

# Magda Stroińska

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## Discourse on Social Exclusion in the Era of Multiculturalism and Political Correctness

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Magda Stroińska (Hamilton)

## Discourse on Social Exclusion in the Era of Multiculturalism and Political Correctness

*Not everything that is faced can be changed.  
But nothing can be changed until it is faced.*

James Baldwin

This paper looks at the mechanisms of recoding the exclusionary discourse on color and ethnicity in Canadian media and public discourse in order to show that discriminatory thoughts may be hidden behind apparently neutral language or in indirect forms of speech such as quotations or satire. It is argued that if we are to seriously consider the problem of social exclusion, we need to address its causes and not limit ourselves to merely hiding its symptoms. The use of discriminatory language often serves as a tool of social exclusion. Banning discriminatory words makes it more difficult to say offensive things but does not address the underlying problems. It is critical to see this use of language as an indication of social problems and to apply linguistic knowledge as a diagnostic tool in analyzing social exclusion.

### Dyskurs wykluczenia społecznego w dobie wielokulturowości i poprawności politycznej

W krajach wielokulturowych, takich jak Kanada, środki masowego przekazu informują o problemach rasowych i etnicznych przestrzegając zasad politycznej poprawności. Nie oznacza to jednak eliminacji treści rasistowskich i negatywnych stereotypów etnicznych z dyskursu publicznego, a tylko zakodowanie ich w języku pozornie neutralnym lub posługiwanie się formami takimi, jak cytaty lub satyra. Nie można w sposób poważny myśleć o zwalczaniu marginalizacji mniejszości, jeśli zamiast poszukiwania źródeł dyskryminacji będzie się jedynie ukrywać jej objawy. Posługiwanie się językiem dyskryminacji etnicznej jest najłatwiejszym sposobem wykluczania “innych” z życia społecznego. Tam, gdzie poprawność polityczna kształtuje dyskurs publiczny, retoryka wykluczania społecznego znajduje inne, pośrednie sposoby wyrazu. Są one najczęściej symptomem głębokich problemów społecznych, których wykrywanie i badanie przy pomocy aparatu diagnostycznego lingwistyki powinno być ważnym obszarem badawczym.

## **Diskurs über die soziale Ausschließung in einer multikulturellen und politisch korrekten Gesellschaft**

Dieser Beitrag untersucht die Wege, auf denen die kanadischen Medien über Fragen der Hautfarbe und über ethnische Minderheiten berichten, indem sie die Ideen der sozialen Exklusion sprachlich verschlüsseln. Es wird gezeigt, dass in einer multikulturellen Gesellschaft diskriminierende Gedanken hinter einer angeblich neutralen und politisch korrekten Sprache oder in indirekten Sprachformen, wie Zitaten oder Satire verborgen werden können. Wenn man sich mit dem Problem der gesellschaftlichen Exklusion ernsthaft auseinandersetzen möchte, sollte man sich nicht auf das Verbergen ihrer Symptome beschränken, sondern ihre Ursachen ans Licht bringen. Diskriminierende Sprache ist ein selbstverständliches Mittel der sozialen Exklusion. Politische Korrektheit macht zwar die Praxis der Exklusion schwieriger, beseitigt aber ihre Ursachen nicht. Es ist von entscheidender Bedeutung, diesen indirekt ausschließenden Sprachgebrauch als ein Symptom tiefgreifender sozialer Probleme zu sehen und den linguistischen Apparat als ein diagnostisches Gerät für die Analyse von sozialer Exklusion zu gebrauchen.

### **1. Introduction**

For a politician or a journalist in a democratic country to be labeled racist is usually equivalent to the end of their public career. It is therefore of paramount importance for anyone working in the public sector to pay close attention to the language they use in order to make sure that it does not contain any potentially inflammatory or even slightly offensive elements. In culturally, ethnically or linguistically diverse countries such as Canada, this requirement is particularly important and there are numerous rules and regulations to safeguard the policies of multiculturalism (cf. Section 13, Part 1 of the Canadian Human Rights Act (1985) and Canadian Multiculturalism Act (1988)). However, the fact that offensive language is not allowed in public discourse is not equivalent to the lack of negative or even openly hostile attitudes in Canadian society towards various ethnic groups within it. In this paper I look at the mechanisms of recoding the exclusionary discourse on color and ethnicity in Canadian media and public discourse in order to show that discriminatory thoughts may be hidden behind apparently neutral language or in indirect forms of speech such as quotations or satire. I argue that if we are to seriously consider the problem of social exclusion, we need to address its causes and not limit ourselves to merely hiding its symptoms. The use of discriminatory language often serves as a tool of social exclusion. Banning discriminatory words makes it more difficult to say offensive things but does not address the underlying problems. It is critical to see this use of language as an indication of social problems and to apply linguistic knowledge as a diagnostic tool in analyzing social exclusion.

