone Québécois as the only category that can legitimately claim the local turf. However, when it comes down to the particular arguments that pertain to Québécois nationality and that combine to produce that image, the informants often discredit that very image:

### 35.

- Interviewer: 0094 Can we speak of patriotism in Quebec? (...)  
 Wladek: 0104 No, no the patriotism of the Québécois is, it is known that it stems from a  
 0105 complex, from a complex and from a will to differentiate themselves from  
 0106 Canada, no matter what. I am putting history, you know, two religions, two  
 0107 languages, all that stuff aside. It is first of all fed by a sentiment and-  
 0108 -and a will to be different from Canada, no matter what. So, [they say] “let’s be  
 0109 Québécois patriots. Let’s not be Canadian patriots.” I think, it’s a completely  
 0110 different story. I think, you can’t, I wouldn’t call it patriotism, this patriotism  
 0111 of the Québécois.  
 Interviewer: 0112 But what about the referendum?  
 Wladek: 0113 Hard to say. It’s, it’s related more to-to politics. I don’t know, whether  
 0114 this is in people, this patriotism. I don’t know whether they are capable of that,  
 0115 you know. We were taught that patriotism in Poland, in the countries that  
 0116 have, that have a long history, that patriotism is something that makes you  
 0117 sacrifice your life, right, totally unselfishly. I don’t see Québécois capable of  
 0118 doing that at all. Not to that point.  
 Wladek, age 29, university student, resident of Montreal for 6 years.

There are numerous voices in the Polish community that discredit nationalist sentiment among the Québécois. Many of those voices are heard when the topic is the issue of Quebec’s sovereignty. Poles generally equate the movement for Quebec’s sovereignty with the nationalist sentiment of francophone Québécois. After all, *sovereignty* is one of the principal propositions of the modern doctrine of nationalism. It is a dream of every self-respecting nation (Anderson, op. cit.; see also, Smith, 1994).

Although statistics regarding the Polish stand on the issue separation do not exist, I can state with confidence that the absolute majority of Polish immigrants in Montreal fervently oppose the idea of Quebec’s sovereignty. In the seventeen years since my

arrival in Quebec, I have met only two Polish immigrants who would openly support that idea. The opposition to Quebec's sovereignty is so unanimous that it is probably the single most consistent aspect of Polish discourse about Quebec and Canada. The arguments that voice that opposition usually discredit the movement for sovereignty and those who might support it:

### 36.

- Interviewer: 0056 So, you are against the separation?  
 Joanna: 0057 Of course, strongly against, strongly against. I generally think, I have a very  
 0058 close friend, eh, a Québécois woman from Chicoutimi, from the very..., you  
 0059 know what. She also thinks that it's something terrible. She thinks that Parizeau  
 0060 and other separatists, they put their kids in foreign schools, eh, they speak  
 0061 the languages, at least the two that count. But they want to keep the French  
 0062 people in the dark, so stupid they could not listen to [the news] in the other  
 0063 language; to make them docile, so they vote for the "Yes" side. So, that is what  
 0064 she thinks. She spoke very strongly about it and I'm of the same opinion. I do  
 0065 not know whether you will be discussing what Polish people think about  
 0066 that issue, but I think there are few Poles out there who would want the  
 0067 separation. Besides, you know we came here thinking about living in Canada,  
 0068 while Quebec, my God, it's just a province, (...) one of the provinces.  
 Joanna, in her fifties, engineer, resident of Montreal for 8 years.

Such a negative view of the nationalist and sovereignty movement in Quebec can have many functions. For now, it should suffice to note that any action oriented against the idea of a nation state based on the cultural traditions of one people is potentially in the interest of diversity and pluralism, and therefore potentially in the interest of immigrant minorities.<sup>8</sup> In a society "belonging" to one nation, where that nation is imagined as a people whose cultural and genetic roots go far back in the history of the land, the position of immigrants might become even more precarious and their alienation from the mainstream more acute than at present. Needless to add, the country that belongs to such a nation could not be easily claimed as the "country of immigrants."

### **The uses and "misuses" of ethnic discourse**

At the risk of restating the obvious, it is important to reiterate that discursive practices have numerous functions that can be isolated and judged independently of any other functions that those practices may have, whether immediately or in the long term. Short-term gratifications are often the reason that the actions, including discursive ones are

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<sup>8</sup> It is important to keep in mind that diversity and pluralism do not necessarily imply equality and justice.

undertaken. The fact that some discursive constructs “miss the mark” or create effects that could in the long run be judged as detrimental to the actors themselves does not undermine their basic functionality. Many social actions, since the beginning of human history, have come to be regarded as detrimental to the human environment and may one day bring about the downfall of our species. Yet few of us would argue that the sole function of those actions has been the destruction of human kind!

One of the most basic functions of Polish discourse of ethnicity that has been explored in this chapter is simply to make sense of social reality, which Polish immigrants do, using the interpretative resources they find relevant in the local context and within the restraints set by that context. The ideological effects of their representations are structured by context as much as by the type of discourse that they use. If anglophones and francophones emerge from Polish discourse as the dominant collectivities in Canada, it is perhaps because such would have to be an “inescapable” conclusion of that type of sense-making (i.e. based on ethnicity) in a given context. In a sense, this shows that Poles reproduce existing power relations by reflecting on what they see “out there” in Canadian society.

Simultaneously, it is apparent that speakers can use the same kind of sense-making to oppose existing power relations and to attempt to construct alternative versions of reality. Does it really matter how logically consistent or realistic such representations are, as long as they offer a scope for resistance? Are such representations to be regarded as enmeshed in fantasy, the expressions of false consciousness? This would be the sort of line taken by one Marxist perspective represented, for example by Miles (1987) and Phizacklea (1984). These authors would argue that all such representations obscure and distort the realities of class struggle in society. However, once the productive role of language (or other social practices) in constituting reality is accepted, the distinction between “false” and “real” is hardly tenable. What is “false” can be made “real” through discursive practices and what has been made “real” can be “deconstructed.” Wetherell and Potter argue that the categories based on class could be analyzed and deconstructed in the same way as the ethnic or national categories are (1992: 146-148). Also, history has shown repeatedly that



even the acts of sheer delusion can have quite material consequences in society. If ideology is defined as proposed in Part I, as discursive practices linked to oppressive power relations, then all the discursive practices that oppose the said power relations can be regarded as forms of counter-ideology.

In another line of argument, Marxist scholars argue that certain ideological forms work through providing oppressed classes with rationalization and legitimation of the existing system of oppression. Reproducing such forms of discourse gives the oppressed short-term gratification through explaining and justifying their social position, while serving the interests of the ruling classes in the long term. The main ideological effect is thought to be the resulting subjugation and passivity of the oppressed (Elster, 1989: 141). What is often overlooked, however, is that short-term functionality (is it always only short-term?) is critical for the production of any forms that could eventually be judged as ideological.

Furthermore, many forms of Polish immigrant discourse that I have characterized as ideological do not necessarily express any submissiveness on the part of the speakers, nor do they always leave the impression that they might eventually lead to any such submissiveness. Polish immigrants indeed obtain some explanation for their underprivileged position in Canadian society. This is where the discourse of cultural determinism is the most effective. But many Polish accounts, including some of those that I have already cited, contain critical voices about the social reality in Canada and traces or even overt expressions of animosity towards the majority. Could these be easily shrugged off as just another example of ideology?

The bottom line of the argument here is that, whether as members of a minority or otherwise, people are not absolutely bound by the logic of ethnicity; nor do they blindly or passively reproduce “the dominant version of reality.” Rather, they should be regarded as actively pursuing their goals in producing that reality. In the next chapter, various ways of sense-making among Polish immigrants will be explored further along with some of the discursive strategies through which the subjects attempt to overcome the

limitations imposed on them by the logic of ethnicity and the social context in which they find themselves.

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## Making Sense of Identity in the Context of Migration

This chapter is focused on representations of identity in the discourse of Polish immigrants. Immigrants are in a special situation when it comes to identity. They are submerged in a population where the dominant identity or identities are usually different from the one they have brought from their country and group of origin. This affects, among other things, which identities they claim and their discourse around identity in general. This study is oriented to determining what particular patterns of ethnic self-identification are present among Polish immigrants: who they say they are, and how they talk about this aspect of their lives. The interest here lies primarily with conceptualizations of identity, as they appear in everyday talk. In other words, what is Polish “common sense” about identity in Canada?

The focus here is also on broader social implications of these patterns of self-identification. In previous chapters, various, sometimes seemingly contradictory tendencies in Polish immigrant discourse were discussed, especially the fact that certain aspects of this discourse effectively function to the disadvantage of immigrants in Canada, while others seem to counter these effects. As we focus on the discourse of identity among the subjects in this study, we will examine some of these tendencies in greater detail.

Interviews as well as observations made in the Polish immigrant community indicate that there are a number of different identities present in the subjects’ discourse. To be more precise, the same people claim several different identities, including more than one ethnic identity. This brings to the fore the question of how people handle the possession of multiple identities of the same order. According to my observations, Poles do not take this fact for granted. On the contrary, they treat it as rather problematic. Their

reservations in this respect stem from two major factors: their basic notions about ethnicity and identity in general and their situation as an immigrant minority in Quebec and in Canada as a whole.

The present analysis demonstrates that essentialist notions still permeate everyday common sense and shape social representations of reality. Poles regard culture as the essential substance of ethnicity and ethnic identity. They assume that identities are based on differences in cultural background and that they are “necessarily” distinct and mutually exclusive. Their views correspond to Canadian public discourse, where ethnicity is the business of culture, and to the realities of life in a society where most people live divided by cultural differences.

At the same time, the results of this analysis contradict essentialist conceptualizations of ethnic identity. They indicate that the link between identity and culture is non-essential and constructed. They also contradict the notion that ethnic identities are necessarily exclusive. Culture is the substance of some self-identifications of Polish immigrants, but when necessary, they also use alternative “substances,” which allows them to claim more than one identity. Moving through the web of Polish self-identifications, it becomes apparent which identities they claim and how they express them.

Before proceeding, a few words should be mentioned about the term “ethnic identity” used here. “Ethnic identity” is used here as an operational term, referring to a particular type of identity and is defined in a very loose and open sense. “Identity” is determined on the basis of the speakers’ subjective identifications of themselves or others. The “ethnic identity” of the speakers refers to their self-identification, that is, when they identify themselves as belonging to a particular type of group which is traditionally recognized as the “ethnic group” or “nation,” such as Polish, Canadian, Québécois, etc. (Despres, 1984; Isajiw, 1974: 213-214). A distinction is not made here between “ethnic” and “national” identities, as is often done in popular discourse, as well as in some social studies (cf. Despres, *ibid.*; Juteau-Lee, 1983). Rather, the two terms are considered as variations on

the same theme, and the distinction itself as carrying ideological connotations. Besides, many if not most of the informants, coming from a nation of considerable longevity, would almost certainly disagree with a reduction of their Polish identity to the status of an “ethnic” one, especially if any other identity were to be defined in the same context as a “national” one.

### **Identifying immigrant identities**

As might be expected, Polish immigrant discourse reveals a multiplicity of self-identifications. With respect to “ethnic” identities, most subjects claim to be Polish and to be Canadian. However, it is important not to generalize by stating that they claim to be “both Polish and Canadian,” because, as will be shown below, they rarely admit anything of the sort, and are rather eager to deny it. With few exceptions, these two categories are the only “ethnic” identities that could be distinguished in the samples of Polish discourse I collected. In one exceptional case, the interviewee declares possessing an impressive number of “ethnic” identities: Canadian, Jewish, Polish and Québécois. Significantly, **no other references** to Québécois identity could be detected in the accounts collected. Observation of the Polish immigrant community at large reveals expressions of Québécois identity to be very rare. Moreover, people produce considerably less discourse on this subject, than on the subject of Polish and Canadian identities. Even denials of Québécois identity are rare, unless provoked by direct questions. In other words, Poles tend to remain silent on the subject.

In addition to “ethnic” self-identifications, one can find references to immigrant, European, White, Catholic and Slavic identities in Polish discourse. However, apart from expressions of immigrant identity, they are rather infrequent and are rarely elaborated upon. Of course, other identities are expressed as well, but they are related to gender, age, profession, and family roles and are not the subject of this study.

There are significant differences between the importance given to each of the two ethnic identities that are claimed by subjects, that is, the Polish and the Canadian, and between

the ways in which the two are constructed. To begin with, Polish identity is overwhelmingly predominant. It is by far the most frequently claimed and elaborated upon. Numerous direct declarations of the kind: “I am Polish...”; “I feel Polish...”; “I am proud to be Polish...”; “My Polish identity...”; “I am a typical Pole...”; “I am too much of a Pole....” are employed by informants. Many of these declarations are spontaneously produced and appear repeatedly in various discursive contexts.

Apart from direct claims, other markers of Polish identity appear recurrently throughout the transcripts. The easiest to identify are qualified expressions, such as “we Poles...,” “us Poles...,” etc. which, together with the use of the first-person-plural form in reference to the Polish people are obvious indicators of identity (not less obvious than the direct declarations are). In addition, they point to “Polish” as the reference group of the speakers. See the following examples:

**1.**

We Poles do not form such a typical ethnic group.  
 [In another context]  
 I do not know if it is envy, envy or something like that, our Polish character trait.  
 Joanna, in her fifties, engineer, resident of Montreal for 8 years.

**2.**

As a nation, we Poles are ranked somewhere ahead, ahead, eh, of the Indians. Because the first in this province are the French, then come the English, then the Italians in the third place, and so on, in order. They classify us somewhere ahead of the Indians.  
 Alicja, in her thirties, embroidery technician, resident of Montreal for 10 years,  
 in Canada for 15 years.

**3.**

We Poles, ha, ha, once we have got settled here ... would like to improve everything.  
 Piotr, in his sixties, engineer, resident of Montreal for 10 years.

Polish identity permeates the semantics of informants’ discourse. Even where there are no direct identity markers, the way the informants express themselves leaves no doubt as to how they perceive their identity. The passage below indicates that Polish identity is treated as a matter of fact:

**4.**

Interviewer: 0186 When you say “someone,” do you mean yourself? Or do you think that Poles in  
 0187 general do not want to get involved with organizations?  
 Leon: 0188 No, no, (it’s) me, me. I don’t know what, I don’t know about other Poles.

0189 In my opinion we are not capable of helping each other.  
 0194 I am not talking about individuals,  
 0195 because there are individuals, you know, who  
 0196 are helpful, really. They try to help others for the sake of our  
 0197 common roots, to give them advice...

Leon, in his thirties, engineer, resident of Montreal for 6 years.

By contrast, claims and expressions of Canadian identity appear to be of a more problematic nature. Although most informants claim Canadian identity at one point or another, they do so much less frequently. Such expressions are mostly limited to direct declarations (e.g. “I am Canadian...,” “I feel Canadian...,” etc).

Apart from direct claims, Polish immigrants’ discourse contains few other noticeable traces of Canadian identity. There is an almost total absence of qualifiers like “we Canadians,” or similar forms of speech. If “we” expressions are used as a measure of group identity, very little in this discourse can be used as a basis to establish “Canadians” as a group with which the subjects of this study identify themselves. It seems that while the subjects have no problem with identifying themselves **as** Poles and **with** Poles, the same is not true of their Canadian identity and their relationship with Canadians.

While Polish identity is always declared unconditionally and without hesitation, the Canadian is often affirmed in hesitant fashion, as exemplified in the extract below. Because the two identities are juxtaposed here in one account, it is worth following in some detail:

##### 5.

Interviewer: 0108 Do you feel Canadian?  
 Jacek: 0109 I beg your pardon? Hm, you know, I feel a little bit lost. Because,  
 0110 it is difficult to say, you know. I certainly feel Canadian in a way, when I am  
 0111 here. But when I am anywhere else, for example, in  
 0112 Poland or in Europe, I feel Polish. You can’t expect a different answer,  
 0113 because I came here being, you know, over  
 0114 thirty years old. I had already been shaped by a different environment, in  
 0115 a different culture. And I, um, left [Poland] by accident, to be honest. So,  
 0116 it happened. I stayed here. So, it is hard to say whether I feel one [Canadian]  
 0117 or not. I can’t say that I feel so a hundred percent, but still,  
 0118 despite all that, I belong to this society and I think that  
 0119 somehow I certainly feel one.

Jacek, in his forties, chauffeur for the Diplomatic Corps, resident of Ottawa for 9 years.

Jacek, when asked about his Canadian identity, begins with expressing his doubts about it and quickly moves on to assert his Polish identity. Although he ends up with admitting that he “feels Canadian”<sup>1</sup> after all, he mitigates his claim with reservations to the very end. His Canadian identity is qualified here through expressions: “difficult to say,” “in a way,” “hard to say,” “I can’t say...,” “I think...” and “somehow... certainly.” The subject has no such doubts about his Polish identity, which he qualifies with a simple, “You can’t expect a different answer.” Canadian identity is conditional, contingent upon a particular context, i.e. Jacek feels Canadian when he is in Canada. Although Polish identity is also introduced here in the conditional, it is not really contextual – “anywhere else” is actually opposite to any particular context. In fact, the assertion of Polish identity explains that Jacek can feel Canadian only in Canada, because he feels Polish when he is “anywhere else.” The overall effect of introducing Polish identity in this account is to explain the speaker’s reservations about his Canadian identity. In fact, Polish identity is often presented as a constraint on Canadian affiliations.

The contingency of Canadian identity upon context in the foregoing citation is not exceptional. This is, in fact, common in Polish discourse on identity. In addition, this contingency is not related to one particular context. Rather, different speakers mention different, often contrasting contexts, in which they feel they are Canadian. Thus, while Jacek from the extract above asserts that he feels Canadian in Canada, the identity of other Poles may be contingent upon being in radically different contexts, for example, the context of travel outside of Canada or in the context of Quebec with its particular configuration of ethnic divisions. We will see examples of such cases below. Such variability is another indication of the problematic nature of Canadian identity for the immigrants in this study. Contextuality implies a limitation here. The subjects see themselves as Canadians only in particular, limited contexts.

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<sup>1</sup>I use the expression “feel Canadian” (Polish, Québécois, etc) in the sense in which it is used in Polish. To “feel X” is the most direct expression of self-identity in the Polish language. There is no exact equivalent in English, the closest one being “to be X at heart”.



Many Polish immigrants deny possessing Canadian identity altogether. Interestingly, though, there is variability in this respect as well. Canadian identity may be denied, sometimes strongly, in one speech context – usually in responses to direct questions about identity – only to be spontaneously affirmed later on during the same conversation. Such apparent contradictions suggest the Canadian identity is not taken for granted even among those who claim it.

## 6.

- Interviewer: 0351 Do you feel Canadian?  
 Józef: 0352 Well, I do not feel Canadian. However, I have the  
 0353 Canadian citizenship. But I feel Polish, that is all...  
 Interviewer: 0361 Do you have contacts with people other than Poles in Montreal?  
 Józef: 0362 Yes, with Italians and with the French, too.  
 Interviewer: 0363 With Québécois?  
 Józef: 0364 Yeah. My first question is: “Are you a separatist? Ha, ha, and he  
 0365 says, “No, I am not.” “Then,” I say, “you are a friend.”  
 Interviewer: 0366 Then, if you are concerned with the separation it means that you have  
 0367 some warm sentiment for Canada, doesn't it?  
 Józef: 0368 Yeah, because... I did not come to  
 0369 a separatist Quebec. I came to Canada.  
 0370 I do not feel Québécois. I feel Canadian. And that's all there  
 0371 is to it.  
 Józef, age 77, retired oil refinery worker, resident of Montreal for 50 years.

## 7.

- Interviewer: 0766 How do you feel [in terms of identity]?  
 Renata: 0767 I do not feel Canadian, absolutely not. And I think that I  
 0768 never will, that always, when asked who I am, I will say I am Polish, even  
 0769 though I have a great sentiment towards Canada and always, when I return  
 0770 from Europe the song “Oh, Canada” comes to my mind...  
 0772 I am glad to be Canadian, more perhaps, I would say,  
 0773 because of the personal benefits. And I think  
 0774 that I am not the only one, that most people think  
 0775 like me. But, like I said, I will always say that I am Polish. And if I have  
 0776 children, I would like them to be raised in Polish spirit.  
 Interviewer: 0777 And not the Canadian one?  
 Renata: 0778 I mean, I would like to pass the Polish culture on to them. Not that  
 0779 I would take the local culture away from them – expanding the so called  
 0780 horizons, you know. But I would simply like them to know Polish culture.  
 Renata, age 29, university student, resident of Montreal for 5 years.

Such contradictions never occur with regard to the Polish identity of the speakers. Polish identity was never denied in any way by any immigrant from Poland that I met during my research. On the contrary, Polish identity is always unproblematic, declared unconditionally, treated as a matter of fact, fixed and inescapable.