## 2. Canadian Model of Multiculturalism

Canada continues to receive over 200,000 immigrants and refugees annually, with a projected target of up to 300,000 a year, i.e. approximately one percent of the population (cf. James 2003:12). This makes Canadian society very diverse, particularly in large metropolitan cities such as Toronto or Vancouver (ibid.). According to the 2006 census data collected by Statistics Canada, 49.9% of Toronto's population is foreign-born, making it one of the most multicultural cities in the world. Living in such a diverse environment, Canadians pride themselves as culturally sensitive and *tolerant*. For a Pole, the word *tolerance* strikes a familiar cord. Poland too, as Poles like to stress, has always been a country of tolerance, chosen as a safe haven by those persecuted for religious or political beliefs in their own homeland. It may be the linguistic habit of focusing on detail to think that the word "tolerance" is somewhat suspect in this context. To *tolerate* means to "put up" with something, to stand it, to bear it, to endure it but not necessarily to accept and embrace it. The noun *tolerance* is perhaps somewhat more positive but it too indicates our ability to put up with something rather than show a more welcoming and inclusive attitude. While this semantic analysis cannot serve as evidence, it signals that Canadians and Poles may be more concerned with their public image than with their support for diversity.

Multiculturalism in Canada was first articulated in the mid 1960s. It was officially adopted as policy in 1971, following the recommendations of the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism which advocated that the Canadian government should recognize Canada as a bilingual and bicultural society and adopt policies to preserve the dual (English and French) nature of the country. However, the idea of biculturalism was immediately criticized for a variety of reasons. Some, including Conservative leader John Diefenbaker, saw multiculturalism as an attempt to negate the idea of so called *unhyphenated Canadianism*. For the separatists in Quebec, on the other hand, the policy did not go far enough. However, the strongest opposition came from those areas of the country where Francophones were not strongly represented but where there were other substantial ethnic minorities, the so-called "Third Force" Canadians. Thus, the formula was changed from "bilingualism and biculturalism" to "bilingualism and multiculturalism" in order to accommodate other ethnic minorities. The Liberal government of Pierre Elliott Trudeau introduced Multiculturalism as government policy in 1971. Finally, the Canadian *Multiculturalism Act* received Royal Assent on 21 July 1988. In many parts of the world, Canada is seen as a model multicultural society where different ethnicities live together peacefully and continue to assert their linguistic and cultural diversity.

In Canada, as in other officially multicultural countries, it is considered not *politically correct* to openly criticize ethnic minorities. The suggestion that im-

migration levels may be too high and that official bilingualism should be abolished earned the Canadian Reform Party a reputation for xenophobia and racism in the early 1990s and probably contributed to its demise. However, as is often the case when public discourse is controlled by the state, criticism finds new and less direct forms of expression. Thus, while hardly anyone openly criticizes Canadian multicultural policies and while Canadians like to think of themselves as *uniquely tolerant* (Szuchewych 2000), criticism of immigration and ethnic minorities is often recoded into discourses in other public domains, such as the strain on education from too many children in the school system with English as a Second Language or the strain on health services from people traveling from foreign countries and bringing into Canada diseases like SARS, avian influenza or, more recently, the H1N1 flu virus. Articles on such issues in Canadian mass media are often accompanied by elements of ‘moral panic’ and anxiety, leading the public to believe that Canada is facing an imminent catastrophe and steering public emotions in a negative way, i.e. making the audience perceive immigrants as a potential threat to “the traditional Canadian society” or “way of life”. And yet, as Szuchewych (2000) further observes, the “national self-perception is so positive and so certain that over two decades of historical and sociological research demonstrating the contrary has had little impact in eroding its strength or pervasiveness.”

### 3. Political correctness and racism

*Political correctness* is usually understood as the alteration of language to redress or eliminate real or alleged injustices and discrimination or to avoid offending any group of people, especially with regard to race, gender, disability, or other status. The groups most often referred to in politically correct fashion are those that are traditional targets of discrimination: visible minorities, ethnic minorities, the handicapped, women, people of alternative sexual orientation, etc. (for detailed statistics cf. for example the reports of the Ontario Human Rights Commission available on-line). Praised by some, criticized by others and derided by most, political correctness has nevertheless established itself quite firmly in both political and academic discussions on multiculturalism and immigration. In theory, it was supposed to promote inclusion and equality. In reality, it often makes it difficult, if not impossible, to discuss important social issues without bringing on accusations of some form of discrimination.

Racial discrimination, in particular, is defined as “any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference based on race, colour, descent, or national or ethnic origin which has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal footing, of human rights and fundamental

freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural or any other field of public life” (UN International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, 1969, Part I, Art 1). However, the fact that people in Canada do not openly talk about racism or make racist remarks does not mean that racism has disappeared.

If, for the purpose of this discussion, we understand racism as a negative feeling towards certain groups within society that are considered *different*, we can picture this feeling in terms of the standard English metaphorical framework that represents strong emotions as hot liquids under pressure (cf. Lakoff 1987: 383). We could thus imagine political correctness as the lid that is placed on a pot with boiling liquid – racism or any form of prejudice – in order to contain this liquid within the pot and prevent it from boiling over. However, more often than not, the lid alone does not stop the contents of a pot from over boiling. In fact, the opposite is often the case. Like the metaphorical lid on the boiling pot, politically correct discourse on its own does not do anything to improve the situation and diffuse racial prejudice or hostility. It is only supposed to contain it, i.e. hide it from view.

#### 4. Moral panic

*Moral panic*, a term coined in 1972 by Stanley Cohen, is a mass movement based on the perception that some individual person or group, frequently a minority group “emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests” (Cohen 1972:9). Such panics are often triggered by media coverage of various issues, may include elements of mass hysteria, and occasionally lead to open violence (cf. Critcher 2006). The concept was introduced to describe media coverage of Mods and Rockers, two youth subcultures in the United Kingdom in the 1960s. In that particular case, the exaggerated reports by the media augmented tension surrounding the conflict between two rival gangs, leading to widespread fears of possible unrest and violence (cf. Cohen 1972).

Media today are full of reports that seem designed to make us anxious and sell more copies. There is the omnipresent threat of global terrorism. Other threats are also becoming global in scale: as I am writing this paper, the H1N1 flu pandemic brings thousands of anxious people to vaccination clinics across Canada; a few years ago, SARS and avian flu quickly spread from Asia to other continents; from time to time media report that Ebola from Congo can easily be brought to other parts of the world; entire ecosystems are collapsing due to global warming; genetically modified or bacteria contaminated foods threaten our health; and obesity is reaching epidemic proportions in North America. We seem to be surrounded by dangers and the mass media know how to best exploit

the fear factor in order to support falling sales of newspapers. After September 11, people in the USA became accustomed to watching alert levels change from yellow to orange to red. The system was introduced in March 2002 as the Homeland Security Presidential Directive 3 and is still in force. Arguably, we are becoming more and more desensitized and indifferent, but anxiety always finds new ways into our thinking even if we are not fully aware of it.

Among many threats, real or perceived, there has always been the threat of the *other*. The concept of the *other* keeps changing. Depending on the society, political system and historical period, it could be the Christian, the infidel, the Muslim, the Jew, the German, the Russian, the French, the white man or the red skins, the class enemy, the intelligentsia, or whoever happens to fit the role of current scapegoat.

Most people rely on the mass media for providing both information and entertainment and the way the mass media ‘play the race card’ (cf. Williams 2002, Noriega 1997) shapes our perception of reality. “If race is something about which we dare not speak in polite social company, the same cannot be said of the viewing of race” (Williams 1997: 17). More than ten years later, people of color are still generally underrepresented in the mass media – there are fewer nonwhite anchors, presenters, journalists and actors, but nonwhites are also more often than whites associated with news and entertainment related to violent crime. This skewed representation of reality contributes to the skewed perception of the ethnic composition of the society we live in. Fear magnifies perceived dangers.

In a 1990 Gallup poll, the “average” American surveyed thought that the U.S. population was 32 percent Black, 21 percent Hispanic, and 18 percent Jewish. Thus, all other groups, including white Anglo-Americans, Native Americans and Asian-Americans, accounted for no more than 29 percent of the “imagined community” (cf. Anderson 1983 for the concept of ‘imagined communities’) the respondents thought they lived in. Yet, at that time, white Americans represented close to 75% of the population and only imagined themselves to be a minority (cf. *ibid.*). In fact, according to new U.S. government projections, by the year 2042 “white people will no longer make up a majority of Americans [...]. That’s eight years sooner than previous estimates made in 2004” (i.e. 14 years after the original Gallup poll). As Noriega (1997) noted, the mass media do not cause or create racism, but neither do they help to eliminate it or offer “a value-free medium for the exchange of ideas and information.”

Discrimination based on race is a relatively new idea because the concept of race was first applied to humans in the eighteenth century and became fashionable only in the nineteenth century. As such, race is just one in the long chain of reasons that have been used to justify existing or desired inequality among people.

The need for a concept that would justify social exclusion was explained in 1864 by Reverend K. J. Stewart in his *Geography for Beginners*:

For some two thousand years mankind multiplied exceedingly throughout the earth. And in those days men lived much longer, and grew to a larger size than they do now. But, in the process of time, men became so wicked and corrupt before God, that He sent a deluge upon the earth, and destroyed man and beast from off the face of the whole earth. Noah, and his sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth, were saved in the Ark which God directed them to build; and with them such animals as God selected. [...]

As God set His bow in the cloud as a sign and seal of His covenant with Noah, that "He would not again destroy all flesh from off the earth," it became necessary that He should adopt some other means by which to check the universal tendency of mankind to impiety and wickedness. He therefore divided the speech or languages of men at Babel.