**8.**

0363 Maybe, I am too much  
 0364 of a Pole, you know. That is what I think, you know. I think so.  
 0365 I think, I am too much from there, you know.  
 Rafal, age 36, electronics technician, resident of Montreal for 10 years.

**9.**

0255 I am Polish. I think it is difficult to erase. Once, there was a period (in my  
 0254 life) when I had very little contact with Poles, really.  
 0256 (...) I still felt that I was Polish  
 0257 It is not that I close myself in some kind of Polish ghetto, you know,  
 0258 and because of that I feel Polish. No, I simply am Polish.  
 Pawel, in his thirties, financial clerk, unemployed, resident of Montreal for 9 years.

In general, we can say that Polish identity dominates Polish discourse both quantitatively and qualitatively. The speakers often present it as their most important (ethnic) identity. Canadian identity, being more problematic, comes in second place. Some speakers are quite explicit in constructing such a hierarchy, even when they claim Canadian identity without reservations, for example:

**10.**

0385 I am Polish by birth. I feel Polish, even though I also am Canadian in the second  
 0386 place. But, I would say, I am more Polish than Canadian. Perhaps, it is so  
 0387 because I spent twenty five years – the best years of my life, so to speak – in  
 0388 Poland. It is what shapes a person, what gives you a personality,  
 0389 your own views. And, no matter, it is also the culture, religion,  
 0390 the way of life, the way of expressing yourself, some kind  
 0391 of outlook on life and everything. And from a perspective of time, no matter  
 0392 how you look at it, you will always feel Polish in the first place,  
 0393 and in the second place, I can say that I am Canadian.  
 Helena, age 34, self-employed, resident of Montreal for 9 years.

Several questions arise: How to explain these features of the Polish discourse of identity? Why this particular hierarchy of identities? Why do these immigrants have a problem with claiming or expressing Canadian identity? Why do they treat it as problematic? Why is it that the overwhelming majority of Poles in Quebec never claim Québécois identity, yet claim to be Canadian? Indeed, what makes people claim certain identities and not others that are available in a given social context?

Variables such as age, social class, length of residence, language competence, even personal networks do not seem to play any significant role here. The same patterns of self-identification in question can be found in the Polish community regardless of these

different variables. For example, Canadian identity is admitted or denied (sometimes both) by people who have lived in Canada for less than ten years, as well as among veterans of World War Two who came to live in this country over half a century ago.

The few cases where Québécois identity was claimed include people who meet, what could be called “minimal criteria of integration” in Québécois society: their language and work (or study) environment is French and they socialize with *Québécois de souche*<sup>2</sup>. However, this identity is otherwise absent in Polish discourse, even among many who meet such criteria of integration to Québécois society. In our selection of interviews, only one person claims Québécois identity explicitly.

### **The “problem” of double identity**

Characteristically, Polish immigrants are not alone in treating their “second” identity as problematic. Studies dealing with immigrant populations often retain the concept of “double identity” as an identity consisting of two components: that of origin and the one acquired in the new social setting. These two component identities are often represented in bipolar terms – as contradictory and mutually exclusive. “A” is X (e.g. French or Chinese) by virtue of his/her not being non-X (Devereux, 1972: 139-140, 147). Hence, the allegedly problematic character of “double identity.”

Moreover, there are voices in ethnic studies arguing that possession of multiple identities may be a cause of problems or even pathologies for the subjects. Beginning with Stonequist (1937), researchers have spoken of “double identity” in terms of “dual personality” or “cultural marginality,” referring either to psychological or social problems that it brings about. Recently, a number of studies, particularly in France, have pointed out serious problems of identity among second-generation immigrants, i.e. people who have traditionally been regarded as bearers of double identity. They have been presented as “uprooted” or “torn between two cultures,” belonging partly to both and

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<sup>2</sup> Descendants of the French colonials, i.e. people popularly considered “ethnically pure” Québécois.

fully to neither (Chicaud, 1984; Yahyaoui, 1989). Conceptualizations of *métissage*, both in scientific and popular discourse partake of this tradition, as well (cf. Amselle, 1990).

Not all researchers dealing with multiple identities have regarded them as intrinsically problematic; for example, Oriol's studies in France (1979; 1984). In Quebec, Meintel's (1992) research among youth of immigrant origin has demonstrated that people can display a wide range of identities without any "incompatibility" problems. Meintel argues that "double identity" is not even an adequate concept to account for multiple forms of belonging characterizing the participants in her study (ibid.: 83-84).

Giraud (1987) argues that the treatment of double identity as "problematic" stems from the essentialist approach to ethnicity and ethnic identity. Indeed, many conceptualizations of ethnicity in social science are essentialist (Meintel, 1992: 73). Definitions often translate into trait repertoires, where cultural factors such as way of life, patterns of behavior, language, religion, etc. in addition to origin are listed as the main components of "ethnic" identity (Isajiw, 1974; Keyes, 1976; Naroll, 1964; cf. Despres, 1982). This leads to reification of ethnicity in science, reification that finds its parallels in common sense discourse. From this essentialism stem also notions of "ethnic determinism," according to which ethnic identity is an inescapable aspect of human personality (Giraud, ibid.: 63).

In the previous chapter, it was remarked that essentialist conceptualizations of identity and ethnicity can be used as a resource in constructing discourses of inequality. Ethnicity traditionally implies differentiation and exclusion. Reduced to a matter of cultural traits, ethnicity can be used as a building block in constituting social hierarchies (Oriol, 1979, 1985; Fortier, 1992). These hierarchies acquire legitimacy when ethnic/cultural factors are interpreted as obstacles to the integration of minority groups into the dominant society (Oriol, 1979: 24). Social differences begin to look natural when explained as ethnic/cultural differences.

It is within the essentialist conceptual framework that the allegedly problematic nature of “double identity” becomes an issue. Without the reification of culture and ethnicity, there is little reason to regard two ethnic identities as mutually exclusive, let alone as a combination leading to social pathologies. Giraud (1987), in fact, argues that the discourse treating “double identity” and its pathological effects contributes to the marginalization and exclusion of immigrant communities from mainstream culture, thereby facilitating their economic exploitation by dominant groups. Treating “double identity” as a factor of individual, familial and social disorganization, the discourse of “double identity” perpetuates “blame-the-victim” argumentation (Giraud, 1987: 64-65).

The present analysis indicates that Polish discourse of self-identification reflects and reproduces essentialist views on ethnicity and identity. While such formulations of ethnicity have already been successfully questioned in social science, they still linger in popular public opinion and apparently still shape Polish representations. Polish immigrants use them in their daily efforts to make sense of the social world and their place in it. In the same way, traditional constructions of gender surface in Marshall and Wetherell’s analysis of gender identity among women (1989). Participants in their study perpetuate the discursive constructions that contribute to the marginalization of women.

A related factor that may contribute to the patterns of self-identification found among Polish immigrants is “ethnic absolutism,” which we have already discussed in Chapter 6. This absolutism seems to influence popular “common sense” about ethnicity and identity. Everyone “must” belong to a nation or ethnic group and possess a corresponding national or ethnic identity (Fortier, 1992: 92; Smith, 1994: 379). Furthermore, since each group has its own essential character and destiny, identities are “necessarily” distinct and mutually exclusive.

Another critical factor shaping Polish discourse of identity in Canada is the subjects’ condition as immigrants who see themselves as being separated from mainstream society. We saw in the previous chapter that Poles regard culture as the principal component of

ethnicity and also as a factor that differentiates immigrants from the mainstream. Their patterns of self-identification are partly an extension of that view – a view that places them in a minority position with regard to non-immigrant groups in Canadian society.

However, it is also apparent that subjects are not totally bound by such criteria. Their self-identifications as Canadians counter some of the ideological effects of their own discourse, placing them closer to mainstream society. In the following sections we will also see that Poles have been able to develop alternative conceptualizations of identity that allow them to overcome many limitations imposed on them by traditional essentialist conventions and by their own condition as immigrants. We can speak of strategies that immigrant populations implement in their practices of self-identification, strategies that serve to counter the marginalization implicit in their minority situation (Giraud, 1987: 65-66; Taboada-Leonetti, 1986; Vasquez, 1987: 37-38). The strategies that Polish immigrants use are quite specific and have their limits as well. Not all identities “available” in the local context can be claimed with the same ease and in similar ways. We can speak in turn of a certain “margin of maneuver” that people utilize in defining their identity (Meintel, 1992: 86).

### **Repertoires of identity**

Apart from the varying degrees of importance that Polish immigrants attribute to their different identities, there are significant differences in the ways in which they explain and legitimize them, such that two distinctive interpretative repertoires can be distinguished. As was discussed in the previous chapters, interpretative repertoires are systems of terms that people use for defining, evaluating and in general explaining actions, events and other phenomena (Gilbert and Mulkey, 1982; Potter and Mulkey, 1985; Potter and Wetherell, 1987: 138-155). The two repertoires outlined here differ in their content, in the basic conceptualizations of identity that they offer, and the identities to which they are applied. According to my observations, Polish immigrants in Canada conceptualize Polish identity invariably and exclusively through the repertoire of “cultural determinism” – one that we already introduced in the previous chapter. At the same time,

they conceptualize (their own) Canadian identity using quite a different explanatory system. For reasons that will become clear, I term the second a “contingent” repertoire.

With regard to content, the two repertoires consist of different determinants of identity. “Determinants of identity” refers to any term or other discursive category that people use to support their claim to a given identity, to explain this identity or to explain the identity of other people. On the level of the discourse under study, they answer the question:

“What makes me X, Y or Z?” Take, for example, the following account:

**11.**

0385 I am Polish by birth. I feel Polish, even though I also am Canadian in the second  
0386 place. But, I would say, I am more Polish than Canadian. Perhaps, it’s  
0387 because I spent twenty five years – the best years of my life, so to speak – in  
0388 Poland. It is what shapes a person, what gives you a personality,  
0389 your own views. And, no matter, it is also the culture, religion,  
0390 the way of life, the way of expressing yourself, some kind  
0391 of outlook on life and everything. And from a perspective of time, no matter  
0392 how you look at it, you will always feel Polish in the first place,  
0393 and in the second place, I would say that I am Canadian.

Helena, age 34, self-employed, resident of Montreal for 9 years.

The terms used here belong to the repertoire of cultural determinism that Poles use in many areas of their discourse, except that in the present situation they are applied specifically to explain the speaker’s own identity. The essentialist character of this discourse emerges as it becomes evident that identity is conceptualized as an internally entrenched collection of components that make people who possess them “inherently” Polish. Helena uses such categories as *origin*, *socialization* (“It is what shapes a person...”), *personality*, *culture*, *religion*, *views*, *way of life* and *language* and presents them as factors that determine her identity.

The excerpt presented above exemplifies almost a full range of ethnic determinants in one short passage of discourse. Needless to say, different speakers may produce a more or less limited range of terms at any given time. The next speaker, for example, is more reserved in that respect.

**12.**

Interviewer: 0279 What makes someone a Pole?  
0280 How do you recognize a Polish person?  
Regina: 0281 How can I say? If someone was born Polish, she wants to live that way,

0282 with her religion, her faith, everything.  
Regina, in her seventies, retired tailor, resident of Montreal for 37 years.

In the conceptual framework of cultural determinism, identity and its particular components are seen as being acquired through socialization. Origin, understood sometimes in biological terms, but mainly as the socio-cultural environment where people grow up, is crucial, insofar as it determines the particular kind of socialization that they receive. In the following two extracts, the environment in which people are socialized is presented as determining what they become:

**13.**

0110 ... I certainly feel Canadian in a way, when I am  
0111 here [in Canada]. But when I am anywhere else, for example, in  
0112 Poland or in Europe, I feel Polish. You can't expect a  
0113 different answer, because I came here being, you know, over  
0114 thirty years old. I had already been shaped by a different environment, in  
0115 a different culture...  
Jacek, in his forties, chauffeur for the Diplomatic Corps,  
resident of Ottawa for 9 years.

**14.**

0361 ...I know that M. [his son] will become Québécois here, in a couple of years.  
0362 But I don't want him to be Québécois. I want him to be Polish.  
0363 Maybe, I am too much  
0364 of a Pole, you know. That's what I think. I think so.  
0365 I think, I am too much from there. It is important for  
0366 me that he be Polish. It would be difficult for me to come to terms with it  
0367 [his son becoming Québécois]. When I observe the children of our friends,  
0368 they speak French among themselves even among brothers and sisters.  
0369 I know it has to be that way, why should they speak Polish?  
Rafal, age 36, electronics technician, resident of Montreal for 10 years.

Invoking their social and cultural background is also the usual way for Polish immigrants to explain doubts and reservations about being Canadian and the differences between themselves and the people of Canadian or Québécois origin. In the same way, they explain their denials of Canadian or Québécois identity and assert the impossibility of obtaining these identities by immigrants.

**15.**

0399 ...When I came here, years ago, I thought simply that that  
0400 I would be Canadian. To some extent I am. I think that,  
0401 to a large extent this country means a lot to me, you know. But, but, I think  
0402 that, to a large extent, Quebec's society is so different  
0403 and it is difficult to even feel Canadian here, you know...  
0404 But, even having been so many times to



0405 Toronto and so on, I do not have any ties with those people. It is not that I  
 0406 dislike them. I simply don't feel any ties. I spent too much time,  
 0407 you know, with my peers, who laughed at the same  
 0408 jokes as me, you know. But they [Canadians] grew up here. When they talk,  
 0409 be it about schools or about the past, they grew up in different conditions.  
 0410 I had nothing to do with that.  
 Rafal, age 36, electronics technician, resident of Montreal for 10 years.

As befits the deterministic character of this repertoire, identity is conceptualized as an unavoidable, inescapable and immutable characteristic of a person. People raised in a given cultural environment are predestined to acquire a corresponding identity. The discourse of cultural determinism has a uniformly neutral style that seldom refers to people's choices or preferences. In fact, factors that shape identity are presented as acting upon people, regardless of their choices or preferences. Once acquired, ethnic identity becomes an inescapable and immutable part of their personality. Hence, "you can't expect a different answer," to cite Jacek (Example 13), when you ask immigrants about their identity. Because they are "too much from there" (Rafal, Example 14), meaning their country of origin and "no matter how you look at it," they will "always feel Polish first of all..." and can "feel Canadian" only secondly. (Helena, Example 11).

Although informants invariably use the repertoire of cultural determinism to explain why they are Polish, we already know from the previous chapter that its uses are not reserved exclusively for this end. In fact, this strand of discourse is employed in a wide variety of contexts and to explain a wide variety of social phenomena related to ethnicity and ethnic relations. Its functions in the discourse of Polish immigrants include among other things:

- defining Polish identity
- explaining the dominance of Polish identity over the Canadian one
- explaining the denial of Canadian or Québécois identities
- explaining immigrants' reservations about their Canadian identity
- defining the identities of "native"<sup>3</sup> Canadians and Québécois

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<sup>3</sup> My usage of the terms "native Canadians" and "native Québécois" has the same meaning as it has in my informants' usage – to simply mean people born and socialized in Canada. As such, it should be

- explaining differences between immigrants and people born in Canada
- defining membership in ethnic groups in general
- explaining differences between ethnic groups
- explaining similarities between members of the same ethnic group
- explaining similarities and affinities between different ethnic groups
- explaining relations between and within ethnic groups

This list by no means exhausts the uses of cultural determinism, but it gives us an idea of how broadly it is applied to explain social phenomena. As was argued in the previous chapter, Polish immigrants treat culturalist discourse in general as if it contained a universal social theory to explain matters related to identity and ethnicity.

However, despite its broad applicability, culturalist discourse is not entirely binding to the speakers, who can switch to different strands of discourse when the need arises. This seems to occur when Poles claim Canadian identity as well as in the rare cases when Québécois identity is claimed. In such cases an entirely different repertoire of terms prevails, one that we have termed here the “contingent” repertoire.

In terms of content, one of the principal categories of the latter repertoire is the notion of *citizenship*, understood either in the strictly legalistic sense of that word, or in the sense of broadly defined relationship to Canada as a country and state. In the following extract, the speaker uses *citizenship* in the legalistic sense of the word.

**16.**

- 0016 Well, I have met Germans, Italians, eh, eh, Greeks, Jews, eh, and people of  
 0017 many different nationalities from Eastern Europe, nationalities from the Arab  
 0018 countries, too. They keep stressing the nationality of origin to some extent, here.  
 0019 Once, we had a Christmas party at work and they started talking at the  
 0020 table where I sat.  
 0021 Eh, “I am French, I am,” eh, “German and I am Greek.”  
 0022 And when it came to me, I said: “I see, I am the only Canadian

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differentiated from the term “aboriginal” which refers specifically to the members of Canada’s First Nations.

- 0023 in this company.” Ha! Ha! Because I already had my  
 0024 Canadian citizenship.  
 Interviewer: 0025 And what did they say?  
 Konrad: 0026 They began to laugh, Ha! Ha!, that I did not stress my origin  
 0027 but that I was Canadian and felt that way.  
 Konrad, age 77, retired merchant navy captain,  
 resident of Montreal for 40 years.

It is worth noting that this extract contains terms belonging to the contingent repertoire as well as others that belong to the repertoire of cultural determinism. However, the two repertoires in question are kept separate in their applications. *Legal citizenship*, a contingent term, is used to define Canadian identity of the speaker, while *origin*, an ethnocultural term, is applied to “non-Canadian” ethnic identities of others.

Apart from *legal citizenship*, immigrants often rationalize their Canadian identity on the basis of their *attitude towards Canada*. The expressions of this attitude can take a variety of forms. The most popular is *political orientation*, particularly, taking a pro-Canadian, federalist stand on the issue of separation of Quebec. Occasionally, such self-identifications may take on emotional overtones:

**17.**

- 0721 I regard myself as Canadian. I regard myself as Polish and as Canadian.  
 0722 I regard myself all the more as Canadian, particularly, as I mentioned, after the  
 0723 referendum because I had tears in my eyes when I was sitting on the sofa,  
 0724 watching TV. And you know, at that moment I wondered at the fact  
 0725 that I was Polish and at the same time I was Canadian – that somehow I was  
 0726 emotionally attached to this country.  
 Helena, age 34, self-employed, resident of Montreal for 9 years.

Canadian identity is affirmed here on the basis of Helena’s concern about the results of the referendum of 1995 in Quebec, that in many ways determined the future of Canada. At the end of this short passage she generalizes her feelings as an *emotional attachment* to the country.

Not all declarations of Canadian identity based on a political orientation mean a simultaneous emotional involvement on the part of the speakers. In the next extract, political orientation is at issue but is tied up with an *immigrant identity*, which, technically speaking, is the main determinant of Canadian identity here. The speaker

explains how the fact of being an immigrant in the context of Quebec “condemns” him to be Canadian:

**18.**

0751 You know, here, an immigrant is regarded as  
 0752 Canadian, while a Québécois is not Canadian. He is  
 0753 Québécois, the Québécois *de souche*. Here, I think,  
 0754 is the division between federalists and separatists...  
 0756 So I have been condemned to be Canadian  
 0757 in Quebec, because I am an immigrant. To differentiate myself from  
 0758 separatists I am a federalist, that is, I am Canadian.  
 Wladek, age 29, university student, resident of Montreal for 6 years.

Wladek is establishing his Canadian identity here through a series of parallels and oppositions. The category “immigrant” obtains its validity as a determinant of Canadian identity by being simultaneously equated with the category “federalist” and contrasted with a “non-Canadian,” ethnic category “Québécois de souche” and its corresponding parallel “separatist.” This rhetorical Gordian knot reflects a popular view expressed in public discourse in Quebec, according to which immigrants and ethnic minorities in general oppose the idea of separatism, while the Québécois of “pure” origin are generally supposed to embrace it.

Not all expressions of attitude towards Canada in the context of defining Canadian identity involve manifestations of political orientation, either. Some of them are politically neutral, at least on the surface:

**19.**

0399 ... When I came here, years ago, I thought simply that that  
 0400 I would be Canadian. To some extent I am one. I think that,  
 0401 to a large extent this country means a lot to me, you know.  
 Rafal, age 36, electronics technician, resident of Montreal for 10 years.

**20.**

Interviewer: 0090 ...Why , on what basis  
 0091 are you Canadian?  
 Marta: 0092 First of all, because I chose this country, because I think it is a good  
 0093 country. What struck me here, even before I came here as an immigrant –  
 0094 when I had been visiting here – was that a person  
 0095 really felt like a subject of the state and not its object, that human rights  
 0096 were really respected here very much. Eh, besides, it is a big, beautiful  
 0097 country. I know it a little bit, not too much, unfortunately. I am still too  
 0098 tied up with my job. [We spend] our vacations in Europe rather than in Canada.  
 0099 Eh, [It is a country] with an interesting history and an interesting, I would

0100 say, attempt, at combining centralization with decentralization.  
 0101 We don't manage very well, unfortunately, to develop this common Canadian  
 0102 feeling. There are these two communities here, French and English. These are  
 0103 the things that I like here and that is why I chose Canada.

Marta, age 55, civil servant, resident of Montreal for 17 years.

If the meaning of the first passage cited above is relatively straightforward, the second one requires some examination. Marta aims to explain her Canadian identity in terms of her *choice of the country* as the place to live. The bulk of the explanation, however, goes to demonstrate her *admiration for the country*, its laws, institutions, history, and its geographic and demographic characteristics. This gives support to Marta's claim to Canadian identity, as much as it supports her explanation of why she chose Canada as a country of immigration.

Marta represents one of the rare cases among immigrants from Poland who affirm that they are Québécois as well. She also uses a contingent repertoire in this case. Her Québécois identity is explained as a *sense of belonging* to Quebec's society and *social participation* in the life of the society:

## 21.

Interviewer: 0127 We were talking about your identities...  
 0128 You mentioned Québécoise, right?  
 Marta: 0129 I feel very much that I am a part of this society. I feel a part of this  
 0130 society. I am involved in this society, professionally and  
 0131 I was involved politically and as a volunteer. Because I want this society to be  
 0132 such as I think a society should be and I don't want to reproach myself later  
 0133 that things were happening and I was just watching and they just happened to  
 0134 me. I want to participate in what is going on. So, I was very much  
 0135 involved politically in the elections that, oh, there are great  
 0136 elections here. So, I'm a part of this society. I like it. It has  
 0137 its imperfections, like every society. But, but I think that it depends  
 0138 on us all how this society will look like tomorrow  
 0139 and after tomorrow.

Marta, age 55, civil servant, resident of Montreal for 17 years.

In comparing this extract with the previous one (Example 20), it is evident that the speaker is using one set of determinants to explain her Canadian identity and another one to explain her Québécois identity. During our interview, Marta actually claimed two more ethnic identities, Polish and Jewish, using different determinants of identity in each case. Her Polish identity is defined in traditional ethnocultural terms, while her Jewish identity is presented as a *consciousness of belonging* to the Jewish community.

Here is a critical feature of interpretative practices involved in defining identity: In our study population, the subjects never use the same defining factors for two different ethnic identities that they claim. Identities in their view are based on difference in content and are mutually exclusive. What makes someone Québécois cannot simultaneously make him or her Canadian. This does not mean, of course, that each determinant is ascribed exclusively to only one identity among the speakers. Rather, different people may apply the same terms to different identities. For example, the next speaker uses the *sense of belonging* to explain why he feels Canadian:

**22.**

0116 So, it is hard to say whether I feel [Canadian]  
 0117 or not. I can't say that I feel so a hundred percent, but still,  
 0118 despite all that, I belong to this society and I think that  
 0119 somehow I certainly feel one .

Jacek, in his forties, chauffeur for the Diplomatic Corps,  
 resident of Ottawa for the last 9 years.

Alternatively, identity is sometimes explained in terms of *personal benefits*. We remember Renata, who hinted in passing that she was “glad to be Canadian, more perhaps... because of the personal benefits” (Example 7, lines 0772-0773). In the excerpt below, another speaker elaborates on this theme and appears almost cynical about the question:

**23.**

Interviewer: 0236 Do you feel Canadian?  
 Pawel: 0237 It depends. Not in Canada, not really. But it helps a little bit [being Canadian],  
 0238 for example, when you travel abroad. So, it is pure opportunism. When you  
 0239 show the Canadian passport, you will be treated differently than when you show  
 0240 the Polish passport.  
 0242 (...) So, one may feel Canadian in that  
 0243 sense but, like I said, out of opportunism. However, if being Canadian at  
 0244 heart means standing at attention when they play the Canadian national  
 0245 anthem and feeling like a great patriot, it does not work with me, not really.

Pawel, in his thirties, financial clerk, unemployed,  
 resident of Montreal for 9 years.

Pawel is openly admitting that he may “feel Canadian” as a result of a conscious opportunistic choice, because the fact of being Canadian – using the Canadian passport – brings tangible benefits. The *personal benefits* are obviously related to the possession of Canadian *citizenship* (Canadian passport), although the speaker is not using that

determinant here directly. In the last lines of his account, he also rejects any emotional basis for Canadian identity.

This brief overview of the contingent repertoire, as applied to Polish self-identifications, shows that most of its terms situate the subject in relation to the Canadian State. As such, one could say that they come from the realm of civics, in the sense of widely defined rights, duties and affairs of citizens. When considering the particular applications of this discourse, even seemingly unrelated terms such as *personal benefits* and *sense of belonging* can be categorized as relating to the civic realm.

Another striking feature that unites this collection of terms is that all the terms come from **outside the realm of culture**. This seems to be one of the basic principles of the contingent repertoire. However, in order to understand it properly, we need to take into consideration the applicability of both repertoires in the Canadian context.

There are some significant differences in this regard. The culturalist repertoire (i.e. the repertoire of cultural determinism) discussed above appears to be the principal explanatory system used to account for a vast number of phenomena related to identity and membership in ethnic groups in general. It is important to note that Poles use it even in cases where the other repertoire is also applicable. For example, most if not all the contingent terms identified in this chapter as being used to define Canadian identity could also be used for explaining the Polish identity of the speakers. Most participants in the study possessed dual *citizenship* (that includes all the interviewees, except one), yet we did not come across any cases where Polish citizenship would be used as a determinant of Polish identity in Canada. The same goes for the *sense of belonging*, not to mention the *attitude towards the country* that, translated into the notion of patriotism (cf. Connor, 1993: 374), has historically held a prominent place in Polish national tradition. Even *opportunistic choice* could, under certain circumstances, serve to explain Polish identity. Despite this applicability, informants used none of these categories in reference to Polish

identity in Canada. Instead, ethnocultural determinants are used first and foremost, if not exclusively for that purpose.

Polish immigrants have a problem, though, when it comes to claiming and explaining their Canadian and Québécois identities, because ethnocultural determinants are inapplicable in these cases. Having been born and raised outside Canada, subjects cannot claim these identities on the basis of origin or any factors that come from the realm of culture, as they understand it. Their accounts are full of explanations as to why they can never be like people born in this country, and ethnocultural factors are always at issue. This problem is handled by the contingent repertoire, one that consists of terms that are applicable in the immigrants' case but that come from out of the realm of culture. Using this system allows the speakers to claim the problematic identities and at the same time to maintain a relatively coherent version of the social world and their place in it.

### **The realism of Polish-Canadian self-identifications**

There are indications that these are genuine ways of making sense of identity – that the produced self-identifications are “real” for the speakers. The latter make efforts to define and explain their different identities in such ways that their claims have substance and make sense to themselves as well as to others. Polish immigrant discourse displays strikingly regular patterns in that respect, most particularly in employing the two explanatory systems that have been identified.

The two repertoires offer two radically different versions of identity, and it is evident that these differences are meaningful for the speakers. In general, the repertoires are kept separate by passages of talk, as the speakers try to avoid contradictions in their discourse. But most of all, the two repertoires are kept separate in their applications. The culturalist repertoire covers most themes of identity and ethnicity, but never the Canadian or Québécois identity of immigrants. These are always constructed through the contingent repertoire. Depending on the speakers' current discursive goal, e.g. the identity he or she claims at the moment, and depending on applicability, speakers switch from one



repertoire to the other. This in itself is an indication that the speakers are really looking for tangible answers to the question of what makes them Polish or Canadian.

The ultimate test of reality of the two repertoires comes when they appear in the same passage of talk or are applied to the same identity. Different versions of identity are then juxtaposed, obliging the speakers to adopt appropriate solutions. In practice, the speakers choose one version over the other. In other words, they “orientate”<sup>4</sup> themselves towards different versions of reality, a maneuver regarded in discursive studies as an indication that those versions have reality for the participants (Atkinson and Heritage, 1984; Potter and Wetherell, 1987: 153-155).

Thus, for example, when Konrad claims Canadian identity on the basis of citizenship, he chooses to disregard his origin: “I did not stress my origin..., I was Canadian and felt that way” (Example No. 16). Obviously, Konrad’s ethnocultural background could only make him a member of one of the “non-Canadian” groups. In the following passage the speaker, in fact, challenges ethnocultural factors as the sole basis of Canadian identity.

#### 24.

Interviewer: 0036 ...Who do you regard as Canadians in this country?  
 Helena: 0037 Mm, frankly speaking, most people here possess at least two citizenships (.)  
 0038 with the exception of those who were born here. They are the descendants of  
 0039 anglophones or francophones who regard themselves as the real Canadians.  
 0040 In Quebec, the French regard themselves as the *native people* [Engl.], which is  
 0041 incorrect, if you look at it from the point of view of history, because Indians  
 0042 were here first. Canadians, I regard myself as Canadian after the referendum,  
 0043 are all those who bear the Canadian  
 0044 citizenship, regardless of how long they have lived here, no matter  
 0045 what language they speak...

Helena, age 34, self-employed, resident of Montreal for 9 years.

Helena is defining here who Canadians are. In the middle, she throws in her own claim to Canadian identity, implying that she also fits the definition. The main defining factor here is *citizenship*, which belongs with the contingent repertoire. She also hints that she regards herself as Canadian “after the referendum,” which points to another contingent

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<sup>4</sup> Following Potter and Wetherell (1987: 153), I use the term “orientate”, instead of “notice” or “understand”, because the speakers are not necessarily aware that their argumentation is organized into two different explanatory systems. In fact, when confronted with my analytical discoveries, out of the context of the research, several people expressed surprise at not having noticed these regularities earlier.

determinant – *political orientation*. She elaborates on this in another context (Example No. 17). However, Helena is also acknowledging that there are people in this country who claim Canadian identity on the basis of *origin*, i.e. in ethnocultural terms, and who in so doing can also claim a monopoly on that identity (Example No. 24, lines 0038-0039). This fact threatens the legitimacy of her self-identification as Canadian. Usually, when Polish immigrants acknowledge any ethnocultural bases of Canadian identity, they themselves do not claim this identity or explicitly deny possessing it. If they do make any such claims, they surround them with reservations (see, Example No. 15). In other words, the version offered by cultural determinism prevails. However, there are also speakers like Helena who take the opposite position and challenge what they see as the dominant version. In Example 24, she goes as far as identifying all Canadians in terms of the contingent repertoire. In order to do so, she must repudiate ethnocultural determinants. She rejects *origin*, *socialization* and *language* in favor of *citizenship*, as the principal determinant of Canadian identity (lines 0042-0045). In effect, the contingent repertoire prevails in this particular account.

Helena's argument should not be treated as an empty rhetorical maneuver used merely for the sake of conceptual clarity. Helena's position is consistent with general trends in Polish-Canadian discourse. Poles generally maintain the importance of cultural determinism, defining most identities in its terms, including those of the descendants of English and French colonials. However, as immigrants, they also try to challenge the perceived monopoly of the two Charter Groups on Canadian identity. Even in the Example No. 24, the ethnocultural bases of anglophone and francophone identities remain unchallenged, only their monopoly on Canadian identity is. As we already mentioned in the previous chapter, Polish immigrants present Canada as a country of immigrants (among other things) and argue that no one group should have primacy over other groups.

## **Identity and practices of exclusion and inclusion**

There is a widespread assumption in both science and popular opinion that certain identities are necessarily exclusive. This assumption seems to be based on an essentialist approach to ethnicity and on a rigid cognitive model of thinking that insists upon conceptual clarity and ignores the argumentative nature of thought (cf. Billig, 1985).

These factors may indeed contribute to the development of negative connotations that are sometimes associated with notions of double identity.

The subjects of this study seem to subscribe to this convention of exclusivity; hence the particular patterns of self-identification that have been examined here. Polish immigrants assume that there is an “essence” of identity that fixes differences between people. True to the logic of such convictions, Polish and Canadian or Québécois identities would have to exclude each other, if defined in ethnocultural terms (i.e., in terms of cultural determinism). Because, according to the subjects in this study, a person of Polish cultural competence is not exactly a person of Canadian cultural competence.... Once again, it is clear that certain social conventions have become so entrenched in common sense that their constructed character is obscured and they are perceived as natural and inevitable (cf. Marshall and Wetherell, 1989).

The strategies of self-identification used by Polish immigrants to overcome these limitations indicate that researchers should pay attention to the interpretative practices involved in the representations of identity, rather than assume that certain forms of identity are inevitably exclusive. The analysis here shows that identities, including ethnic ones, are not inherently exclusive: rather, it is interpretative practices that eventually make them so. The present analysis demonstrates that even immigrants of the first generation can claim different identities “of the same order” without serious problems of incompatibility.

The logic of cultural determinism provides a ready and convenient explanation for distinctions made between different identities. At the same time, however, various practices of social categorization in Polish immigrant discourse indicate that the limitations imposed by the logic of cultural determinism are not absolute. In fact, they are context-related: they serve mainly to construct the difference between minorities and dominant groups in Canada, rather than between human groups in general. Cultural terms are used very consistently in Polish discourse to differentiate between immigrants and Canadians and/or Québécois, who are (within this particular pair of oppositions) always represented by the anglophone and/or francophone majorities. Beyond the context of this particular opposition, the logic of cultural determinism is broken frequently and in many ways. The same factors can actually serve to establish affinity just as well as difference between groups of people. In other words, the same factors may be employed for both exclusion **and** inclusion.

This is easily discernible when we look at the other self-identifications that are present in Polish discourse. For example, identities such as White, Catholic, European and Slavic, claimed by Polish immigrants, are all constructed through ethnocultural discourse, and yet they are also inclusive. For example, European identity is built on references to such factors as *origin*, *culture* and *life style*. Those are the same terms that are used to establish the Polish identity of the speakers. Arguably, European and Polish identities belong to different orders, and as such they allow a certain degree of mutual inclusion. Our informants are Polish and as such they are also European, White, Slavic and, for the most part, Roman Catholic. However, ethnocultural factors can also in some cases be used to construct common identity of groups that belong to the same order. By the logic of cultural determinism, such identities should be mutually exclusive. Yet, if the need arises, that logic can be suppressed. This is what happens in the following case:

**25.**

Stefan	0081	They are, let's say, Serbs or Yugoslavs from the former Yugoslavia. We
	0082	don't say Serbs, because they don't identify themselves as Serbs but as
	0083	Yugoslavs. So, it is the Orthodox religion, Christian, like ours. They are Slavs,
	0084	like us, hm, and they simply think in the same way and do things in the same
	0085	way as we do. They are simply, their character is shaped in a similar way to ours

0086 and very different than the character and the way of looking at the world of  
 0087 people from here – natives who have lived here for generations.  
 [in another context]  
 0279 ...On the other hand, I would like to say that Yugoslavs, or Serbs, who, as I  
 0280 said are the closest to me. They are Slavs, they have similar language  
 0281 and similar culture and similar traditions from their ancestors.  
 Stefan, age 30, Hospital Technician, residing in Montreal for the last 8 years.

Here, a speaker uses numerous ethnocultural terms to argue the affinity between Poles and Serbs. These are the same terms that are elsewhere commonly used to warrant Polish identity and also to establish the difference from other ethnic groups: the *way of thinking*, *the way of doing things*, *the way of looking at the world*. When the speaker returns to the subject, after a while, he reaffirms the affinity between the two groups by referring to the similarities of *language*, *culture*, *traditions* and *origin* (“ancestors”). In arguing the similarity between two different groups, he almost exhausts the contents of the cultural repertoire.

In this argument, even obvious differences are downplayed in favor of similarities. For example, the speaker asserts that Serbian religion is “Christian, like ours,” effectively introducing *religion* as another determinant of affinity between the two groups. He does so in striking disregard of an important difference of denominations between the two groups: Poles are overwhelmingly Roman Catholics, while Serbs are traditionally Orthodox Catholics. Ironically, the same religious differences have often been exploited in conflicts between different groups of people, throughout history, including Slavs<sup>5</sup>. Apparently, these differences are irrelevant to the speaker in the local context.

The difference that seems relevant in the local context is the one between Poles and Serbs, taken together, versus the local population. According to Stefan, what makes Poles and other Slavs similar to each other also makes them different from the “natives” of Canada – people “who have lived here for generations” (lines 0086-0087). This brings us to the subject of immigrant identity in Polish representations.

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<sup>5</sup> It is enough to look at the Serbian-Croat relations within former Yugoslavia.

## Immigrant identity

Perhaps the most significant feature of immigrant identity is that it is built on a direct differentiation from “native” Canadian and Québécois identities. The immigrants see themselves as a category in itself, apart from other categories, by virtue of not being native Canadians or Québécois. Poles may produce a few seemingly neutral determinants of immigrant identity, such as *common fate with other immigrants*, *lack of social competence*, and/or the *fact of having come to this country from elsewhere*. However, the meaning of these terms is almost always dependent on this opposition – on the *fact of not being a native of this country*. When it comes to constructing immigrant identity, subjects can rarely abstain from making comparisons with native Canadians. Take the following two accounts:

### 26.

- Interviewer: 0202 Is there a sense of common identity among immigrants?  
 Anna: 0206 ...I think, so. I mean, we always think that, eh, we will never be  
 0207 those Canadians, even if I get citizenship. We will always be  
 0208 second class. Just a naturalized Canadian, yeah. This is our complex.  
 Interviewer: 0209 So, there are the second and first classes. Is that right?  
 Anna: 0210 Yeah, Ha!, Ha! Ha!  
 Interviewer: 0211 Who is the first class Canadian?  
 Anna: 0212 The first class is the person who was born here, who received, I wouldn't say  
 0213 a university education, but some education and it is easier for him, I don't know,  
 0214 to express himself, easier to find a job. He knows where to go. He knows the  
 0215 ways to do things. He knows it from his parents. Just like us, who were born in  
 0216 Poland. Your father had to instruct you. You knew the ways. It was for us. I was  
 0217 born with it. Here, someone has to show me the ways. [A Canadian] does not  
 0218 need that. It is easier for him.  
 Anna, college student, age 44, resident of Montreal for 7 years.

### 27.

- 0248 But, but one thing that is certain is that  
 0249 immigrants stick to immigrants, and they feel best among  
 0250 immigrants, that with those Québécois, you can call them  
 0251 natives, it simply doesn't [work out]. Obviously, everything is mixed up but,  
 0252 but there are districts, you know, more immigrant, pure immigrant districts...  
 0263 ...I think this is natural.  
 0264 You can't cut that out. People come here looking, you know,  
 0265 for a better life. That's for sure, right? For the most part it is looking  
 0266 for a better life and they find it one way or another. And you know, they stick  
 0267 together because as the first generation they can't, they are unable to cut the  
 0268 ties. They are different. They have a different temperament, different  
 0269 language, so they don't have the same way of understanding things. Because  
 0270 even if you learn the language and understand those Québécois, you understand  
 0271 only the language but you don't understand the nuances...  
 0272 [It is] simply not the same sense of humor, you don't grow up in the same

0273 conditions, you don't grow up in [the same] school, you don't go to school with  
 0274 the same people, you don't laugh at the same things. You simply grow up in  
 0275 different conditions. It is impossible for you to have the same point of view.  
 0276 These differences are really minimal but they are enough  
 0277 to make it impossible for you to live together with these people.  
 0278 It does not work for you. And it is known that Italians, for example, dislike  
 0279 Québécois. I think that most immigrants rather dislike Québécois.  
 Rafal, age 36, electronics technician, resident of Montreal for 10 years.

In the first extract above, Anna, when asked about immigrant identity begins by establishing a difference between immigrants and “born” Canadians. In a sense, the terms used to define immigrant identity are the same as when the informants claim their Polish identity. The difference, however, is that Polish identity is generally defined in terms of possession (they feel Polish because they are of Polish origin and possess the appropriate social competence), while the immigrant one is largely defined in terms of deficiency. What the immigrants have in common, according to Anna, is the fact that they will never be like “those” Canadians, for they lack their *origin* and *social competence*. The speaker in the second extract uses similar arguments to explain why immigrants “stick” together. He also builds his argument on how they differ from the “natives” – in this case the Québécois. This difference is explained in ethnocultural terms, again, by pointing to deficiencies and limitations.

The differentiation from “natives” seems to be the main factor determining immigrant identity. This factor alone allows subjects to temporarily suspend, or disregard the ethnocultural differences that otherwise divide the immigrant population. Beyond that opposition, the category “immigrants” covers a loose conglomerate of people from different cultures. The ethnocultural factors that serve to establish the difference between immigrants and “non-immigrants” also set internal limits to immigrant identity. In the extract below, the informant explains first what the basis of immigrant identity in Canada is and then quickly moves on to point out its limits.

## 28.

Interviewer: 0482 Do you think that there is a sense of common identity among  
 0483 immigrants in Canada?  
 Pawel: 0484 Uhm, a sense of commonality, certainly, in the sense that all immigrants go  
 0485 through hard times. I mean, hard, in the sense that it is not easy. As for any other  
 0486 sense, it is divided. I think it is very divided.  
 0487 It is only natural, because every immigrant who comes here brings

0488 luggage of particular experiences, life experiences. He comes from a particular  
 0489 culture and it is hard to turn around a hundred and eighty degrees. So,  
 0490 he thinks. I think so. It sure is like I say, in the sense that he is an immigrant  
 0491 and he goes through harder times than someone who was born here. So, in  
 0492 this respect we are all equal, I think.