By this means, and by the diverse climates in which men live, and their different modes of life, nations have been kept distinct; and men have become separated into races, of different colour, as well as government. (31-32)

In this highly unscientific account, the division into races can be viewed as a means of God's punishment but there is no suggestion that some skin colors were inferior to others. And yet, this text was published at roughly the same time as "An Essay on the Inequality of the Human Races" written by Comte de Gobineau. Gobineau's work can be considered the beginning of a (pseudo)scientific race research and may actually have been the source of some of the arguments about the supremacy of the Aryan race used by the Nazi German propaganda (cf. Klemperer 2000: 137-140). While the concept of the Aryan ancestry of Northern Europeans may have its roots in the historical and comparative linguistics of the time, race became a handy criterion for differentiation among people because it can be related to physical appearance. However, these differences in physical appearance do not prove the existence of race but only help to perpetuate the illusion. Even the National Socialists in Hitler's Germany found it difficult to rely on physical appearance because few of the high ranking Nazi officials could pass the test of the ideal Aryan appearance, as illustrated by pictures on the cover of the magazine *Volk und Rasse*. Helmut Stellrecht, explains the convoluted concept of German race in a Nazi brochure in 1943:

**Race** means to be able to think in a certain way. He who has courage, loyalty and honor, the mark of the German, has the race that should rule in Germany, even if he does not have the physical characteristics of the "Nordic" race. The unity of the noble and a noble body is the goal to which we strive. But we despise those whose noble body carries an ignoble soul.

This shows an interesting phenomenon: according to the official ideology of arguably the most racist regime in history, race is a feature of character rather than physical appearance. A German who lacks in appearance can make it up in fanaticism. At the same time, Aryan-looking children from countries occupied by Germany were taken away from their parents and raised as Germans in order to improve the purity of the Aryan race (cf. Roman Z. Hrabar 1960). Yet, this



approach did not apply to Jews whose race was determined through calculations based on the Nuremberg Laws on Citizenship and Race, passed in 1935 (cf. Ehrenreich 2007). Despite their official format and pseudo-scientific language, the Nuremberg Laws confuse ancestry and religion, make race determination dependent on time of birth and have a simple function: to provide a pretext for the expulsion of people now “legally” defined as Jews from public offices. The Nuremberg Laws made it legal to take away from them the rights of German citizens and to open the door to their physical extermination. The dehumanization of the victims is often the first step in their annihilation (cf. Strońska & Popovic 1999 and Strońska 1998).

## 5. Race – illusion or reality

The modern approach to race seems to be taking a 180-degree turn by denying the concept of race any scientific reason for existence (cf. Zack 2002). But even if race does not exist, the problem of racism does.

For some, the assertion that there is no biological or genetic evidence for the existence of race may seem to be simply a matter of political correctness. Those who disagree often prefer to trust their eyes rather than scientific arguments. Yet, from the genetic point of view, there seems to be little doubt that there is more variation within any group of people who are traditionally considered homogeneous (e.g. Poles, Scots or Chinese) than between the traditionally distinguished “races.” The range of genetic variation among humans is not huge to start with, but 85% of that variation exists within any local population and about 94% can be found within any continent (cf. Keita, S. O. Y., Kittles, R. A. et al. 2004). Two randomly selected Italians may be as genetically different as an Italian and a Japanese. Royal (2006) asserts that human genome research has reinvigorated discussions on the definition and existence of human races and wonders how the increased knowledge of human genetic variation will affect the treatment of race and ethnicity in science, medicine, and society.

Since humanity (or the human *race*) is relatively new, humans, unlike many animals, have had too little time to evolve into different subspecies. We are among the most homogeneous of all species, and any differences in appearance between ‘races’ are noticeable only from the perspective of another human being. This level of variation within the human race does not prevent interbreeding, i.e. is biologically insignificant (cf. Keita, S. O. Y., Kittles, R. A. et al. 2004). However, it was this possibility of interbreeding and its alleged disastrous effects that became the corner stone of Nazi racial ideology.

In *Mein Kampf*, Adolf Hitler wrote that the inner segregation of the species of all living beings on earth is one of those “truths which are so obvious that for

this very reason they are not seen or at least not recognized by ordinary people” (Hitler 1925/1971: 284). He continued:

Every animal mates only with a member of the same species. (...) No more than Nature desires the mating of weaker with stronger individuals, even less does she desire the blending of a higher with a lower race, since, if she did, her whole work of higher breeding might be ruined with one blow. (...) When man attempts to rebel against the iron logic of Nature, he comes into struggle with the principles to which he himself owes his existence as a man. And this attack must lead to his own doom (Hitler 1925/1971: 284-287).