Interviewer: 0493 Equal, right?

Pawel: 0494 Right. But when it comes to cult-, to difference in culture and customs,  
 0495 to language, we all differ from each other. So, take a thing like couscous.  
 0496 I had never met with a thing like that, until I came here and learned that  
 0497 Moroccans -- I don't know whether this food came from Morocco or Algeria -  
 0498 - they ate couscous. And they will always eat couscous. I, on the other hand,  
 0499 don't like it, really. So, here are the differences and I think they will always be  
 0500 there. But in the sense that they are immigrants, they feel as immigrants, the  
 0501 same way as I do.

Pawel, in his thirties, financial clerk, unemployed,  
 Resident of Montreal for 9 years.

Pawel implies that a certain *commonality of fate* is a determinant of immigrant identity. In his opinion, what all immigrants have in common are the “hard times” that they go through. Their ethnocultural background proves to be a burden difficult to shed or change (“It is hard to turn around a hundred and eighty degrees”). Like others, Pawel does not fail to draw a contrast comparison between immigrants and people born in Canada: immigrants go through hard times as compared to people who were born “here” (lines 0490-0491). Having established what immigrants have in common with each other, Pawel points out the differences among them. He mentions *culture*, *customs*, *language* and *food*, which are all stock categories of the culturalist repertoire.

Representations of immigrant identity is one of the areas where Polish discourse in Montreal and Ottawa differs, according to my research. Immigrant identity in Montreal is often built on the opposition to two identities: those of Canadians and Québécois. In Ottawa the opposition is invariably limited to the identity of Canadians only. As was already explained in the previous chapter, this difference stems from the fact that in Quebec, and particularly in Montreal, immigrants face two dominant categories.

Another difference between the representations of identity in the two cities is that in Montreal some Poles go so far as to claim Canadian identity on the basis of the immigrant one. This was evident in Wladek's account (Example 18), where the speaker sees himself as Canadian precisely **because** he is an immigrant. Such variability is



possible because the two relationships in question are defined in terms of two different repertoires and because of the existence of another triangle of relationships, in which the categories “Canadian” and “immigrant” are pitted together against the category “Québécois *de souche*.” In both these triangles immigrants are represented in opposition to the category “Québécois.”

### **Strategies of ethnic self-identification**

Polish immigrants regard the repertoire of cultural determinism as the dominant explanatory system for making sense of identity and ethnicity in general. Frozen in social convention, it seriously influences the patterns of self-identifications of those guided by its logic. This explains the predominance of Polish identity over other identities in the representations of immigrants from Poland. Given their origin and the socialization they have undergone, it is only “natural” for them to regard their identity of origin as their primary and most important identity. Hence, we “can’t expect a different answer,” when we pose the question of identity.

The same explanatory system imposes serious limitations on people’s choices as to the identities they can claim. In case of immigrants, it puts them at a disadvantage, if they want to partake of the dominant collective identities in the host society. The way identity is conceptualized through cultural determinism virtually precludes possessing another “ethnic” identity by the same person. The ethnocultural background of Polish immigrants is inapplicable when they want to identify themselves as Canadians or Québécois. Therefore, some immigrants deny possessing Canadian and Québécois identities, explaining their denials through the repertoire of cultural determinism. They think they do not possess the characteristics that would make them members of one or both of Canada’s majorities. We can see how culture can be a “stumbling block” to the integration of immigrants into the host society.

Significantly, it is not so much through self-identification as Poles as through the representation of immigrant identity that we can best see how the ethnocultural hierarchy

system functions to the disadvantage of immigrants. Even though Poles are undeniably a minority in Canada, they still define their ethnic identity in positive terms, through possession of certain characteristics, which themselves are not necessarily disadvantageous. By contrast, they define immigrant identity in negative terms and through deficiency rather than possession. “Immigrant” basically means for them non-Canadian and non-Québécois.

Through such constructions, Canadian and Québécois identities emerge as the reference points and the embodiments of the dominant collective identity in Canada and Quebec respectively. At the same time, immigrant identity is de-valORIZED as inadequate in this respect. A similar process has been observed by Fortier (1992), who studied language as a factor of ethnic differentiation in the discourse of Québécois of Italian descent. The participants in her study expressed a sentiment of inferiority related to their allegedly imperfect usage of French and the low value attributed to the knowledge of the “non-official” languages in Quebec (*ibid.*: 95-96).

In effect, immigrants’ own discourse recreates and legitimizes a social hierarchy based on ethnic differences in Canada. This hierarchy stems from what Breton (1984) calls the “dominant symbolic order” which, through a particular institutionalization of dominant identity (largely in ethnocultural terms) regulates the distribution of social prestige in Canadian society.

We can see, however, that Poles are not prisoners of their own convictions, nor passive victims of their immigrant status. They overcome the limitations imposed on them by the ethnocultural hierarchy system and their status by claiming one and occasionally both of the dominant identities. The strategy they employ consists of using a different system for defining identity. What we have termed here the “contingent” repertoire contains the determinants of identity other than ethnocultural, but that have a sufficient validity for the informants to be used in claiming the identities not permitted through the ethnocultural system. Using this strategy of changing repertoires allows the immigrants to identify

themselves as Canadians and in some cases as Québécois, despite the fact of being immigrants, and “first of all” Polish.

In claiming one or both dominant identities, these immigrants challenge their minority status and attempt to secure a better footing for themselves in the dominant symbolic order – to construct a positive identity and certify their status in the host society (cf. Breton, *ibid.*: 137-138). They do so without challenging the dominant status of Canadian and Québécois identities – actually, the fact that they aspire to either of these identities only confirms that dominant status.

Poles challenge, however, the ethnocultural bases on which the dominant identity in Canada is constructed. And even this does not come easy. Immigrants’ self-identification as Canadians (or Québécois) runs against the dominant convention, according to which identity should be defined in ethnocultural terms. Hence, the hesitations and reservations that often accompany these claims. Speakers who produce such reservations explain them through the repertoire of cultural determinism – in the same way as those immigrants who explain their denials of the identities in question. Creating a hierarchy of identities, is probably one more strategy to manage this conceptual problem: many speakers regard the identity “obtained” through the contingent repertoire as secondary to their Polish one.

It should also be clear by now that any notion of double or multiple identities being a factor of individual or social disorganization is totally missing the point, at least with regard to the representations of identity that we have studied here. If Polish immigrants have a problem with claiming “additional” identities, it is because they are of the same frame of mind as those researchers who see the possession of multiple identities as problematic. The difference is that the immigrants can also overcome the limitations imposed by this approach via discursive strategies such as those outlined in this study.

The question still remains as to why so few Polish immigrants in Quebec claim Québécois identity. There is only one case in which the informant claimed Québécois

identity in the sample of interviews and very few instances were encountered in my everyday interactions with the community at large. There is also relatively little discourse with respect to this issue in the community, as though even the notion of claiming Québécois identity was “out of the question” for Polish immigrants. The question remains as to why these people have not come up with contingent terms that would allow them to claim Québécois identity. To answer this question, the potential determinants that are available for people in a given social context must be examined. For the speakers, the “determinants of identity” are the reasons to possess one, e.g. to be X or Y. This brings us into the realm of pragmatics – the strategies of self-identification demonstrated above are not empty rhetorical maneuvers.

In their attempts to make sense of the world, people use what is available to them as interpretative resources. Nonetheless, however wide the margin of maneuver in employing interpretative strategies, the latter must make sense to the users. Informants use *language* and *culture*, for example, as determinants of their Polish identity, not only because these categories are traditionally used to define identity but also because they speak Polish and were socialized the “Polish way.” With regard to the particular contingent repertoire present here, most of its terms make sense only when applied to the Canadian identity. For example, these immigrants claim to be Canadian on the basis of *citizenship*, because they do possess Canadian citizenship. They could not use this factor in claiming the Québécois identity, though (That may change one day, if Quebec becomes a sovereign state). Determinants related to citizenship also have their specific applications, and their utility for immigrants in explaining Québécois identity is presently rather dubious.

Indeed, several of the factors that have been identified here as contingent determinants may be preventing Polish immigrants from claiming Québécois identity. The latter could not base this identity on their *attitude towards the country*, particularly given the *political orientation* that they espouse. Polish immigrants’ discourse about politics in Quebec and Canada revolves almost exclusively around the issue of Quebec’s separation. Moreover,

the subjects' stand on this issue is strongly pro-Canadian and federalist. From my observations, there are very few exceptions to this rule in the Polish community at large, even among those who do identify themselves as Québécois. As for *immigrant identity* in Quebec, its construction in Polish discourse is based on a double opposition to Québécois identity: first as a non-native *versus* native identity, and then as a Canadian identity defined in contingent terms *versus* the identity of native Québécois.

Perhaps, the greatest obstacle for immigrants in Quebec to “feel Québécois” is the fact that Québécois identity is defined so strongly in ethnocultural terms. The dominant discourse in Quebec is manifestly nationalist and emphasizes the distinctness of Québécois' origin and culture in North America. By contrast, the dominant Canadian discourse, particularly in its official version, emphasizes the ideas of pluralism and multiculturalism: In principle at least, Canadian nation is formed as a conglomerate of different ethnic groups (Breton, *ibid.*; Laczko, 1994; McLellan and Richmond, 1994). This certainly gives immigrants much more ground for maneuver in claiming Canadian identity, than when it comes to claiming the Québécois.

Another question is how and to what extent the particular strategies of self-identification that we have outlined here put subjects closer to Canadian mainstream. The presence of self-identification as Canadians in the absence of other markers of identity may indicate not that Poles do identify themselves **with** Canadians as a group, or nation to which they belong, but rather **as** Canadians, that is, as a category. Judging from the terms through which Canadian identity is claimed by a considerable number of Polish immigrants – terms coming from the realm of civics – we can conclude that it is easier for them to identify with the Canadian State, rather than with a nation defined in culturalist terms. Thus, their Canadian identity may correspond to what Breton calls “political nationality,” as opposed to “cultural nationality,” which corresponds more closely to the identity defined in culturalist terms (1984: 128).

This may be a reflection of the degree of alienation from the host society that all immigrants suffer. Even the contingent repertoire is not enough to overcome perceived differences – defined in culturalist terms – between immigrants and people born in Canada. The existence of two separate repertoires of identity helps us understand why, in the absence of identification **with** Canadians, so many immigrants can nevertheless identify themselves **as** Canadians.

In the next chapter, the subject of categorical divisions and cultural differences in Canadian society, as they appear in Polish immigrant discourse will be further explored. The functions of this discourse – the uses and “misuses” of particular representations by the subjects in the study, will be the focus. Of special concern is how the content of social categories constructed in discourse depends on the functions of this discourse in the particular context in which it is produced.

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## Constructing “Us” and “Them”

In the previous chapters of this study, Polish immigrant discourse about Canadian society was introduced and situated in its larger social and discursive context. How the subjects of the study divide Canadian society, what principles they use to define its constituent parts, where they place those parts in the symbolic order of Canadian society, and which principles are seen as governing their mutual relations was examined. Finally, patterns of self-identification among Polish immigrants were discussed. In this chapter, the focus shifts to an investigation of the content of the principal categories in Canadian society that are distinguished by the informants, including the particular characteristics, virtues and flaws they assign to them.

One of the chief analytic goals of this chapter is to confirm the interrelationship between the practices of categorization of different groups and the self-categorization of the actors. The goal is to demonstrate that, as far as everyday practices of social construction are concerned, the construction of “them” is mutually bound up with the construction of “us.” This, ostensibly, is the mechanism involved in the processes of establishing and maintaining boundaries between ethnic groups, as proposed by Barth (1969). In the framework of Barth’s approach, it is not objective factors that come to constitute ethnic groups, but rather the factors that actors choose as significant boundary markers between different categories of people.

The great variability of categorizing discourse will once again become evident. Processes of categorization are not necessarily automatic or independent of each other. Rather, they are reactive and depend on different kinds of factors that determine why ideas in discourse of the same people are often associated with objects-categories in ways that appear inconsistent and contradictory (Potter and Wetherell, 1987: 32-53, 116-136). For

one thing, there are different categories of “us”: immigrants, members of an ethnic community, and even members of a race. Depending on the speaker’s perspective, images of “them” vary accordingly. How actors will go about categorizing “us” and “them” depends on their relation to significant others, on what they hope to achieve through a particular practice of categorization and on the range of discursive resources available to them at the time.

The themes that were touched upon in the previous chapters will continue to be elaborated on here, so as to demonstrate more ways in which Polish discourse constructs Canadian society, including its social hierarchies. One issue that has not been discussed so far is the reproduction of racist discourse by the community under study. In the framework of racial relations, Polish immigrants belong with the White majority, and for the most part racial minorities receive rather critical and at times derogatory treatment in their everyday talk. Sadly, that talk seems partly structured by a conflict of interests between minority categories.

Once again, the interplay between ideological discourse and counter-discourses will be made apparent. Polish immigrants are members of the White majority in Canada, but they are also immigrants and members of an ethnic minority in this country. Thus, they speak of racial minorities in ways that reconfirm and legitimize the marginal status of the latter. However, they also talk in ways that undermine and de-legitimize the dominant status of the groups that are above them in the hierarchy of status and power. In both instances, discursive practices are oriented to enhancing their self-image and position in the ethnic hierarchy of Canadian society.

Much of Polish discourse about “them” can be classified as ethnic categorization which should be distinguished from the construction of minority-majority relations *sensu stricto*. Even when talking about dominant ethnic groups in Canada, the subjects in this study do not speak only as a minority. They also speak as Poles. They construct the category “Canadians” in contrast to the category “Poles”. Categorizations of Canadians,



whether negative or positive, serve to establish, maintain, and enhance the sense of what it means to be Polish in Canada.

All this discourse is also highly ethnocentric, but that does not mean that it consists only of criticism of others. Not all Polish representations of “them” are critical, nor is all discourse about “us” laudatory. Some Polish views on their own community are far from flattering. In fact, Polish self-criticism is at times more elaborate and negative than that applied to any other group. Furthermore, certain categories of “others” are used as models to follow for change and self-improvement.

There are relatively few ethnic categories that receive systematic treatment in Polish immigrants’ everyday discourse. “Systematic treatment” refers to a relatively frequent use of a given category in everyday talk and/or consistent associations of this category with the same topics. The categories that receive the most systematic treatment from the subjects in this study are mainly the majorities, i.e. “Québécois/French Canadians, English Canadians”, and “Canadians” in general. Needless to say, “Poles” themselves also receive a lot of attention. Apart from these, there are few ethnic minorities mentioned more often and in a more systematic manner than others. Those are mainly “Jews” and “Italians”. Other ethnic groups in Canada are rarely mentioned and do not seem to be the subject of everyday conversations among Polish immigrants.

The latter also produce a small amount of discourse concerning racial minorities in Canada. Although this discourse is relatively marginal, as compared to the attention given to other social categories, it appears to follow regular patterns. As was previously noted, Polish constructions of Canadian society rely for the most part on the discourse of ethnicity – to the point that ethnic terms often displace the racial account. But, this does not mean that Poles are ideologically “colour blind” or ignorant of racial discourse. Rather, it means that they do not use race, understood in terms of phenotype, as a significant building block in their constructions of Canadian society. Nevertheless, race emerges as an important discursive and explanatory category in certain contexts.

### **Racist discourse: the majority perspective**

Much Polish discourse about the racial minorities in Canada consists of perpetuating popular racist conventions, albeit veiled in various disguises common to the present era of political correctness. Such disguises are much thinner than is often the case with the modern racial discourse and they actually help the researcher to determine that these are indeed racist arguments. Such is the case of common disclaimers of the kind: “I am not a racist, but...” They indicate that the subjects themselves are aware that they are engaging in potentially offensive discourse. Other forms of camouflage are oriented to hiding the racial character of discourse. They consist of replacing racial categories (such as “Blacks”, “Negroes”, “Orientals”) with ethnic or national ones (“Jamaicans”, “Philippinos”) or even with geographical categories (“Asians”, “Africans”, etc). Nevertheless, in most cases, the overall form and sense of speakers’ arguments show that these are indeed forms of racial categorization (cf. Billig, 1988; Potter and Wetherell, 1988; Wetherell and Potter, 1992).

That this is mostly **racist** (i.e. not merely **racial**) discourse is also evident given the fact that it is offensive with regard to racial minorities, and from the relative thematic uniformity of the accounts that were collected. Rarely are racial minorities spoken of otherwise than in association with social problems such as crime, unemployment, welfare abuse, disturbing peace, aggressive behavior, or untidiness. These associations occurred both during the interviews and in the informal exchanges between members of the Polish community. In the following example, the informant speaks about crime in Canada<sup>1</sup>:

#### **1.**

Interviewer:	0077	So, there is crime here, too.
Leon:	0078	Of course, like everywhere.
Interviewer:	0079	Uh, what do you think are the reasons for that?
Leon:	0080	Crime? Uh, poverty, most of all, poverty, uh,
	0081	some kinds of social divisions.
Interviewer:	0082	What kinds of social divisions?

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<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that Polish immigrants argue almost unanimously that Canada is a very safe country – that it has a very low crime rate. Contrasts with the neighboring USA are commonly invoked in arguments about the safety of Canadian cities. Nevertheless, there also is a general consensus that this safety has its limits and that a certain amount of crime does occur.

- Leon: 0083 Uh, Blacks, racial divisions, uh, they live in certain districts. They don't, don't  
 0084 have, they have different, uh, they are simply brought up in a different way,  
 0085 if they are brought up at all, if they have a parent at all or-or both parents.
- Interviewer: 0086 Who exactly are you talking about, right now?
- Leon: 0087 Right, right now, all of them but, you know, there are-are lots of immigrants,  
 0088 too, that-that come here with criminal records. Somehow they slip through the  
 0089 cracks in the Canadian Immigration system and set up gangs. Recently, they  
 0090 spoke on television about some gang from Jamaica, or-or, I think, from Jamaica,  
 0091 a guy who already had a conviction in Jamaica, apparently. They caught him  
 0092 in Canada, but with the immigration laws working the way they are, uh, he's  
 0093 gonna wait here for another three years before his turn comes. So he is back  
 0094 on the streets, doing what he was doing before.

Leon, age 32, engineer, resident of Montreal for 5 years

One might think that this cannot be an immigrant speaking about other immigrants. Unfortunately, when it comes to racial discourse, the Polish seem to participate in the collective belief system of the mainstream culture. Apart from the discourse of ethnicity, the ideological heritage of Canada contains a set of conventional perceptions with regard to racial minorities. Most Canadians are familiar with the images of aggressive, criminally minded Blacks, of disrupted Black families, of Indians and other racial categories “taking unfair advantage” of the welfare system, etc. The age-old accusation that immigrants are “flooding” the job market and “stealing our jobs” is also incorporated into racial discourse. Such representations have for a long time been perpetuated in popular discourse as well as in various public media in Canada and still linger in general public opinion (Dick, 1985; Ungerleider, 1991).<sup>2</sup>

The association of racial minorities with crime has become so entrenched in the collective belief system that some Polish immigrants have come to take it for granted. Such is the case with the elderly man cited below who uses the said association as an interpretive resource in voicing his political views on a quite different subject: he is making a statement about what he sees as the “pro-French” immigration policy in Canada. See the example:

## 2.

- Interviewer: 0391 What do you think about immigrants in Canada?
- Józef: 0392 About immigrants. Well, it was once much easier to immigrate to Canada than  
 0393 it is today. You need two hundred and fifty thousand dollars in order to obtain

<sup>2</sup> The fact that many of these images were created by American television and film productions does not make much difference, especially if one takes into account that until recently the Canadian film market was merely an extension of the American one (Dick, 1985).

- 0394 the immigrant visa, or open your own business. And that is two hundred and  
 0395 fifty, half a million dollars. It's a lot of money and few people can afford it.  
 0396 They have brought a lot of people from Africa, from the former French colonies  
 0397 and now they are in trouble. Those people who came from Africa have many  
 0398 children. I remember, there used to be a district in Montreal, I mean,  
 0399 I'm not a racist but I must say that [formerly] the only Black neighborhood in  
 0400 Montreal was Saint-Antoine. Blacks used to live there. There were no Blacks  
 0401 anywhere else. Today, they are everywhere – all over Montreal and Nôtre  
 0402 Dame-de-Grace. Every third person, even every second one on the bus is an  
 0403 Asian. One can see that great diversity in Montreal. It's because they were  
 0404 looking for people who spoke French, from the French colonies. And now they  
 0405 have done it. Crime, they don't want to work and so on. This is the reason.  
 Interviewer: 0406 The reason for what?  
 Józef: 0407 For crime.  
 Interviewer: 0408 Aha.  
 Józef: 0409 Like theft and so on.

Józef, age 77, retired oil refinery worker, resident of Montreal for 50 years

Henry and Tator (1994) refer to this kind of discourse as “common sense” racism and regard it as an important dimension of the hegemonic system of White dominance in Canada. “Common sense” racism is part of the storehouse of knowledge that guides everyday practical thinking of the popular masses and particularly the White majority to which Poles also belong. It provides people with simple and ready-made explanations for the complexities of life in modern societies.

The opinions about racial minorities collected in the course of this study resemble closely in form and content the ones found by researchers in other parts of the world, for example, Denmark, Great Britain, the Netherlands, New Zealand, and the United States (cf. Enoch, 1994; Essed, 1988, 1991; Ginsberg, 1981; Henry and Tator, 1994; Potter and Wetherell, 1988; van Dijk, 1984, 1988a, 1993; Verkuyten et al., 1994; Wetherell and Potter, 1992: 96). Furthermore, the same views are found not only among dominant groups but among the “non-coloured” minorities as well. For example, the opinions regarding Black people found in Polish communities in Montreal and Ottawa resemble the ones found by Ginsberg (1981) in his studies of Jewish communities in the United States and in Britain.

That Polish views on racial minorities form part of the common stock of Western public opinion can be discerned from the fact that many informants in the present study used examples from other countries, especially the United States, when discussing Canadian

issues. The following two accounts draw parallels with the American context that the speakers use to support their arguments against welfare abuse in Canada. One of the underlying assumptions is that certain categories of people are the same everywhere.

### 3.

- Piotr: 0759 The natives here are Indians who are scorned and marginalized.  
 0760 The government has set them up so that they are bound to degenerate.  
 0761 I was, I had a very hot argument with a Canadian, here.  
 0762 Because he says, they want to hunt, and so on.  
 0763 So, I say, they want to hunt, let them hunt, but, I say, the government  
 0764 did a lot of damage, because they receive money. The fact that they receive  
 0765 money is the worst thing that has happened to them. (...)  
 0829 Yes, I think, the Indians, you know, there is nothing worse than supporting  
 0830 someone financially. Uh, you know, it can only bring ruin on that person.  
 0831 Because people will automatically [abuse] (...). In the United States  
 0832 they have the Black problem. It was once enough, I don't know the situation  
 0833 right now, it's probably the same, it was enough to have a black skin to be  
 0834 entitled to welfare benefits, etc, etc. So, the Negro sits in his crumbling house.  
 0835 He has cardboard in place of windowpanes and an old Caddy, but still. And he  
 0836 drives that Caddy to pick up his welfare payment. He sits on his terrace the  
 0837 rest of the day sipping beer and he does nothing else, you know.  
 0838 He waits for his next welfare cheque to come (...)  
 Piotr, age 67, mechanical engineer, resident of Montreal for the last 10 years

### 4.

- Interviewer: 0301 So, you are talking about the welfare abuse. (...)  
 0307 OK, but, but who does abuse welfare?  
 Urszula: 0308 It is not, I don't have Poles in mind. There are a lot of people abusing welfare in  
 0309 this country. In the States, I can tell you about the States. There are whole  
 0310 generations of people there who have never worked in their life. The great-  
 0311 grandmother was on welfare, the grandmother was on welfare, and now, now,  
 0312 the children. It is particularly common among those so-called "suntanned."  
 0313 There are entire generations of them living on welfare. You can't cut that,  
 0314 now, because they would call you a racist. But it's true. And those  
 0315 people live very comfortable lives.  
 Interviewer: 0316 But how is it here, in Canada?  
 Urszula: 0317 I don't know in Canada that much, but from what I have heard from people,  
 0318 "this guy is on welfare," "that guy doesn't look like he is on welfare, but  
 0319 apparently he is." I say, "apparently," because I don't know that for sure.  
 Urszula, age 66, retired actress, living in Ottawa for the last 3.5 years

Disclaimers such as, "I am not a racist, but..." that appear in many Polish accounts, and that are usually followed by negative remarks about the categories in question are yet another conventional feature of modern racism. Some researchers into racist ideology have noted that various denials of racism and prejudice have actually become mandatory in racist accounts. Such negations make racist accounts possible, allowing subjects to build negatively charged arguments despite the limitations imposed on this type of discourse by political correctness (Billig, 1988). It has also been noted that denials have

themselves become a basis for blaming racial minorities (Essed, 1988; Henry and Tator, 1994: 9-13; Van Dijk, 1988a, 1993). In the course of this study, arguments were proffered to the effect that members of racial minorities abuse the notion of racism by crying “racism,” “prejudice,” and “discrimination,” even where the latter do not exist.

## 5.

- Interviewer: 0190 You mentioned that there was no racism. You think, there is no racism in  
0191 Canada.
- Joanna: 0192 Uh, no. I think, there is no racism. I will give you [an example]. Not  
0193 long ago, a week ago, not even that long, I spoke to that French [Canadian]  
0194 lady, who was very upset. Because she is active in that comm.-, there is that  
0195 center on Côtés-des-Neiges, uh, a place for immigrants. They hold various  
0196 discussions, and they often have those posters about the fight against racism.  
0197 And she says, there was that Negro there. I don't know whether I should use that  
0198 word, but it doesn't matter. He kept talking, he almost grabbed the  
0199 microphone, speaking in the sense that there was racism, here. And he was so  
0200 rude and impolite and, you know, aggressive. (...)
- 0201 And there she is, she is so open, the difference of colour doesn't exist for her.  
0202 She is really such a great human being, an activist, too. (...)
- 0204 She says, she says,  
0205 “It's horrible how those Negroes, mainly them, because the Orientals don't do  
0206 that. They [Blacks] demonstrate, demand more [than they deserve]. They are  
0207 often rude and if you talk back, they make a big scandal out of it.”
- Joanna, in her 50's, engineer, resident of Montreal for 8 years

Many features of modern racist discourse occur in Joanna's account. Her argumentation relies on the shared common sense opinion that runs along the following line: “*Racial oppression is a thing of the past and the members of racial minorities who still bring up the issue are too touchy, too aggressive and pose unreasonable demands on the greater public*” (cf. Essed, 1988: 10-11; Henry and Tator, 1994: 9-13). As in many accounts belonging to this strand of racist discourse, the behavior of Whites is positively contrasted with that of “coloured” people. As Joanna continues with her account bringing up examples from her own experience, yet another feature of modern racist discourse emerges: Whites emerge as the victims of coloured people who unfairly abuse the notion of racism to their private advantage (Essed, *ibid.*). See the rest of Joanna's account:

## 6.

- 0208 I could tell you from my own experience. That is right.  
0209 I was riding on the bus one day, sitting on the long seat, in the back, when that  
0210 Black woman got on with a child, about two years old. And that child began  
0211 to run around, spin, and kick his feet up so much that I got up. I just didn't want  
0212 to get my coat stained. I didn't say anything, I did not even look at her.  
0213 But she raised such a hell, because of that, [claiming]  
0214 that I had something against her. And I-I didn't even say a word.

0215 I just looked down at her with contempt  
 0216 and moved away, so as to avoid [her]. She kept screaming after me.  
 0217 So, is this racism, if I don't let my coat get soiled? Or, that I-I don't like the  
 0218 loud music at midnight, the way they like it? Or, I will give you another  
 0219 example. I heard them cry "racism," here [in this building].  
 0220 I have a Philippino neighbour, a terrible person. When I moved here, at the  
 0221 beginning, she kept the doors open while cooking and it smelled  
 0222 so bad that one could choke. Uh, I said, "Please, close the door and open the  
 0223 window." No, she wouldn't. So, we had fights. Finally, we wrote a  
 0224 complaint to the rental office. I initiated it. And they had serious problems. It  
 0225 came to the point that we noticed, it wasn't just me, that they ripped  
 0226 the smoke detector out of the ceiling. It must have kept ringing, so she just  
 0227 ripped it off. She had that friend, a Greek guy. Both elderly people  
 0228 and always dirty. Cockroaches were walking out of that place. (...)  
 0237 And she started to cry "racism," because of her  
 0238 being so dark-skinned and all. And I say: "What racism?"  
 0239 "Am I a racist because I don't like the stench?" (...)  
 0246 There are many people with allergies and asthma living in this building.  
 0247 The stench was horrible, because it was fish.  
 0248 It's horrible, the fish stench. One cannot tolerate things like that.  
 0249 So, that's what I am getting to. We were talking about that with that French  
 0250 [-Canadian] lady. "There are things that we cannot tolerate. They  
 0251 must take others into account," right. (...)  
 0257 So, that's, what I said to that French [-Canadian] lady: "Stop talking about  
 0258 racism on that committee, in that center," whatever they call it.  
 0259 "Where do you have racism in Canada? Absolutely not,  
 0260 on the contrary. Actually, we should become stricter with people like that,  
 0261 in order to make Canada a cleaner place."  
 Joanna, in her 50's, engineer, resident of Montreal for 8 years

The factuality of this kind of discourse is of limited relevance for the analysis of its ideological effects. Even if some of the above-cited opinions could be judged as false or mistaken, there is no reason to assume that Joanna's experiences are not genuine. The ideological character of her discourse lies mainly in her choice to present matters and people in racial terms and in her interpretation of the events in question.

This account shows how the denial of racism can be used as a basis for blaming and denigrating racial minorities. Whatever the veracity of Joanna's account, its overall effect is that of creating a derogatory image of a particular social category. At the end, there is even a suggestion that being "stricter" with the people of colour might be a desirable thing for Canada.

### **The semiotics and political economy of categorizing discourse**

The form and content of racial constructs produced, or rather re-produced in Polish discourse is highly conventional – the speakers repeat the same types of accusations that circulate in the mainstream of Western societies. Those conventional views have entered the common sense discourse of the Polish community, providing material, i.e. interpretive resources for arguments against racial minorities.

A more important question concerns the reasons why Polish immigrants should make use of these discursive resources in the first place. In order for such views to be effective, they must make some sense to the actors and must somehow reflect their interests and concerns.

Barth's theory of ethnic groups and boundaries (1969) should help to understand some of the mechanisms involved in this type of categorization. According to Barth, social categorization is a two-way process that takes place across the boundary between "us" and "them." Such boundaries are established, confirmed and transformed on the basis of various factors, including the traits that people assign to themselves ("us") and to others ("them"). Thus, particular traits are used to play a crucial role in the construction of collectivities, insofar as they make up the substance of difference between them.

This means, among other things, that the categorization of "them" is in a way dependent on the categorization of "us" and *vice versa*. Categorical models reproduced through everyday discourse often tell us more about the **categorizers** – their norms, values, interests and objectives – than about the **categorized** (Hagendorn, 1993; Jenkins, 1994: 207). Talking about social problems is a form of normative discourse – about acceptable and unacceptable behaviors among people. When people allocate blame to any specific category of "them," they mean to say, among other things: "*We don't do that kind of thing.*" The semiotic mechanism differentiating "us" from the perpetrators, i.e. "them" helps to establish "our" norms and values.



This discourse also serves the social interests of the speakers. When talking about racial minorities, Polish immigrants construct the category “White majority” by implication and automatically defend its interests. Regardless of their status as an ethnic minority in Canada, in the general scheme of racial divisions Poles also belong to that dominant category. Therefore, it could be said that marginalizing people of colour serves Polish interests in Canada as well.

The fact that the subjects are also members of an ethnic and immigrant minority means they are subject to many of the same structural deprivations as racial minorities. However, unlike the latter, they are not designated as “visible minorities” and therefore are not entitled to benefit from any special programs and policies designed to alleviate the effects of deprivation (such as for example “affirmative action” or “employment equity” programs). A certain conflict of interests can be perceived to exist between the White immigrants and a category that visibly “benefits” from “special” treatment at the hands of various public and corporate bodies.<sup>3</sup>

Since the 1970’s at least, ethnic groups have been treated in American sociology as “interest groups,” competing for valuable social resources such as money, status and prestige, as well as the benefits of government programs and policies (cf. Despres, 1982; Glazer and Moynihan, 1970). In the United States, the sensitivity of white ethnic minorities about programs and policies designed for the benefit of “visible minorities” has been expressed in public and political debate where leaders of American Polonia have taken active part. They have argued that all minorities, both racial and ethnic, should receive an equal treatment when it comes to government programs and policies (Światkowski, 1983). Examples from other parts of the world also show that the notion of special benefits for “visible minorities” has been regularly used to build arguments against those minorities (see, e.g. Enoch, 1994; Van Dijk, 1988a; Verkuyten, 1994).

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<sup>3</sup> Common-sense notions about the effectiveness of the affirmative action programs may actually stem from various kinds of exposure and the public attention given to them, rather than from any actual effects of such programs on the position of racial minorities in society.

Current opinion among Polish immigrants in Canada holds that membership in a racial minority entitles one to special benefits from the State. *“It is enough to be Indian to get welfare benefits...”* runs one popular argument in the community under study. *“It is more difficult to immigrate to Canada or get a good job, if you are Polish (European), than if you are coloured (or from places like Senegal or India),”* runs another one. Such argumentation reflects the perception of one minority group that another one is receiving privileged treatment.

### **From the dominant discourse to counter-discourse: the immigrant perspective**

Racial discourse of the kind discussed above contributes to the marginalization of racial minorities and therefore contributes to maintaining White domination in Canadian society. It also helps maintain prejudicial attitudes against other minorities. Polish immigrants who perpetuate racist conventions seem to ignore the fact that similar conventions are often used in the mainstream against immigrants in general. Even more ironic, subjects also ignore the fact that not long ago (relatively speaking), during the earlier phases of Polish immigration to North America, similar discourse was being used against their own compatriots, as well (Avery and Fedorowicz, 1982: 9; Makowski, 1987: 80; Znaniecki-Lopata, 1976: 70-72).

There may be more than one ideological effect to this discourse. Members of ethnic minorities, who engage in racist discourse, risk emerging in public view as “racist bigots.” The party that is likely to benefit most is the majority establishment. With minorities at each other’s throats over the negligible benefits of government programs, serious structural inequalities remain untouched and so is the general hierarchy of status and power in society.

However, it should be noted that racist discourse is only one strand of Polish discourse in Canada and about Canada. One finds different perspectives on racial issues among Poles; quite a few denounce racism while others are more or less neutral. Racial discourse belongs with the interpretive resources of Polish community, but those resources are

being used to diverse ends. Much depends on the speaker's perspective and their objectives at the particular moment of speech. Below is the account of an elderly woman who remembers times when political correctness with regard to racial minorities was not much of an issue. The way she singles out "Blacks" is still an instance of racial categorization, but her remarks sound rather inoffensive or at least well meant. She has chosen to speak about her positive experience with Black people:

**7.**

Interviewer: 0099 What are people like here [in Canada]? Generally speaking?  
 0100 Could you tell me, please? (...)  
 Regina: 0108 People are, what do I know? They are nice. [For example] on a bus,  
 0109 people are nice and the Blacks are nice, too. I can't say. They even  
 0110 give up a seat to me, yes.

Regina, in her 70's, retired tailor, resident of Montreal for 37 years

Various strands of discourse are simultaneously active in Polish everyday talk, bringing different versions of reality to light, some of them contradicting each other. If much racist discourse relies on associating racial categories with social problems, the latter are also explained by other factors in Polish everyday talk. Crime, for example, is just as often explained as a result of poverty, faulty socialization, and flaws in human nature, or a combination of those factors,<sup>4</sup> as it is by race. Other social categories can also be blamed for the same social problems.

Immigrant perspectives and the defense of immigrants' interests determine much of Polish discourse of categorization. Among the objectives observable in Polish discourse is the promotion of a greater diversity in Canada, as a way to diminish the marginal status of immigrants. One way to reach this objective is through questioning the dominant status of native majorities. Consequently, dominant groups are also the objects of blaming, derision and other kinds of criticism, even more so than racial minorities. The following account argues for the necessity of diversity in society and scores a hit against one of the dominant groups. Simultaneously, it shows a different outlook on racial issues from those that have appeared so far. Indeed, we are dealing here with a "counter-discourse" of sorts:

**8.**

Interviewer: 0601 How do you see racial diversity in Canada? There are people from many  
 0602 nations and of different skin colour here.

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<sup>4</sup> In Example 1, Leon initially mentions "other" factors involved in crime, but then quickly moves on to elaborate a "racial account" (pp. 248-49).

- Helena: 0603 To tell you the truth, Canada is like that, particularly, I would say, Toronto,  
0604 Montreal, perhaps less in Vancouver, because there are more anglophones there.  
0605 It has a more [Anglo-] Saxon atmosphere. But here in Montreal we have an  
0606 incredible mixture of people. From the medical point of view, the point of view  
0607 of genetics, this is very healthy for society. (...)  
0609 It's beautiful when people have mixed children. They are always  
0610 so beautiful.
- Interviewer: 0611 Children become adults.
- Helena: 0612 Yes, so, uh, I'll tell you one thing. From a perspective of time, this is very  
0613 healthy. You have the example of the French [Canadians] who were an isolated  
0614 group, or the Jewish group, who were isolated both from the French and the  
0615 English for over fifty years. They are beginning to talk about it now, right.  
0616 Uh, as a result, due to big genetic changes (...),  
0617 they are the most degenerate community in the world. Not even  
0618 the Australian society is as degenerate  
0619 as the Québécois are.
- Interviewer: 0620 In what sense?
- Helena: 0621 In what sense? Mentally. Such a number of people with mental disorders you  
0622 won't find anywhere else but in Quebec. Uh, and so many instances of sexual  
0623 deviance you won't find anywhere else, either. You have fathers doing it  
0624 with daughters, sisters with brothers and even mothers with sons and things like  
0625 that. It's because this community was isolated for over two hundred years and  
0626 there was a lot of inbreeding, especially in those small towns  
0627 and isolated villages. Uh, after the second and third generation they became just  
0628 one big family.

Helena, age 34, self-employed, resident of Montreal for 9 years

*“Isolation and inbreeding cause degeneration of genetic pools. Groups need fresh blood to reinvigorate them....”* Thus runs the common sense theory on which Helena bases her account. Like the racist arguments circulating in the Polish community that were discussed earlier, this is a convention found in other societies, albeit often for different purposes. It happens to be a convenient argumentative resource for the advocates of diversity in society. As such, it can also be used to serve the interests of immigrants, for whom diversity is an attractive alternative to the isolationism of the dominant group. In the light of such arguments, the presence of immigrants and a continued immigration appears a necessary and “healthy” thing for society.

Parallel to views that blame racial minorities for social problems, many accounts associate the same problems with dominant groups, blaming them for crime, welfare abuse, unemployment, etc. Racism and chauvinism are also on the list of majorities' faults. The fact that the subjects themselves produce racist accounts does not prevent them from accusing others of the same evils. The present analysis shows that the speakers' self-image and the category “immigrants” to which they belong are constructed

in this discourse, as much as anything else. In fact, when Poles voice any criticism of the majority, they very often use “immigrants” as a contrast category.

One common sense theory found in the community under study can be summarized as follows: “*A person’s immigrant status precludes criminal inclinations. Consequently, whatever crime rate exists locally is mainly the work of the elements in the native population.*” In the following exchange, it is Québécois *de souche* who receive the blame for the crime rate in Montreal, but there are indications that these kinds of accusations are directed at the majority in general, because similar arguments directed at the category “Canadians” can be found among Polish immigrants in Ottawa.

### 9.

- Interviewer: 0300 Do you think that the crime rate is the same [in Canada] as in other countries?  
 Wladek: 0302 No, I think it is much lower [in Canada than elsewhere] (...)  
 0304 people [here] have much less inclinations for crime, because, I keep going back  
 0305 to it, most people are the first- or second-generation immigrants. When someone  
 0306 comes to Canada, it is an opportunity. Therefore, they don’t think about  
 0307 (...) about stealing or doing something bad. They think about using that  
 0308 opportunity. They don’t want a criminal record, at least not until they get their  
 0309 citizenship, and they don’t want it later, either. They want to land a good job.  
 0310 That [state] can last for a couple of years and it somehow keeps people  
 0311 straight. A part of society is simply frozen in that state and there is no crime.  
 0312 It’s a different story in those old societies where you have that that, I don’t  
 0313 know, that hopeless quagmire, lack of opportunities, historically conditioned,  
 0314 nationalism and so on. People who are not alienated from society, like for  
 0315 example in Italy, where you have criminality, high crime rate (...).  
 0330 “We have been those Italians, for so many years. We feel secure,  
 0331 no one can kick us out of the country. We are secure, even though without  
 0332 opportunities. There are few opportunities, but no risks, either, so we can steal,  
 0333 we can do whatever we want.” (...)  
 Renata: 0346 OK, Wladek, but we lived on-on Dandurand before where there were one  
 0347 hundred and twenty-five drug dealers on a street that was perhaps one  
 0348 kilometer long. (...)  
 Wladek: 0356 They sent us *publicité* [Fr.] through the mail,  
 0357 you know.  
 Renata: 0358 Yeah, so//  
 Wladek: 0359 //a police report. (...)  
 0365 It’s because you have the native population, over there.  
 Renata: 0366 The native population and you can see that quagmire. Those people just sit  
 0367 around and drink beer. They don’t work; most of them take *chômage* [Fr.]  
 Wladek: 0368 There you have that quagmire. You see, it’s exactly in  
 0369 such circumstances that you can have that quagmire. Back in Poland,  
 0370 we used to call that “scum.”  
 Interviewer: 0371 So, you are talking about the native population.  
 Wladek: 0372 Yes, yes, about Québécois, the ones who are *de souche*.  
 Interviewer: 0373 Québécois *de souche*, I understand.  
 Wladek: 0374 It is from among them that criminal elements can emerge.