This kind of racist discourse is not a thing of the past. One glance on the internet is enough to realize the amount of race based discrimination, a phenomenon that organizations such as Simon Wiesenthal Center try to monitor and eliminate. The following is a quote from an article entitled “Facing Racial Realities” on the website of American white separatist Kevin Alfred Strom:

[...] in my eyes the European race is a race of light and beauty. [...] And our race is threatened. Nowhere is our birthrate above replacement level. Everywhere our borders have been opened and the new elite teaches our children that intermarriage is good and desirable [and...] that to defend our genetic heritage is the very definition of evil. The end result, if trends continue, will be genocide [and] death for the uniquely beautiful, intelligent, and creative people called by the name of the goddess Europa.

In fact, the above sounds very similar to the style of Helmut Stellrecht in his Nazi brochure *Glauben und Handeln* (Berlin: 1943):

He who mixes his blood with that of foreign inferior races ruins the blood and soul that have been given to him (...) and commits the greatest crime that he as a National Socialist can commit.

Unfortunately, similar linguistic structures and figures of speech can be found also in some Polish newspapers, as quoted for example in the 2007 report on monitoring racist, xenophobic and anti-Semitic contents in Polish press, prepared by the Centre for Human Rights at the Institute of Legal Studies, Polish Academy of Sciences, Poznań (Gliszczynska et al. 2007). For example, in discussions about negative effects of the Polish entry to the European Union, the EU integration is referred to as *Anschluss* (ibid. 20) and Europe is presented as controlled by Islamic, Jewish or liberal forces that threaten Polish values, sovereignty, and traditions (ibid. 23).

For a sociolinguist, it is hard to ignore the fact that the use of language in the above examples is similar and that it intentionally stirs a moral panic. This is the language of hatred and exclusion, the same type of discourse that, some ten years ago, was a warning sign before the ethnically based conflict in Kosovo (Stroińska & Popovic 1999). It should also have been a warning before the Holocaust. It is being used in the conflicts in the Middle East. We have to pay

attention to words and metaphors because words and “metaphors can kill” (cf. Lakoff, 1991).

## 6. Race and Color

Visually, skin color is one of the most striking differences between humans. According to Nina Jablonski (2006), it is one of those things everybody notices, but nobody wants to talk about. However, color is only skin deep. It shows a strong correlation with the strength of sunlight across the globe but is not related in any obvious way to the shape of any body part (e.g. eyes or nose), blood type, intelligence, artistic talent or athletic ability. Thus, what in the last centuries became the most visible criterion of inequality among men turns out to be a very superficial phenomenon. Nothing can be predicted based on the color of skin, yet color-based prejudice continues. Those who have ever been affected by racial profiling know it very well.

However, political colorblindness will not end racism because discrimination is never based on color alone. The Nazi persecution of Jews was not based on nationality, religion or appearance but on a pseudo-scientific concept of ancestry. Another tragic case of discrimination can be found in the marginalization of and hostility towards the Roma population in many countries of Europe, usually predating organized extermination of the Roma people by the Hitler's regime. In pre-war Germany, *Gypsies* were treated as an “alien race” and were the object of harassment, both by the state and by individual people. Referred to as the “Gypsy plaque” or “Gypsy nuisance” (cf. Lewy 2000:17-18), the Roma were accused of molestation of the native population. Those who could not provide proof of a permanent domicile could not obtain a trade license that would permit them to travel around. If they were considered *incorrigible*, they could be sterilized (ibid.). As was the case with the Jews, language was used as a primary tool of exclusion: they were described in terms of disease, referred to as parasites, animals or savages that moved in “hordes,” and subjected to degrading procedures such as sterilization as if they were dangerous criminals or carried some awful disease. By using the rhetoric of “racial hygiene” (Lewy 2000:20) and by denying the targeted ethnic group their humanity, the perpetrators were preparing the setting for the physical extermination of the victims and making sure that no one would protest against their actions.

Today, the Roma still face persecution in many European countries. In Poland, they are singled out by the 2008 report by Agnieszka Mikulska from the Helsinki Human Rights Foundation as the group whose situation is the “most difficult” (page 5) and where unemployment reaches 90%. High unemployment usually results in poverty, lack of proper health care and is farther related to low

levels of education (*ibid.*). Due to the length of time it takes to educate a person, from elementary school to, possibly, postsecondary academic institutions, the situation of the Roma population in Poland will not change overnight despite a variety of programs that are being implemented to help that ethnic group. In Hungary, a country that “has become a racial powder keg and has been hit hard by the global economic crisis” (cf. Nadler 2009), there have been several cases of physical attacks on the Roma. Nadler quotes Orban Kolompar, president of the Hungarian National Roma Council, who thinks that “‘there are parties that are saying that the Roma [are] to blame for the problems in the country,’ and believes the economic downturn will lead to increased support for far-right parties with anti-Roma platforms in both European parliamentary elections this year and Hungarian national elections next. ‘Voters who are disillusioned [by the crisis] may join them’” (*ibid.*). However, prejudice against the Roma pre-dates the current economic crisis and may not go away at the end of the recession. The roots of the problem of ethnic hatred go deeper and require more than police action to address them. They also may be different in each particular national context.