Renata and Wladek, both aged 29, university students,  
 residents of Montreal for 5 and 6 years respectively

This is an example of popular counter-discourse produced by immigrants. Not only does it “set the record straight” with regard to the issue of immigrant criminality, but it also blames and denigrates the native majority, therefore undermining the legitimacy of its dominant status. Compared to the native-born population, identified here as a source of problems in society, immigrants emerge as honest, ambitious, dynamic, and a source of security. Once again, the conclusion is that immigrants are what this country needs in order to stay on the right path.<sup>5</sup>

Assuming that any discourse that serves the dominant sector of society at the cost of minorities is a form of ideology, then any discourse directed against the majority can be regarded as a counter-discourse, because it undermines (if only potentially) the legitimacy of its dominant status. Negative categorizations of dominant groups are often a form of compensation for the disadvantages of the minority status and a response to hostile attitudes and negative images of minorities recurring in the dominant discourse. Some Polish discursive constructions are also decidedly multifunctional – acting as counter-discourse but with ideological effects. Such are the constructions directed against the Quebecois who are the dominant group only in Quebec and who remain a minority in Canada. In the following extract, the speaker rejects the popular mainstream view that immigrants are “flooding” the job market and causing unemployment in Montreal. She “strikes back,” placing the major part of the blame on the separatist movement in Quebec.

#### 10.

Ewa:           0103    I was only talking about the fact that there were definitely more, uh, immigrants.  
                   0104    Therefore, I mean, this is what the separatists argue,  
                   0105    that, uh, the newcomers, I mean the non-natives steal their jobs.  
                   0106    I mean, I of course don't agree, because the most important thing  
                   0107    is, uh, a person's professional competence, and whether-whether the person  
                   0108    proves up to the challenge. Uh, I mean, I don't know whether the  
                   0109    fact that-that there are a lot of newcomers from Asia, or from Haiti, most of all,  
                   0110    right, and from Africa, I don't know whether that has been causing the shortage  
                   0111    of jobs. I think, the problem lies much more in the whole labour policy and in  
                   0112    fact that-that the great companies are moving out of Montreal, and in this way

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<sup>5</sup> The characteristics of both immigrants and a native-born population are attributed to structural causes rather than to inherent predispositions of the objects. Such “causal narratives” are actually typical rhetorical features of categorizing discourse. They act as supporting arguments to the speakers' assertions – increasing the impression of factuality to what otherwise might look like empty allegations made by biased and prejudiced people (Potter and Wetherell, 1988).

- Interviewer: 0113 they, so to speak, undermine the job market. (...)  
 0116 So, why are they moving out? We keep avoiding that topic.
- Ewa: 0117 Why they are moving out? Well, they are moving out due to the specific  
 0118 character of Montreal, due to the fact that it's the largest city in the province that  
 0119 wants to separate, uh, and right now, the separatists run the government,  
 0120 the Parti Québécois, and everything indicates that [it will happen], because they  
 0121 have been threatening us, ha, ha, for some time, now, since ninety-five that  
 0122 this is not the end. That means that, if Bouchard gets elected again to become  
 0123 the premier, I mean that the Parti Québécois wins the elections, we will surely  
 0124 have another referendum before the year two thousand.  
 0125 No one knows whether it will be decisive, right, because in a surprisingly  
 0126 undemocratic way, uh, the separatists say that they will keep calling the  
 0127 referendums as long as it takes for them to win, ha, ha. Therefore-  
 0128 therefore, I think, that the big companies are simply afraid that  
 0129 the moment will come when the situation will be difficult.  
 0130 I mean, a new-new country will emerge, right,  
 0131 with all kinds of new problems and it will not be the right place and time  
 0132 to make big money.

Ewa, age 45, university professor, resident of Quebec for 17 years

While making an attempt at a counter-discourse, here the speaker reproduces a form of ideology. In defending the interests of immigrant minorities, she uses an argument from the dominant discourse: Accusing the separatist movement in Quebec of causing economic instability is a longstanding argument of the anglophone establishment in Canada.

The separatist movement constitutes an inseparable part of the Polish image of francophone Québécois. Poles have a tendency to speak about the Québécois as if the latter were all, without exception, separatists. At the same time, as mentioned previously (Ch. 7, pp. 204-205), an absolute majority of Polish immigrants in Montreal strongly opposes the separation of Quebec from Canada. The vision of impending economic troubles is one of the “evils” of separatism most frequently cited in Polish discourse. The subjects in this study also associate the separatist movement with chauvinism and hostile attitudes towards ethnic minorities. Thus, once again, immigrants’ interests, concerns and even fears play a critical role in their categorizations of a majority group.

## 11.

- 0006 Canada is basically a country of immigrants. It is and should remain an  
 0007 example for the whole world of a place where different cultures can coexist,  
 0008 different peoples speaking different languages and they tolerate each other.  
 0009 Perhaps, with the exception, the exception of Quebec, where the political  
 0010 situation is different than in the rest of Canada. (...)  
 0015 the present political situation, the attitude of the French towards

0016 immigrants, especially after what Mr. Parizeau said, ha-ha, that because of  
 0017 the ethnic groups and money, hinting at the Jews, ha-ha,  
 0018 he had lost the referendum, doesn't create a pleasant atmosphere here.  
 Helena, age 34, self-employed, resident of Montreal for 9 years

When it comes to the issue of hostile attitudes towards immigrants, there is a remarkable difference between Polish categorizations of the French and English Canadian majorities. Based on observations of discourse in the Polish community, it is mainly French Canadians or Québécois who receive the blame. This phenomenon cannot be easily explained by the fact that Québécois represent the dominant group for immigrants in Montreal. For one thing, no corresponding intensity of accusations directed at the English Canadians or Canadians in general was observed among Poles in Ottawa. Actually, some spoke to the contrary. For example:

## 12.

0038 Generally speaking, Canadians don't have,  
 0039 don't have, uh, that hostility in themselves. Perhaps "hostility" is a big word, but  
 0040 they don't have it. They are friendly towards all immigrants. It's enough to look  
 0041 at the state institutions, here. For the most part, it's immigrants who work in  
 0042 there, young or old, but often the people who came here, not the ones born here.  
 Urszula, age 66, retired actress, living in Ottawa for the last 3.5 years

A number of factors could be responsible for such a difference in the representations of the two majorities. For one thing, Polish immigrants feel more alienated from the Québécois people with their strong national identity based on cultural heritage than from Canadians in general. The previous chapter showed that Polish immigrants have not been able to develop self-identifications as French Canadians or Québécois, even though they have successfully developed self-identifications as Canadians. Another variable that could play a role here is the fact that Québécois have become the majority only recently and only in the context of Quebec. Their dominant status is still being questioned, particularly in Montreal, where the Anglo-Saxon population and immigrant groups present a significant counterbalance to their power. This factor may be a source of tension between the Québécois and other groups, which finds a reflection in Polish discourse, as well. In any case, explaining this difference in representations of the two majorities on the basis of Polish discourse alone would be mere speculation. This aspect of immigrant discourse certainly demands further research.



### **The hardworking, rational selves and the lazy, stupid others: the ethnocentric perspective**

Although the immigrant point of view and immigrant interests seem to determine a great many Polish representations of “others,” the subjects of this study also produce images that reflect more a perspective based on the ethnic group to which they belong. It is difficult at times to separate the two points of view – after all, Poles are ethnics in Canada by virtue of being immigrants in this country. However, most of the time, the two perspectives display distinctive features that allow us to distinguish one from the other. Usually, it is enough to look at the oppositional pairs (e.g. “Canadians” *versus* “immigrants” or “Canadians” *versus* “Poles”) that are being constructed in any particular instance to determine whether the general immigrant perspective or a more specifically ethnic point of view is at play.

Depending on the speaker’s perspective, the content of categorizations also varies. Categorizations that reflect the more general immigrant perspective tend to exploit issues affecting society in general: social problems, intergroup relations, economy, and politics. Categorizations made from the ethnic point of view tend to focus on cultural factors, differences in life style and on character traits that, in the categorizers’ view, distinguish the group in question. In such cases, the categorizers’ ethnicity is constructed more than anything else. Many ethnic categorizations are ethnocentric in the classic sense of the word: they take the categorizers’ own group and culture as a positive standard and the point of departure for comparisons with “others,” and often end up demonstrating how “we” are better than “others.”

As far as everyday usage is concerned, ethnic categorizations are focused on the dominant groups, i.e. Canadians and French Canadians/Québécois. To be more precise, they are mostly comments on mainstream culture, Canadian and North American, in which the subjects are immersed in their everyday life. In that respect, there seems to be little difference between the discourse of Poles in Montreal and Ottawa.

One important aspect of Canadian social life that is subject to frequent criticism among Polish immigrants is socialization in general and children's education in particular. The subjects in this study argue that Canadian children lack discipline and not enough is required of them in terms of duties at home and in school.

**13.**

0155 You know, sir, children are allowed to do whatever they want, here. One can't  
0156 make them do anything, or God forbid, reprimand them or punish them,  
0157 because that causes stress.

Urszula, age 66, retired actress, living in Ottawa for the last 3.5 years

The problem with children's education in Canada, as Polish immigrants see it, is too much emphasis on a stress-free environment. As a result, argue the subjects, Canadian children are egotistical, unruly and have no respect for their elders, teachers and authority in general. Most of these critical comments contain comparisons with the corresponding "Polish way," for the construction of Polish ethnicity is simultaneous with the construction of the Canadian one:

**14.**

0325 I don't know whether it's a question of the times, or whether it is Canada. But I  
0326 think that it is Spock's theory, according to which the child is the  
0327 absolute center of the universe and the subject of our attention. This way  
0328 of bringing children up originated on this continent. And you can feel the effects  
0329 of that, uh, on the children. I can't say how it looks like inside the home. One  
0330 cannot judge looking from the outside. But you can see that for sure in the  
0331 schools, uh, seeing them, I don't know, on a bus, in the metro. For example, the  
0332 behaviour towards the elderly is certainly different from the one we got used to  
0333 [back in Poland]. The question of [not] giving up a seat, of pushing through the  
0334 door, and so on. I mean, the basic lack of good manners that shocks me  
0335 personally and upsets me, but that is treated as completely normal, here.  
0336 I mean, no one sees that as the lack of proper upbringing, ha, ha. (...).  
0340 On the other hand, I think, if you look at Polish children,  
0341 they really have very good manners, so to speak,  
0342 uh, at least the ones I know, ha, ha, meaning that Polish family pays really  
0343 close attention to good upbringing.

Ewa, age 45, university professor, resident of Montreal for 17 years

**15.**

0530 Those children here are spoiled. They walk all over you, no matter who you are.  
0531 They have no respect for anybody. They have no respect for the elderly.  
0532 They kick the elderly out of a seat. In Poland, the teenagers give up their seats to  
0533 the elderly people. There is more respect for the elderly people. For all I know,  
0534 there is more respect for the parents. Uh, generally speaking, the Poles who have  
0535 come here meet with an entirely different environment.

Alicja, in her 30's, embroidery technician, resident of Montreal  
for 10 years, in Canada for 15 years

These comments reveal the perception of striking differences in values and norms of behavior between Poles and Canadians. One example of such normative difference is the issue of giving up a seat to the elderly, be it on the bus, metro or anywhere else. When it comes to talking about the local norms of behavior, few Polish immigrants that I met in Canada, both in the course of this study and otherwise, failed to mention that young Canadians did not give up their seat to the elderly. People from all walks of life have made those comments – the variables of social class or education do not seem to play a role here. This issue has apparently come to symbolize for Poles a normative difference between the two groups.

It has already been noted elsewhere (Clifford, 1988: 98) that due to particular historical developments, aristocratic values have become “unusually evident” at all levels of Polish society. This is not to say that Poles in general are more “noble” in their character or comportment than other nations. However, certain elements of the traditional chivalric code and aristocratic behavior are still enforced in Polish society at large. Most of the time, this concerns such trivial matters as, for example, forms of introduction or table manners. Even a moderately cultivated Polish immigrant might argue that they know their table manners better than the Prime Minister of Canada. Even more widely enforced are the norms of good behaviour towards “the elderly and the weak.” Giving up your seat to an elderly lady is not merely a gesture of good will, but is a socially enforced rule of behavior. Observing this rule is still very much required of an average Pole, and especially of the young people – failure to do so often brings reprimands from bystanders.<sup>6</sup>

Coming back to the Canadian context, most Polish immigrants see such norms as missing from the local code. The following comment, cited earlier, demonstrates that “proper” behavior comes to them more as a surprise in the local context:

**16.**

Interviewer:     0099    What are people like here [in Canada]? Generally speaking?  
                       0100    Could you tell me, please? (...)

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<sup>6</sup> Based on my observation of the Polish social context, I can state without exaggeration that failing by a youngster to give up their seat on a bus to an elderly lady or a pregnant woman is more likely to put them in trouble than riding without a ticket.

Regina: 0108 People are, what do I know? They are nice. [For example] on a bus,  
 0109 people are nice, and the Blacks are nice, too. I can't say. They even  
 0110 give up a seat to me, yes.  
 Regina, in her 70's, retired tailor, resident of Montreal for 37 years.

Related to views on socialization are comments about the level of education in Canada. If Polish immigrants from all walks of life criticize Canadian methods of child rearing, the popular subject of criticism among the educated is poor education and a lack of general knowledge. Comments and anecdotes about the poor level of education among Canadians can be heard from most Polish immigrants with higher or even secondary education. In the course of this study, a high percentage of illiteracy in Canada was cited repeatedly, but most often informants referred to a low level of general knowledge, particularly in the arts and sciences. Quite a few Poles also conclude that Canadians do not appreciate the value of knowledge. Once again, Poles stand out as a contrast category in those arguments:

### 17.

0343 And another thing, Polish families put a lot of stress, uh, on their  
 0344 children's education. I think, it is a similar story with people from Asia,  
 0345 I mean, people from the East. No matter what your family's financial situation,  
 0346 the most important thing is that the child gets a good education.  
 0347 Unfortunately, I think that this is something that is not particularly valued  
 0348 by the average Canadian.  
 Ewa, age 45, university professor, resident of Montreal for 17 years.

### 18.

Urszula: 0185 I don't have to tell you, but people  
 0186 who were educated in Poland, in Europe, stand out here in terms of  
 0187 knowledge and skills, and even in terms of general aptitude. They are able to  
 0188 adapt better to any situation because they are generally much-much  
 0189 better educated (...).  
 Interviewer: 0199 So, is the level of education much lower here?  
 Urszula: 0200 It is lower, here [in Canada].  
 [elsewhere]  
 0692 The local education is not very good, for example, in music.  
 0693 There is a lot to improve in this area.  
 Interviewer: 0694 Here, in Canada, right?  
 Urszula: 0695 Oh, yes. I gave lessons to two persons with university diplomas, here. They  
 0696 can't, they have no idea. They sing an aria without knowing what the opera  
 0697 is all about. To give you an example, I had a guy who sang a duet as the king  
 0698 the fishermen. He came out on the stage with a sword and a crown on his head.  
 0699 I say, "What are you, what does [this outfit] have to do with this opera?" He  
 0700 says, "I'm the king of the fishermen." I say, "The 'king' here means the best  
 0701 among the fishermen," ha, ha. He was almost offended, "What? But it's written  
 0702 'king'," ha, ha. And this guy comes with a sword and a cape. Yes, a guy who  
 0703 graduated from university, from the department. You would not have that, that  
 0704 kind of thing could not happen in Poland. That would be impossible.  
 Urszula, age 66, retired actress, living in Ottawa for the last 3.5 years.

Still on the topic of education, the subjects of my study often admit that the level of job specialization is very high in Canada, or at least higher than in Poland. Such admissions are almost always accompanied by comments that Canadians have nevertheless very little general knowledge, which affects their general performance and resourcefulness. Urszula continues in this vein:

**19.**

0750 They have a high level of specialization, here,  
 0751 quite narrow specializations. And from what I noticed, they rarely go beyond  
 0752 their specializations. But they are perfect in their field.  
 0753 They are perfect in their specialization. But, as I said,  
 0754 this is only from this point to that. One step outside and they get lost. We-we  
 0755 adapt much better to new situations, we know what to do, how to solve  
 0756 unexpected problems in order to finish the task at hand.

Urszula, age 66, retired actress, living in Ottawa for the last 3.5 years

The opinion that Canadians lack resourcefulness refers not only to education and job performance, but also the more trivial matters of everyday life such as the general style of consumption, car maintenance, cooking skills, etc. Comments such as: *“Everything has to be idiot-proof in this country,”* are commonly heard. A popular common sense theory among Poles states: *“Life has been so easy for the people from here that they haven’t learned to handle problems. They would have to learn a lot to be able to survive some real harsh times, like the War or the communist regime, or else they would perish.”*

The following extract speaks of the general lack of resourcefulness and poor cooking skills among Canadians and leads us to the subject of dietary practices – still another subject of critical comments heard in the community under study:

**20.**

0513 This, this is what I heard, what I see,  
 0514 too, when I watch TV. (...)  
 0516 Uh, so, what I have seen and what appeared very strange to me, for example,  
 0517 a woman complaining that she is very poor, that she is  
 0518 on welfare, that she only gets enough in terms of allowance to give her children  
 0519 money for a bag of chips, uh, and a Pepsi. Uh, and meanwhile she smoked  
 0520 cigarettes and she had a full ashtray. (...)  
 0522 I didn’t even know the prices of Pepsi and chips, but I later checked  
 0523 out the prices. I figured, she had two or three children, I figured, if she bought  
 0524 vegetables and a piece of meat and made soup, if she cooked something, for the  
 0525 same money the children would have good nutrition and they would, they  
 0526 wouldn’t go hungry. And they wouldn’t be fed with Pepsi. What else [can I  
 0527 say]?, Uh, the eating habits. For example, there are many more fat people here  
 0528 than there are in Poland. And they say that it’s even worse in the United States.  
 0529 You don’t have that in Poland or in Europe. So, dietary practices, the

0530 practice of eating canned food, chips, drinking Pepsi, hm.  
 0531 That affects your health and looks. All this comes from a kind of laziness. For  
 0532 example, I noticed, [even though] I don't regard myself as any special  
 0533 person, but I am regarded as a super-cook by my friends,  
 0534 French [Canadians] and others. But I see myself,  
 0535 I say, I am just a normal, average Polish woman. I know some who do  
 0536 it better than me, and others who do it less well. So I see myself as an average  
 0537 person, but they see me here as someone who knows how to cook, how to bake  
 0538 God knows what and how. I say, "My mother did it this way and I do it in the  
 0539 same way," right? So, as far as we, as far as I am concerned,  
 0540 maybe it is just me, but I would say, they are not able to use  
 0541 what they have at their disposal -- in order to have a better life. To live and  
 0542 provide for yourself, for your children and your family. Uh, I mean a more  
 0543 rational diet and the life-style in general. Something we probably learned back  
 0544 in Poland because times were hard and no one would give us a break.  
 Joanna, in her 50's, engineer, resident of Montreal for 8 years.

Many Poles make critical comments on the extent to which so-called "junk food" has become an important part of Canadian diet. Apart from soft drinks and chips, the consumption of McDonalds' food and fast foods in general are the most oft-repeated examples of bad eating habits among Canadians. Once again, these comments target mainstream Canadian and North American culture. Ethnic minorities are generally excluded from criticism or represent a positive contrast to the mainstream. Polish immigrants often praise the quality of life in Montreal, because it offers, among other things, so many opportunities to try out "ethnic" (i.e. other than the mainstream) cuisine.

The subjects in my study often point out that the Canadian mentality puts a lot of emphasis, too much emphasis, apparently – according to the subjects – on comfort and an easy, stress-free life. "*Canadians don't like problems,*" is a frequent comment in the community. Many aspects of Canadian life that come under criticism from Polish immigrants are attributed to this mentality. The stress on comfort is also criticized for itself, being associated with laziness and a meaningless life. With such a mentality, it is "no wonder" that Canadians eat junk food and settle for a superficial education. This is of course in contrast, once again, with the Polish mentality:

## 21.

0035 Eh, for me, most of all, [Canadians] have a totally different mentality than  
 0036 Europeans, eh, Poles do. (...)  
 0041 I have an impression that different things are important for Canadians and  
 0042 different things are important for me, a person who came from Poland. I mean,  
 0043 they have different norms and values from the ones I brought from Poland. For  
 0044 example, the importance of living in the most comfortable manner possible. So,  
 0045 one orders pizza for dinner. One eats frozen foods, prefabricated foods,

0046 and so on. Everything has to be as fast and easy as possible.  
Izabela, housewife, age 36, residing in Ottawa for the last 7 years.