Asked in an interview with the German magazine *Der Spiegel* whether genocide always begins with language, Daniel Goldhagen answered: “Most of what people know about the world is imparted to them through speech -- through language of all different kinds. One of the striking things about genocide is that the people doing the killing view large groups of people as being subhuman or dangerous. They use language to either dehumanize or demonize them. [...] Language is the bearer of hatred. Germans didn’t know the Jews of Poland. Many Turks didn’t know Armenians. Individual Hutu knew nothing about most Tutsi. How could they? And yet in each case they set out to kill vast numbers of people about whom they knew only what they had heard. Language transmits prejudices and descriptions of others that lead some to believe that the other must be eliminated. This is a critical factor in understanding the generation of mass slaughter, which is often not seen to be important. People say “it’s just talk.” but it’s talk that is the soil from which these genocidal assaults eventually grow” (Goldhagen 2009b).

## 7. Conceptualization of prejudice

Cognitive linguists talk about mental structures that are evoked by the use of certain words and that shape the way we understand complex events or relationships (cf. Lakoff 2004). Such conceptual frames, frequently in the form of metaphors or scripts, are often used in politics to channel people’s attitudes in the desired way. This is also the case in discourse on immigration and ethnic mi-

norities, in particular in situations where direct reference is discouraged or considered politically incorrect.

Thus, the home country may be presented as a family with the political leader as a father figure. The father's responsibility is to protect the family and the family home from intruders, who may want to invade the home, to take it over, or who show little respect for the values of the family, etc. (Bloor & Bloor 2007:121). The native land may also be portrayed as a vulnerable female – a mother, a wife or a daughter, threatened by the savage intruder (cf. Lakoff 1991). Bloor & Bloor (2007) point to the connection between such frames and the notion of racial inequality, with some races considered inferior (childlike, rebellious or threatening) and/or deserving punishment or special treatment. They add that “the discourse of slavery and colonialism were based on such metaphorical account, and it survived into post-slavery and in neo-colonial societies” (121). The notions of *primitive* or *weaker* races, of disease and parasite life style that are associated with some ethnicities may lead not only to hateful and insulting ethnic jokes (e.g. about Irish or Polish immigrants in the US) but to aggression and victimization of the targeted group (e.g. Jews in Nazi Germany or Albanians in Kosovo).

Another frame that is observable involves the representation of the nation or country (or its social institutions such as health care or school system) as “a container of limited capacity” (122) that is at a bursting point, overflowing, being filled with foreign born *masses*. The concept of *mass* is further related to *force* and so the *waves* of immigrants may be represented as *flooding* or *swamping* the country and *draining* its resources (ibid.). The ‘draining of resources’ shows semantic similarity to the ‘parasitic life style.’ The immigrants also bring with them their language, their customs and their way of life, causing moral panics concerning the threat to local values and traditions.

The concept of a mental schema was first introduced in the 1930s by Sir Frederic Bartlett, a British psychologist who studied the process of recalling folk tales and noticed that people tend to supply missing information according to a kind of prototypical scenario for an event perceived as similar to the one being told. After several decades of neglect, in the 1970s, Bartlett's idea of mental schemas was revived in the computer modeling of human cognitive processes. Marvin Minsky (1975) used the concept of *frame*, while Roger Schank and Robert Abelson (1977) worked with scripts and plans. Conceptual frames are also used in Critical Discourse Analysis to explain how people interpret complex phenomena by relating them to mental models they have stored in their memory. We are not even aware of those scripts but we rely on them in processing information and often one word is enough to invoke a complex schema: if someone mentions abuses of the welfare system by refugee claimants, this is often enough to invoke the schema of that particular group

being like a parasite living off the state, with all the negative connotations this entails.

## 8. Lexicalization of prejudice

Attitudes that are verbalized often enough may become lexicalized. Polish language uses the terms ‘cyganeria’ and ‘cygański’ to denote the lifestyle of the artistic subculture, often somewhat marginalized and often living in poverty. Many other European languages use the term ‘Bohemian’ introduced in France in the early 19th century when artists often lived in poor gypsy neighborhoods. *Bohémien* was a word to describe the Romani people who had come to Western Europe from Bohemia. Apart from this artistic association, the family of words in Polish derived from the word ‘Cygan’ (‘Gypsy’) has mostly negative connotations. The verb ‘cyganić’ is synonymous with ‘to cheat’ or ‘to lie’ and, even when it is used to refer to people who have no Romani links, it conveys negative connotations about that ethnic group.