Another consequence of the comfort-oriented mentality is that Canadians, according to our subjects, maintain superficial relationships with each other or with other people. Polish immigrants often pick on the common greeting formula in Canada: “*They (Canadians) ask: ‘How are you? or Ça va bien?’ But it’s just a formula. If you don’t answer “Fine,” they only get embarrassed. They don’t want to hear about your problems.*” Often those arguments are accompanied with accusations of hypocrisy: “*They only pretend to care.*”

## 22.

Izabela: 0102 Human relationships have a slightly different character here than in Poland.  
0103 It is very difficult to change that. (...) I emigrated here from Poland when I  
0104 was twenty five. I was already shaped as a person. The life style is a little  
0105 different here. For example, Canadians don’t like [to show their] problems  
0106 on the outside. Of course they have problems like any other people, like me.  
0107 But-but they smile all the time. “Everything is fine,”  
0108 everything on the surface, right?  
0109 God forbid, if you touch any deeper things. Because, what for?  
0110 So, I meet with some kind of barrier each time I begin with something.  
0111 I mean, and I hear the same thing from my different [Polish] friends,  
0112 that we talk and talk and suddenly there is that door, and for some reason they  
0113 won’t let you in. There is either silence or, I don’t know, they change the  
0114 subject. They simply don’t want to go that far, right? The conversation begins to  
0115 lag. We cease to be friends.  
Interviewer: 0116 But why wouldn’t they open that door? Is it you, or they wouldn’t open it  
0117 under any circumstances?  
Izabela: 0118 I have an impression that it is not just me, that they wouldn’t open it anyway.  
Izabela, housewife, age 36, residing in Ottawa for the last 7 years

## 23.

0045 Generally, generally speaking, Canadians are very nice people,  
0046 At first, you even get an impression that they are warmhearted.  
0047 It’s a slightly different story when they get closer.  
Edward, age 37, small business owner, Ottawa resident for 7 years.

## **The intolerant, ethnocentric “us” versus the tolerant, open minded “them”: another aspect of the ethnocentric perspective**

If the explicit discussion of Canadians by informants often produces an unflattering image, by comparison or implication, Polish people emerge from the same discourse in a much better light. However, once again, this only touches upon a part of Polish discourse

about selves and others – the overall picture is much more complicated than that. There are also many positive evaluations of “others” in Polish everyday talk and much critical discourse about Poles as well. By comparison or implication, the various versions of “them” help the informants construct the versions of “us”. The images of “how we are” and “how we aren’t” are constructed through demonstrating “how we should” and “shouldn’t be.”

Thus, one of the most distinct “Canadian traits” in the eyes of Polish immigrants is a great civility in social relations. In fact (despite the alleged flaws in socialization), one often hears that Canadians display a high level of civility in social relations. The subjects speak in unison that Canadians are civil and polite in dealing with each other and with strangers. This is in contrast to Poles who are often boorish in the same circumstances. Once again, this demonstrates how the ethnicity of the categorizers is constructed simultaneously with that of the categorized:

**24.**

0044 [Canadians] are nice and polite. For example, there is little  
0045 of that boorish behaviour that you can see in Poland.  
Jacek, in his 40’s, chauffeur for the Diplomatic Corps,  
resident of Ottawa for 9 years.

**25.**

0762 Some Canadians are smart and some are stupid, ha, ha. It’s the same thing with  
0763 every nation. But one has to give it to them that one doesn’t see any of that rude  
0764 behavior. Even when you are driving on the street, you won’t see any rude  
0765 gestures or hear comments like: “Where did you get your license, you moron?”  
0766 So, here is the general culture of human relations. But, like I said, wars  
0767 demoralize people and make them lose that culture. Our history didn’t help us  
0768 become tolerant people. So, this [civility] is not our character trait.  
Urszula, age 66, retired actress, living in Ottawa for the last 3.5 years.

As one of the capital features of Canadian character, Polish immigrants mention tolerance in social relations. Tolerance is often mentioned together with civility, but is treated as a separate feature of character and related to liberalism. If Canadian civility reflects on Polish boorishness, Canadian tolerance reflects on Polish intolerance.

**26.**

Urszula: 0217 You have that liberalism, that tolerance, oh, tolerance. Canadians are tolerant  
0218 people. This is an enormous plus. Unfortunately, I can’t say the same thing  
0219 about us Poles. We have generally little tolerance; little tolerance  
0220 for other people’s faults, for other people’s usages, their habits.  
0221 We are first to forgive ourselves but not others.



- 0222 This often leads to conflict between people. We could use a little bit more  
 0223 tolerance. It wouldn't hurt.  
 Interviewer: 0224 But Canadians are tolerant.  
 Urszula: 0225 They are tolerant. They won't show, even if they don't share your opinion, they  
 0226 won't show that they are upset, ha, ha. They will just smile, and keep their  
 0227 distance. Not like Poles, who are very temperamental.  
 0228 So, those are the traits that we should learn from them [Canadians].  
 [elsewhere]  
 0278 These people here have not been demoralized by the War. So, they have more  
 0279 tolerance, they are more-more trustful and more, eh,  
 0280 I can't find the proper word, friendliness. Yes, they are friendlier towards  
 0281 other people. They are not afraid of each other, like we often are.  
 Urszula, age 66, retired actress, living in Ottawa for the 3.5 years.

The notion of Canadian tolerance covers a lot of ground in Polish discourse and often translates into open-mindedness. Canadians are not only tolerant in interpersonal relations. It is common to hear that Canadians are tolerant and open minded in interethnic relations as well. In the course of this study, several informants commented that Canadians are friendly and that they like other people. Often examples were cited of how Canadians make efforts to learn something about other peoples and their cultures (which is an interesting divergence from the view that “Canadians do not appreciate the value of knowledge”). The examples are anecdotal but they contain important tokens of ethnicity: words from the language, family names, elements of historical tradition, etc. Ethnic identity of the subjects is reinforced in various ways, big and small. Witness the following:

## 27.

- 0326 I think that [Canadians] like Poles. For example, a very nice thing happened to  
 0327 me the other day from Canadians. I was talking on my cellular phone, I mean I  
 0329 had gotten my service disconnected and I phoned the operator.  
 0330 So, I had a conversation with him about why they had disconnected. He checked  
 0331 everything out and I got my service me back, and at the end he says, “Dziękuję”  
 0332 and “do widzenia” [Pl.]. He said, thank you, good-bye, ha, ha. It's a very nice  
 0333 thing to do and it means that Poles are liked here, that-that Canadians would  
 0334 learn those couple of words from the language to say, to show that. He had  
 0335 probably figured out my Polish origin from the accent, the fact that I was Polish.  
 0336 You often meet with this kind of thing. Furthermore, you can often hear, when  
 0337 you talk with a Canadian, he says, “oh, you're Polish. OK, I have a [Polish]  
 0338 friend.” Almost everyone has a Polish friend, here. And he gives me a family  
 0339 name ending with ‘-ski’,<sup>7</sup> or-or he says, “ a very nice guy.”  
 Edward, age 37, small business owner, Ottawa resident for 7 years.

It is important to note that the comments about open mindedness in interethnic relations are often made with regard to both Canadian majorities – English Canadians as well as

French Canadians/francophones/Québécois. This creates what appears as one more contradiction in Polish discourse. It was previously noted that Poles often accuse French Canadians/Québécois/francophones of a hostile attitude towards immigrants. Indeed, the relations between the two categories are generally described in terms of antagonism in Polish discourse and the majority is generally pictured as the guilty party in the conflict.

The analysis should distinguish, however, between the immigrant perspective and a more specific ethnic perspective in the informants' discourse. In fact, Poles speak of the conflict between the majority and immigrants, where the latter represent a general category. Even though the conflict in question is often explained in terms of ethnic conflict (and explained away through the discourse of cultural determinism), there is no discourse among the subjects of this study about any conflict between French Canadians/Québécois/francophones and Poles as such, and rarely any discourse about any form of antagonism between French Canadians/Québécois/francophones and any particular immigrant group. Even when Poles or members of other nationalities are presented as victims of discrimination by the majority, it is usually in their capacity as immigrants rather than as members of a particular ethnic group.

When it comes to the relations between the Québécois and particular ethnic groups, the image of the Québécois is much more positive. They emerge as people who are friendly, open minded and interested in other nations and their cultures. When it comes to talking about the attitudes of Québécois towards Poles in particular, there actually appears to be a consensus that “they” like “us.” Quite a few Polish immigrants point out a cultural likeness between the Polish and Québécois peoples, a likeness that stems from common European roots, from French influence on the cultures of both nations, and also from the tradition of political and military alliances between France and Poland that date a long way back in history. All these factors are cited to support a claim to cultural similarities and even a spiritual bond between Poles and Québécois. The first of the following extracts represents a cliché among Polish immigrants:

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<sup>7</sup> The suffix “-ski” symbolizes for Polish people a typically Polish name, e.g. Kowalski, Malinowski, Korzeniowski, Gorski, etc.

**28.**

0010 Eh, in my opinion, because I am Polish,  
 0011 I feel a spiritual bond with the French people, with their culture.  
 0012 Montreal reminds me of European cities. It has a typical,  
 0013 typically European atmosphere. And that is what I like in Montreal.  
 0014 Maybe it's banal, but I can't imagine my life in any other city in Canada.  
 Helena, age 34, self-employed, resident of Montreal for 9 years.

**29.**

Interviewer: 0253 What is the attitude of Canadians towards Poles?  
 Anna: 0254 Towards Poles? The French people are nice. I don't know the reason why. May  
 0255 be they know about our historical relations with France? When I go, say, to a  
 0256 hairdresser, the French people say, "Pologne, Pologne. Oh, I had a Polish friend  
 0257 once. We had good times together." I went to a hospital for a check-up, and  
 0258 again, "Oh, Poland, I knew a Pole, once," yeah. You meet with that a lot in here  
 0259 Last week, I went to a French library and this lady says, "I know a couple of  
 0260 words in Polish: *Dzie dobry*." Yes. The French people like us. (...)  
 Anna, CEGEP student, age 44, resident of Montreal for 7 years.

In contrast to such attitudes of Canadians and Québécois towards other peoples and cultures, the corresponding Polish attitude needs serious improvement, according to many informants. They speak of Polish people as ethnocentric megalomaniacs who look with condescension at other nations and cultures. According to my observations, this particular criticism is applied to Poles more frequently than to any other group or category mentioned in Polish discourse about Canada. Explicit accusations of racism are not uncommon. Furthermore, those types of criticism are directed more often against the Polish group in Canada or in the Polish diaspora in general than against the Poles in Poland. The latter are in fact described as suffering a minority complex. See the following examples:

**30.**

Pawel: 0502 In my opinion, Poles have a tendency to think of themselves as better than other  
 0503 peoples. (...)  
 Alicja: 0522 I think, the ones who have lived in the West for a while. Because the ones whom  
 I 0523 knew back in Poland thought of themselves less than the other nations.  
 Pawel, in his 30's, financial clerk, resident of Montreal for 9 years;  
 Alicja, in her 30's, embroidery technician, resident of Montreal for  
 10 years, in Canada for 15 years.

**31.**

0181 You know, how it is with Poles abroad, ha, ha. Back in Poland, when we had a  
 0182 guest from abroad, no matter who they were, we were bowing down. Once, we  
 0183 go abroad, we think, Poles are the smartest of all. Those are our character traits.  
 Jacek, in his 40's, chauffeur for the Diplomatic  
 Corps, resident of Ottawa for 9 years.

**32.**

0344 I noticed that Poles are generally presumptuous. For example, the word  
 0345 *Kanadol* is a little bit ugly, you can say. They think that their culture

0346 brought from Poland is of a higher grade than-than the one in Canada, that their,  
 0347 that their way is this, and our way is that. It's hard to say whether they are right  
 0348 or not. But, it's the same with regard to, say, people from Africa, the Blacks, or-  
 0349 or the coloreds. (...)

Edward, age 37, small business owner, Ottawa resident for 7 years.

In analyzing Polish discourse of categorization, the extent to which the construction of “them” is an important function of the construction of “us” becomes evident. Categories must be constructed on both sides of the ethnic boundary, if that boundary is to exist at all. In that sense, the discourse of informants is ethnocentric not only when they produce the negative images of “them” and the positive images of “us,” but also the other way around, i.e. when the terms are inverted.

If the construction of particular categories relies for a great part on the exaggerated, idealized and at times inaccurate features of the objects, it is at least partly because the emerging images are supposed to speak not only about “how we are” and “how we aren't,” but also, and perhaps more importantly, about “how we should” and “shouldn't” be. This objective is reached through explicit or implied comparisons. It is not always necessary that the category “Poles” be explicitly mentioned in order to see what features they should possess:

### 33.

0074 I think that-that the French are so spontaneous, so warmhearted (...) I think, we  
 0075 have a lot, a lot, that they are very sim-similar to us in that respect. (...)  
 0081 they are so warm and outspoken. For example, an example, when she ends a  
 0080 conversation, she always tells me: “Joanna, I love you. *Je t'aime*.” Ha, ha. I  
 0082 must admit, I wouldn't think of ending in this way.

Joanna, in her 50's, engineer, resident of Montreal for 8 years.

## **The weak, divided us and the strong, united them: Poles *versus* other immigrant groups in Canada**

Most ethnic categorizations in Polish everyday talk are focused on the dominant groups in Canada. Since the latter are the most significant “others” in the local context, it is primarily against their ethnicity that the Polish one is being constructed on an everyday basis. The categorizations of other ethnic groups are much more limited in frequency and in scope. However, the present analysis indicates that the primary function of those categorizations is the same as for those regarding the dominant groups, i.e. the

construction of Polish ethnicity in Canada. In order to better understand the images of other ethnic groups that emerge as a result, some notions perpetuated by informants about their own community should first be considered.

It has already been noted that Poles often express critical opinions about their own group. A considerable portion of this criticism revolves around the issues of group unity and solidarity – issues that the subjects regard as being of crucial importance to the survival and prosperity of the Polish group in Canada. “*There is no solidarity among Poles and no unity in the Polish community*” is one of the most common views expressed by the informants. The latter are almost unanimous in stating that Poles are great egoists who lack a sense of group solidarity and do not help each other. They are divisive, quarrelsome, insincere towards each other, jealous and resentful of the achievements of other Poles. See the following examples:

**34.**

0630 There is no solidarity among Polish people, that principle that, since we are Pol-  
 0631 that we-we want to help each other, to make the life better for Poles who  
 0632 come here. No, on the contrary, they are simply angry that they have to pay  
 0633 higher taxes (...).  
 0639 So, I would say, there is not compassion among Poles, no will to help each  
 0640 other, uh. There is always this (...) attitude, that, “We went through such a hard  
 0641 time, and it’s so easy for you, nowadays.”  
 (elsewhere)  
 0854 I do not know if it is envy, envy or something like that,  
 0855 our Polish character trait.

Joanna, in her 50’s, engineer, resident of Montreal for 8 years.

**35.**

0170 I don’t think that it’s such a com-, eh, such a strong community, a community  
 0171 that could, for example, get the Poles together, unite them so to speak. (...)  
 0179 The mother of my friend was once active in some organization, I don’t recall  
 0180 the name, something like the Engineers’ Association, or something like that.  
 0181 There is a lot of hypocrisy, a lot of, ah, people are simply, it’s not, there is a  
 0182 lot of hypocrisy. People are insincere. People don’t help each other. They are  
 0183 two-faced. So, if one hears stories like that, one doesn’t want to get involved,  
 0184 f-for what the hell for?

Leon, in his 30’s, engineer, resident of Montreal for 6 years.

Polish everyday discourse is also full of jokes and anecdotes exploiting character traits seen as responsible for the lack of unity and a general weakness of Polish community.

Ethnic jokes they are, par excellence (cf. Colombo, 2001):

**36.**

0717 The strife. You know, there must be a lot of jealousy among Poles. We are such  
 0718 a, you know this saying, that where there are six Poles, you have six different  
 0719 opinions.

Joanna, in her 50's, engineer, resident of Montreal for 8 years.

**37.**

0637 Those divisions, among us, in the Polonia, that difference of opinions,  
 0638 the intolerance to other's point of view. Everyone says, "This is wrong. I-I  
 0639 know better, and all the rest is nonsense." That's how it is and we are not able to  
 0640 work out any sort of compromise.(...)  
 0645 You know, this often brings us down to the bottom of existence here. It causes  
 0646 me pain. After all, we are well prepared for life in this society, in terms of  
 0647 professional competence. We lose a lot precisely because-because, we are  
 0648 already notorious as a group for being internally divided. Yes, they say, "where  
 0649 you have three Poles, there are four political parties." Or, [another one], about  
 0650 the Polish cauldron in hell: "The devils don't have to guard it, because if any  
 0651 Pole tries to get out, the remaining ones will keep him down."<sup>8</sup>

Piotr, age 67, mechanical engineer,  
 resident of Montreal for the last 10 years.

Negative character traits of Polish people are, in the subjects' view, responsible for the general weakness of the Polish community in Canada, both in terms of organizational structure and informal bonds among the members. Lack of ethnic solidarity is also cited as the main reason for the relatively low status of the Polish community in Canada and North America. Polish immigrants generally see themselves near the bottom of the social ladder in terms of economic success, status and prestige, not to mention political power and influence. They see themselves near "the bottom of existence," as Piotr puts it.

It is in the context of this kind of discourse that other ethnic minorities in Canada are usually mentioned. After discussing Polish weaknesses, informants discuss how other ethnic groups are more united and better organized, how their members help each other, and how they are more committed to the common good of the group than Poles are. The ethnic "others" appear in Polish discourse as the contrast categories, serving to underline "how bad we are" and "how much better we should become":

**38.**

0221 I think, there is no bond, so to speak, between Poles. You can even, ah, compare  
 0222 them to-to Italians, for example. I think that Italians are, aah, much better  
 0223 organized. True, their community is a little larger [than the Polish one] in  
 0224 Montreal. But, hmm, as far as Italians are concerned, wherever you look, at least  
 0225 in the area where I live, you can see how-how well, ah, they are organized. (...)

<sup>8</sup> It is interesting to note that Canadians apparently make similar jokes about themselves (see, e.g. Colombo, 2001: 8).

0232 So, I think, that when it comes to the Polish group, there is simply a  
 0233 lot-a lot to do in this respect.  
 Leon, in his 30's, engineer, resident of Montreal for 6 years.

**39.**

Joanna: 0326 There is no Polish mafia but there are other [mafias].  
 Interviewer: 0327 Well, but it is not a mafia that represents an ethnic group.  
 Joanna: 0328 No, no-no-no. That is not what I mean. What I mean is simply, that we are  
 0329 different. (...) As you know very well, we say that ourselves: "Poles don't  
 0330 help each other. Italians, for example, they help each other enormously."  
 Joanna, in her 50's, engineer, resident of Montreal for 8 years.

**40.**

Helena: 0095 I don't think that the Polish community is strongly united, here, if we compare  
 0096 with other nations, such as the Jews, or the Syrians or the Moroccans, or some  
 0097 other groups that are strongly united. They help each other. Poles are by nature  
 0098 jealous, greedy-greedy. They are horrible egotists. They live by the principle of  
 0099 "each man for himself," and make efforts to actually not help each other. On  
 0100 the contrary, their conduct actually alienates them from each other.  
 Helena, age 34, self-employed, resident of Montreal for 9 years.

Once again, this discourse should be read both ways by deconstructing the categories on both sides of the ethnic boundary. It is important to know not only how Poles are portrayed in this discourse, but also how "others" emerge by comparison and implication, and who the "others" are, in particular. If "we" are so bad, what are the models for "us" to follow? Polish character flaws are constructed against the perceived virtues of various immigrant minorities, but most of all, Italians and Jews, who appear in almost all discursive constructions of this kind. Thus, compared to Poles, Italian and Jewish people are portrayed as sincere, unselfish, generous towards each other, disciplined, active, organized, and, perhaps most of all, united.

The immigrant groups that are presented as models of ethnic unity and solidarity are also, in the eyes of Polish immigrants, the ones that have established themselves most successfully in Canada. Cast against the alleged mediocrity of Polish people, they stand as the examples of financial affluence, high status and political influence. It only "makes sense" that they are well off, as compared to "us": "*Unity and solidarity bring prosperity,*" is the common sense assumption behind this discourse. The following examples illustrate the various stages of the line of reasoning that runs through Polish representations of "ourselves" and immigrant "others":

## 41.

0023 As a nation, we Poles are ranked somewhere ahead, ahead, eh, of the Indians.  
 0024 For the first in this province are the French, then come the English,  
 0025 then the Italians in the third place, and so on, in order. They classify us  
 0026 somewhere ahead of the Indians.