Polish language regularly uses the word ‘Gypsy’ in a simile that is supposed to denote a type of cheating or swindle (e.g. Polish ‘oszukać jak Cygan’ – ‘to cheat like a Gypsy’) or as a metaphor for a cheater (e.g. Polish ‘ale z niego Cygan’ – ‘he is such a Gypsy’, meaning ‘he is a swindler’ or ‘a liar’). The ‘Gypsy lifestyle’ (‘cygańskie życie’), on the other hand, generally denotes a vagrant or nomadic way of life, in addition to the possible Bohemian interpretation. Poles who use these figures of speech are usually unaware of the derogatory connotations as the expressions became fully lexicalized and are used without deliberate intention to insult a particular ethnic group. Similarly, the expression ‘kochajmy się jak bracia, liczymy się jak Żydzi’ (‘let’s love each other like brothers but let’s conduct our business like Jews’), means simply ‘let’s keep our accounts straight.’ There are *other* expressions in Polish that target Jews and must be considered offensive and vulgar. The fact that some politicians, journalists or public figures use such language is, unfortunately, a measure of the quality of public political debate in Poland and an indication of populist trends that exploit some shameful old ethnic prejudice for immediate political gain.

Prejudice based on different cultural traditions or language and customs can be found in many other expressions. While the word ‘zabojad’ (literally a ‘frog eater’) only applies to French, it targets the otherness of their culinary customs by pointing out that what they eat is not considered food in the culture of the speaker. The expression ‘austriackie gadanie’ (literally ‘Austrian chatter’) denotes ‘silly talk’, balderdash, fiddle-faddle’ (Stanisławski 1994). On the other hand, expressions such as ‘siedzieć jak na *tureckim* kazaniu’ (literally to sit as if ‘at a Turkish sermon’), stress the incomprehensible nature of the other

language, somewhat like in the English ‘it’s all Greek to me.’ Fully lexicalized is the Polish word *Niemiec* (‘German’) which derives from *niemy*, i.e. one who is unable to speak (here, one who does not speak in an understandable way). Many Slavic languages share this term. For Poles, surrounded by other Slavic languages, Germans were the only neighbors whose language was not comprehensible.

For Germans, on the other hand, words referring to Poles (*Pole*, *polnisch*, *Polaken*) usually have pejorative connotations and are used to indicate stupidity, lack of organization, chaos (cf. the widely functioning expression *polnische Wirtschaft* – literally ‘Polish economy’), excessive drinking, poor work ethics, etc. (cf. Szarota 1996). Such lexicalized stereotypes survive the end of political systems and historical transformations because they are repeated by people without conscious intentions to offend. While they may seem innocuous and dormant, they can be easily referred to as conceptual frames when hostilities between ethnic groups need to be revived for political reasons. We have many examples in history of such apparently innocent stereotypes becoming ideological tools of victimization and physical extermination.

## 9. Recoding Discourse on Race and Ethnicity

Even if we all agreed that race does not exist in terms of science, racism would remain real. To combat it, we need to identify and remedy social policies and institutional practices that grant advantage to some groups at the expense of others. We also need to watch the language that is used, not only in public political debates but also in informal contexts. Yet, some social scientists claim that the political correctness model “is too eager to praise racial minorities and often fails to acknowledge the fact that sin knows no color” (Yancey 2001). This creates a tendency to downplay problems within minority groups or to blame the majority group members for the minority group problems (ibid.) Such approaches cannot be effective in the long run and create a lot of resentment within the majority group. Even if the lid of political correctness can for a while prevent racism from freely spilling out of the pot, the hot liquid will eventually find ways to escape. If society does not allow some form of discussion on minority groups, negative feelings towards foreigners will take more cryptic forms. Let us consider a few examples from Canadian media that could serve as a model of political correctness on ethnic issues.

In January 2001, Hamilton, Ontario experienced a period of uncertainty when a person traveling from Africa was being observed for symptoms that could have been associated with Ebola. Although in such cases the identity of the patient is normally protected, the newspapers had the picture of the black

woman and her name and address printed. The discussions in the media, even after the disease had been properly diagnosed and the fears had been alleviated, focused on the dangers caused by visitors traveling to Canada from Africa and other regions affected by disease (c.f. Adeyanju 2005). This clearly triggered the conceptual frame of primitive (disease infested) versus developed (clean and healthy) countries.

In the Spring of 2003, the outbreak of SARS, Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome, paralyzed Toronto. The Web page of the Centre for Disease Control and Prevention started its June 2003 update with the sentence reporting that SARS was first recognized in Toronto in a woman, who had returned from Hong Kong in February 2003 but no names had been released and she was only referred to as case 1. Even though SARS subsequently attacked people of all ethnic backgrounds (361 cases and 33 deaths), the original link to Hong-Kong and to China persisted causing economic losses to the Chinese community in Toronto. The 2009 H1N1 flu pandemic was usually traced back to Mexico in its initial stages.

In 2005, CBC carried the following information: "Blood clinics struggle to attract immigrant donors" (CBC News, Thu, 19 May 2005). It reported that "only four per cent of eligible Canadians give blood regularly, partly because clinic organizers are struggling to find a way to attract donors from different ethnic communities, according to Canadian Blood Services officials." Toronto has the lowest participation rate of all Canadian sites because of large ethnic population. The growing number of newcomers to Canada was one reason behind the low numbers. "Many immigrants aren't aware that blood donation clinics even exist," the interviewed official said. "I just don't think it's part of their awareness, and part of what they did in the country they came from" (ibid.). However, if only 4% of all Canadians donate blood, the effect of ethnicity alone cannot be blamed for this low rate.

Low passing rates on standardized tests in Ontario schools are often linked to the percentage of ESL students. However, a correlation between being an ESL student and failing standardized tests has not yet been established. At the same time, ESL students complain that they are discouraged from taking courses in the academic stream and counseled to take applied courses. The effect of standardized tests on teaching outcomes in the U.S. has been contested. David Hursh and Camille Anne Marti (2003) write:

One group of students, in particular, has been harmed by the standardized testing requirements. Previous to this year, many English as a second language (ESL) students excelled in their courses and were accepted to university, but did not graduate because they could pass all but their English Regents exam. This year the ESL students face an additional problem. Because the ESL exam, an exam that they must pass to be waived from ESL courses, was made significantly more difficult, few have been able to pass the exam, even though they could pass the English Regents exam required for graduation! While no statewide figures are available, schools reported that



fewer than 10 percent of students passed the ESL test, essentially relegating them to less academic courses (Winerip, Sept. 17, 2003).

Students of color, living in poverty, and for whom English is a second language are facing more, not fewer education barriers. The exams are exacerbating, not lessening, inequality.

Interestingly, both health care and education are areas of social life in Canada that are plagued by financial problems and insufficient funding. It seems that situations where there is lack of adequate resources breed particular intolerance towards those who could be perceived as reasons for the problems or who could be conveniently blamed for them. The reference to the cognitive frame of the limited container immediately comes to mind.

In 2007, the town council of Herouville, a small town in Quebec with less than 1500 inhabitants and one immigrant family, passed a declaration that they “considered it completely outside norms to... kill women by stoning them in public, burning them alive, burning them with acid, circumcising them etc.” (cf. BBC News from January 31, 2007). The declaration also points out that women are allowed to drive, vote, dance and own their own homes (ibid.). The councilor behind the declaration does not believe it to be racist: “We invite people from all nationalities, all languages, all sexual orientations, whatever, to come live with us, but we want them to know ahead of time how we live” (ibid.). The reference to the script of the *other* threatening our way of life with his or her customs and traditions, helps us to understand the appeal of the proclamation to the Herouville town council.

News about the First Nations population in Canada frequently reports substance abuse, family violence, cigarette and alcohol smuggling on reserves, high suicide and criminality rates, and also high levels of government welfare support. Indigenous persons appear as *Agents* of destructive or self-destructive actions and *Recipients* of support offered by the government and the taxpayers. Individually these reports may seem objective but together they paint a rather biased picture by linking First Nations people to all kinds of potentially negative behaviors. The language use is politically correct but it does not prevent racial feelings from spilling over.

On the university front, foreign language departments are often the first to be cut or eliminated in an era of shrinking budgets (cf. for example the response of the British Academy to the 2008 review of Modern Foreign Languages Provision prepared by the Higher Education Funding Council for England). Various worthy academic endeavors become sidelined by the systemic assumption that the Anglo-Saxon point of view, Western values, and the principles and parameters of English grammar are – if not universal – then at least in some unspecified way superior due to the position of English-speaking countries in the global economy.

When money is scarce, it is often prejudice that dictates what of the great diversity in languages and cultures to support.

If we now go back to our original metaphor of a pot that is boiling over, we can see that, even if the lid is in place, the content is still likely to spill. Instead of keeping the lid on, one could look for other – even metaphorical – solutions: one could lower the heat, remove the content or change its properties so that it stops boiling. Or one could use a bigger pot. Perhaps the changing pattern of diversity is just another threat, like many others. Is politically correct language a safe way of making the same racist claims without sounding like a racist? We all know that the lid on a boiling pot only makes the content boil faster! Hate speech remains hate speech, even when disguised as satire or quotation.

In the era of political correctness, we are repeatedly told that we are all equal and have to be treated equally. While it sounds good, it is simply not true. We are all different and the beauty of mankind is in this plurality, just as Hannah Arendt put it in her book *The Human Condition*: “Plurality is the condition of human action because we are all the same, that is human, in such a way that nobody is ever the same as anyone else who ever lived, lives, or will live” (Arendt 1998:9). We need to learn to *celebrate*, not simply *tolerate* this diversity.

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Magda Stroińska, Ph.D.  
McMaster University  
Department of Linguistics and Languages  
Togo Salmon Hall 629  
1280 Main Street West  
Hamilton, Ontario, Canada L8S 4M2  
Email: stroinsk@mcmaster.ca