Alicja, in her 30's, embroidery technician, resident  
 of Montreal for 10 years, in Canada for 15 years.

## 42.

0401 No matter how you look at it, whether in Canada or in the USA, Poles are not  
 0402 particularly visible on the political scene. They are not a group that stands out in  
 0403 any way, or that has anything to say, uh, or has any influence on the politics of  
 0404 the country, like say, uh, the Italian group, or the Jewish group do, or, I don't  
 0405 know, the Irish group in the United States, or any other, right? Poles are always  
 0406 at the end. Maybe, there are, there are individuals, who succeed in reaching a  
 0407 high position. But generally speaking, whether in the USA or in Pol-, uh,  
 0408 Canada, Poles are not a powerful group.

Helena, age 34, self-employed, resident of Montreal for 9 years.

## 43.

Wladek: 0812 Damn it, Polish achievements are mediocre. Not only in Montreal,  
 0813 but in diaspora everywhere.  
 Interviewer: 0814 In what sense?  
 Wladek: 0815 Well, in terms of money, uh, social position, some kind of I don't  
 0816 know, progress. I don't see any famous, they constantly talk, you know, big  
 0817 names. Let it be Malinowski here, or some engineer there, who did something,  
 0818 constructed something, or some metallurgist, you know, and so on.  
 0819 But I think all these are mere slogans that confirm that the majority [of Poles]  
 0820 still belong to Jackowo, to Greenpoint,<sup>9</sup> that they don't make the middle class.  
 Interviewer: 0821 Why?  
 Renata: 0825 (...) Perhaps because we lack some kind of, I don't know,  
 0826 solidarity? Some kind of, uh, just looking at the other cultures, say-say, I don't  
 0827 know, the Chinese, or the Italians, or the Hindus, they all help each other.  
 0828 The Jews, they all help each other (...).  
 Wladek: 0829 Italians are such a symbol of, you know, cooperation,  
 0830 national solidarity.  
 Renata: 0831 And this-this builds a nation's might.

Renata and Wladek, both aged 29, university students,  
 residents of Montreal for 5 and 6 years respectively.

It is not difficult to discern the ideological message in this kind of discourse. The discourse of ethnic solidarity provides a logical explanation and justification for the existing social relations in Canada, including even such practices as discrimination (both positive and negative).<sup>10</sup> In this particular case, it places responsibility for the fate of the ethnic group, including the group's integrity and its position in the existing social

<sup>9</sup> Jackowo and Greenpoint are colloquial terms designating two traditionally Polish neighborhoods in Chicago and New York respectively. For many Poles in North America, they have come to symbolize the Polish ghetto and generally carry pejorative associations.

<sup>10</sup> See Chapter 7, pp. 179-186 in this study.



hierarchy, squarely on the shoulders of its own members. In other words, the message is that Poles have only themselves to blame for their relatively low status in Canadian society.

Simultaneously, engaging in this discourse the subjects also participate in the construction of Polish ethnicity. They call upon other Poles to play the game of ethnicity and reinforce ethnic bonds. Together with criticism comes a message of ambition and aspiration – a call to harness ethnicity in the service of social interests and make it a recipe for social advancement. Poles are presented with models to follow and a promise that social advancement is within their reach, if they pull up their sleeves and start to “play” ethnicity the right way.

### **On the importance of here-and-now**

The analysis of patterns of Polish categorization demonstrates the transactional nature of categorizing discourse and the importance of the here-and-now in the processes of social categorization (cf. Jenkins, 1994). The construction of “them” is always relevant to the present and on-going construction of “us” – a construction that involves the creation of “our” image as well as the securing of “our” interests and objectives.

In this study, informants make majorities the objects of both criticism and praise. The two dominant groups are for Poles their most significant “others,” in the present context, so it is against them most of all that the subjects’ own categories must be constructed. As immigrants, Poles must continually reassert their social value as citizens and the legitimacy of their existence in Canada, both of which can at any moment be questioned (and are often questioned, as many immigrants know only too well) against the value and legitimacy of the majorities. Furthermore, the dominant culture and life style present the most formidable and immediate challenge to Polish ethnicity on the Canadian soil.

At the same time, it is not an accident that, despite their high status, French and English Canadians are not cited in this discourse as models to follow on the way to success. Their position in the local social hierarchy is taken for granted. Only minority groups can be

part of the recipe for social advance that could be useful to Polish immigrants. That Italians and Jews are the stock categories in that recipe is probably not an accident, either. Among immigrant groups, they have obtained some of the highest levels of visibility on the Canadian and North American social scene. Even the saying, “*There is no Polish mafia,*” popular among Polish immigrants relies on one of the most popular categorizations of an ethnic group in North America. It would appear that in the local context, Italians and Jews are, for the Polish, their second most significant “others.”

Such positive representations of the Jewish people are striking, considering the recent history of strained relations between Poles and Jews. This does not mean that all Polish representations of the Jewish group are laudatory, however. The history of Polish-Jewish relations catches up with Poles in Canada, too. Many of the informants complain that Polish people have been categorized as anti-Semites in Canada (and North America more generally) – categorizations that they regard as highly unjust. These complaints refer mainly to the images perpetuated in movies, television and other mass media in their coverage of the Second World War. Poles generally blame the Jewish people for producing those images. Ironic as it sounds, Poles blame Jews for unjustly blaming Poles for being anti-Semitic.

A particularly common opinion in the Polish community is that Jewish people place the Polish among the perpetrators in the Holocaust. The topic is very delicate, and heated arguments are not uncommon. The counter-arguments that Poles almost universally present can be summarized as follows: “*Poles were themselves victims of the Nazi occupation and they did not have much to say, let alone to do in the matter. On the contrary, they helped quite a few Jews survive the Holocaust. If there were any Poles who helped the Germans exterminate Jews, well, you can find black sheep in every nation.*” The following extract exemplifies this line of argument:

#### 44.

- |              |      |  |
|--------------|------|--|
| Interviewer: | 0633 | Do you think that Poles are anti-Semites?                                      |
| Urszula:     | 0634 | They may be more [anti-Semitic] today than during the war or before. But it is |
|              | 0635 | the fault of the Jews themselves.  |
| Interviewer: | 0636 | So, we can speak of anti-Semitism, <u>today</u> ?                              |

Urszula: 0637 Don't catch me in my words. This is not anti-S-. But there is more bitterness.  
 0638 Oh, no, Anti-Semitism is too strong a word. There is much bitterness towards  
 0639 the Jews caused by the fact that they attack us unjustly. Because among the trees  
 0640 commemorating the "Just" in Israel, the "Polish trees" are the most numerous.  
 0641 So, among all the nations, Poles were the ones who helped them most. You see,  
 0642 one does not hear about that and it hurts. It hurts and it turns people against  
 0643 Jews. I, for one, keep my distance more than I used to. When I come across a  
 0644 Jewish person, I become cautious, because-because I don't want anyone to twist  
 0645 my words and turn them against me, me as a Polish person, and form  
 0646 generalizations. The same people who were giving Jews away [to the Nazis]  
 0647 during the war, were also giving Poles away. My father was in the Resistance,  
 0648 and he was betrayed by a Pole. These kinds of things happen. You have all sorts  
 0649 of people in every nation. We are not angels, but the Jews are not angels, either.  
 0650 But we are not all devils, either.

Urszula, age 66, retired actress, living in Ottawa for the last 3.5 years.

Significantly, this strand of discourse is by far the most frequent criticism directed at Jewish people by the informants. Polish discourse in this study revealed very little of the traditional anti-Semitic representations that have been circulating among gentile communities since the Middle Ages. Although, the notions of Jewish solidarity may have their source in the popular accusation of Jewish "clannishness," their meaning in the present Polish discourse is clearly far from pejorative. At the same time, Poles are obviously touchy on the subject of Polish anti-Semitism, which directly concerns their image as a people. No one likes to see himself or herself as an anti-Semite, especially nowadays when the label of "anti-Semite" has acquired distinctly negative connotations. Self-image is the way people see themselves and the way they would like to be seen by others (Jenkins, 1994: 204).

Thus, it would appear that Polish immigrants concentrate their categorizations on different categories and groups of people insofar as the latter's existence or actions have or may have a conceivable effect on Polish self-image or present interests in Canada. On the other hand, people with whom Polish immigrants "have no business" receive no significant coverage in their everyday talk. Even the old grudges against some of Poland's neighbors are largely forgotten or ignored by immigrants insofar as they do not relate to the local context of the here-and-now. Thus, for example, Russians and Germans

– the traditional “archenemies” of Poland – are literally absent from Polish discourse in Canada.<sup>11</sup>

Informants are also silent about Ukrainians and Lithuanians – the other Old World “relations” of Poles. Even direct questions posed during the interviews concerning those groups and their relations with Poles did not elicit any significant representations. In general, who is discussed in Polish everyday talk and the kind of coverage they receive is highly related to the here-and-now of Polish existence in Canada.

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<sup>11</sup> Keeping in mind, of course, that I am focusing here on the Canadian context. Some subjects in this study did engage in talk about Russians or Germans, but that discourse related to current or past events in Europe and barely ever made any reference to the Canadian context.

## Conclusion

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One of the main objectives of this study was to explore the ways through which minorities participate in social processes. The idea was to see members of a minority as agents; i.e. active subjects, rather than passive objects of social practices. One domain of social reality, ethnicity in Canada, particularly in the context of Montreal, provided the focus for examining how Polish immigrants participate in social processes through their everyday talk.

A constructionist approach to social reality was adopted, with the assumption that the world of ethnic divisions as we know it emerges from human practices in particular social and temporal contexts. Popular discourse is a practice through which people construct real-seeming versions of the world that surrounds them. As people repeat them on everyday basis, these versions become “transparent” and established as truths, to be in turn used as the bases for reading and interpreting reality.

The ways in which the world of ethnicity in Canada is constituted in Polish-Canadian discourse were examined, including: how different categories are defined and distinguished from one another; which categories are treated as significant in the local context; and what kinds of principles (according to the subjects in this study) govern ethnic relations. In addition, the basic functions of this discourse and its potential effects on different sections of Canadian society were explored.

### **Functions and variability of ethnic discourse**

In different chapters of this study, the ways in which the subjects use the discourse of ethnicity for different activities of construction were analyzed to see how they make sense of the social landscape in Canada, how they construct their identity as well as the images of various ethnic groups (and to some extent, racial categories), including their own group. At the same time, the

question of whether and how Polish-Canadian discourse serves the speakers' social interests and how it functions as ideology, i.e. how it serves the interests of dominant groups in the local and larger social contexts, was explored.

Many constructions in this discourse do function as ideology. Indeed, the subjects in this study were shown to actively participate in the construction of a social hierarchy based on ethnic divisions. The categories *French Canadians/Québécois* and *English Canadians* are constructed as dominant in their discourse, while the other ethnic categories, such as *Polish, Chinese, Italians*, etc, as well as the general category *immigrants* are constructed as subordinate. Not only do the subjects identify the said categories as such, but they also treat them accordingly and provide explanations for the resulting hierarchy in their everyday talk.

It has become evident in this study how the ethnic hierarchy is justified and given legitimacy in Polish-Canadian discourse, that is to say, how the dominant categories are treated as the norm and positive standard and how they are assigned "ownership" of Canadian society. At the same time, immigrant minorities are marginalized and denied the full rights of such ownership. It also became evident that the membership of immigrant minorities in Canadian society is questioned by the Polish informants, even though they are immigrants themselves. Their discourse justifies competitive relations and discriminatory practices between people who are ascribed to different ethnic groups – by explaining those phenomena as "natural" and inevitable. In the present historical context of Quebec and Canada, where from the outset some groups have a more competitive advantage over others, such practices, I argue, contribute to the existing ethnic hierarchy in society.

The analysis showed that informants also produce ideological constructions based on race even though, compared to ethnicity, they use race relatively infrequently as the principle ordering Canadian society. Their discourse denigrates racial minorities and accuses them of creating social problems in Canada, thereby contributing to their marginalization and to ongoing White domination.

However, not all discourse of social categorization produced by Polish immigrants supports the existing social stratification in Canada. Indeed, this study showed how complex and full of contradictions popular discourse can be. Apart from the representations that are clearly ideological, others that serve or are intended to serve the interests of immigrant minorities in general, and those of the Polish minority in particular, were identified. Features of counter-discourse – representations that were clearly directed against the majorities and against the dominant order of Canadian and Québécois societies – were also revealed.

Some of the discourse in question even functions simultaneously as ideology and counter-ideology. For example, some of the representations of the francophone Québécois can be seen as a counter-discourse produced by a minority against the local majority. However, placed against the larger background of ethnic relations in Canada and North America, the same representations function as ideology – acting against the ambitions of another ethnic minority and for the benefit of the continuing Anglo-Saxon domination.

These observations confirm one of the initial assumptions put forth in this study: that ideology is not the sole function of ethnic categorization. In fact, there is a great variability of ethnic discourse, as it reflects different needs and objectives of the speakers. This variability can be taken as proof of the multifunctional character of ethnic categorization and of social practices related to it. An important implication for the social sciences is that ideology is not necessarily a determining factor in ethnic categorization – that social practices occurring in the domain of ethnicity can be studied independently of their ideological effects.

Furthermore, indications that ideological constructions, to some extent at least, depend on other functions of ethnic categorization became apparent. The other functions give ideological constructions a certain practical adequacy, necessary for them to be effective. The ideological forms that were identified in Polish-Canadian discourse occur in the course of everyday discursive practices, through which the subjects try to reach a variety of goals that usually have little to do with supporting the ethnic hierarchy in Canada. However, in the given social and historical context, many of the emerging constructions also have ideological effects. To determine whether particular ethnic constructions are ideological or not, their situated use as well

as their actual or potential effects at the time and place of passing judgment must be examined. What follows is the necessity of looking at different practices of ethnic categorization as the potential conditions of existence for ideology, rather than regarding those practices as ideology in themselves.

Many features of Polish-Canadian discourse are directly related to the subjects' status in Quebec and Canada, particularly to the fact that they belong to minority categories – as immigrants and as Poles at the same time. Many constructions of the social reality in Canada, of majority categories and, perhaps most striking of all, of identity in Polish discourse clearly reflect the immigrant status of the speakers. The particular Polish origin of the speakers appears to influence, above all, the content of particular ethnic categories produced in their discourse. The last chapter of the study demonstrates that many constructions of particular ethnic categories are bound up with the construction of the category *Polish* in Canada.

The status of an ethnic minority, combined with the racial category to which Polish immigrants belong, must influence the subjects' representations of racial minorities. As White ethnics, they see themselves in competition with racial minorities for valuable social resources in Canada. Other important variables are context-related, i.e. factors in both global and local contexts have influenced Polish representations of Canadian society. The immigrants undoubtedly brought with them many notions related to ethnicity from their home country. Even more important in this respect has been the context of Canada, where most immigrants are immersed in a multiethnic environment on an everyday basis, where ethnicity is an important aspect of social life and politics and, perhaps most importantly, where the subjects' ethnic **and** minority status have become strongly accentuated. The extent to which Canadian society has been defined, both officially and unofficially through the discourse of ethnicity cannot be overestimated as the factor in shaping Polish-Canadian views and opinions. In a more narrow perspective, the specific context of Quebec, with its distinct status and its slightly “reversed” ethnic hierarchy, as compared to the rest of Canada is another important influence on Polish representations. Finally, the local context of Montreal, with its particularly complex ethnic relations, where the dominant status of both of Canada's “founding nations” has been challenged and where immigrant groups constitute more than one third of the population must also be taken into account.



Comparisons between Polish discourse in Montreal and Ottawa show context-related differences in the representations of society. The general ethnic structure of Canadian society and the nature of ethnic relations are constructed in the same way in both cases. However, the content of particular constructions observed in the Polish community in Montreal is slightly different and more diversified, as compared to the constructions found in Ottawa. The category *French Canadians/Québécois* that is overwhelmingly present in the representations from Montreal is lacking in Ottawa. This category is constructed by Polish Montrealers as one of the majorities, in addition to *Canadians* and *English/Canadians*, or even constructed as the dominant group in the local context. Many other discursive representations produced by Polish Montrealers display features that reflect the specificity of Montreal and the province of Quebec in the area of ethnic relations.

By contrast, the factors of education, occupation, age, and gender seem to have little bearing on the representations of Canadian society that were found among Polish immigrants. While conducting my research, I talked to and listened to people from all walks of life, and everywhere I found similar opinions and patterns of discourse, as far as the object of my study was concerned. Some of the less educated subjects have more difficulty in constructing elaborate accounts and otherwise articulating their views, than the better educated ones. Some of them are also less familiar with the exigencies of “political correctness” and therefore more blunt in expressing controversial views. The opposite is usually true for the more (formally) educated subjects. Nevertheless, people belonging to both of these categories still perpetuate the same basic patterns of discourse that are common to the whole community. The same applies to the subjects’ competence in the two official languages of Canada. All of this leads to the conclusion that at least a part of the common sense of the Polish community in Montreal was captured in my study.

### **Categorization as a social practice and minorities as social agents**

A number of theoretical choices with regard to issues of society, agency and reality, as well as the approach to social discourse were made in this study. Generally speaking, the choice was

between the psychological approach that would explain ethnic categorization as an expression of psychological processes taking place at the level of the individual, and a more society-oriented approach, that would take society as the source and main arena of social practices associated with ethnic categorization. The latter perspective was chosen, and I believe that it is supported by the analysis.

Theories of social psychology reviewed in Part I can be credited with developing some of the central concepts associated with social categorization. These concepts touch upon some critical aspects of social categorization in general: cognition, the influence of the social context on the development of ideological views, the relationship between group identity and categorization, to mention just a few. However, the basic assumptions and explanatory models of these theories could not account for the complexities of Polish-Canadian discourse of ethnicity.

The main problem lies in handling the apparent variations that characterize the discourse in question. In the course of this study, it was apparent that people belonging to the same community would produce various representations of selves and others, and many of those representations may even contradict each other. Such contradictions could not be easily explained by reference to rigid cognitive processes or psychological reflexes that lie at the base of explanatory models proposed by the authoritarian personality, social cognitions, or social identity theories. Nor could these variations be discarded as psychological idiosyncrasies of individual respondents, since they repeat themselves systematically throughout the community and in the same discursive contexts. An inevitable conclusion is that social factors are largely responsible for these variations. Social categorization emerges in this study as a form of social practice and the subjects as social agents engaged in pursuit of social interests and objectives.

This study has also demonstrated that minorities are in many ways the subjects of social practices and should be treated as social agents, in much the same way as majorities. Polish informants “internalize” the dominant discourse of ethnicity that places them in a minority position in the local hierarchy of society. But that does not prevent them from manipulating that discourse and from trying to “adjust” the social reality to serve their particular interests and objectives.

This suggests a need to keep a wide focus in studies of ethnicity and social categorization in order to reach beyond the issues of power and domination, and to look at different aspects of social construction and different social agents so that we can obtain a fuller understanding of the processes of social construction. People belonging to all social categories are involved in these processes, even though most of them are also, in one way or another, members of some minority and objects of practices taking place in the mainstream of society. This ethnography of Polish immigrant discourse also demonstrates how the micro-social practices taking place at the level of everyday interactions contribute to macro-social processes and contribute to defining mainstream opinion – in this case the formulation of ethnic divisions and stratification.

Finally, this study has demonstrated the utility of discourse analysis as a method of analyzing ethnographic data, particularly the verbal accounts of informants. Discourse analysis offers a relatively systematic and transparent approach to the interpretation of oral accounts, including some analytical tools that help the researcher detect and explain regular patterns and variations (and find the patterns in variations) that are a critical part of those accounts.

### **Issues for further analysis**

This study has shed light on one portion of social reality that is constituted in the everyday talk of Polish-Canadians. At the same time, it has elicited other critical questions that could not be answered in the context of the present analytical and methodological parameters. For example, short of making broad assumptions, the reasons why Polish immigrants in Montreal present the *Québécois* as hostile to *immigrants* could not be fully explained in terms of the majority-minority relationship because similar representations do not appear with respect to the majority-minority relationship involving *Canadians* and *immigrants* in the Polish community in Ottawa. This aspect of immigrant discourse is worth further investigation, if only because it concerns a critical sphere of social relations in the province of Quebec. To explain this may require a comparative study, ideally involving other immigrant groups and representations collected in the other Canadian provinces.

Questions also emerge regarding other aspects of social discourse produced by minorities, whether immigrants or otherwise, that are worth investigating. Racial discourse among minorities

is one important aspect of social categorization that has only been touched upon in this study and begs for further consideration. But there are other questions as well: How do minorities construct gender? How do they talk about the homeless, business executives, politicians, etc? All these are important questions for a better understanding of how minorities participate in the processes of social construction.

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