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CULTURAL BECOMING IN A MULTICULTURAL AUSTRALIA:

A Study of the Educational and Cultural Experiences of a Group of University of Adelaide Higher Degree Students

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ABSTRACT

The study investigated the role of formal and informal education in the life experiences and 'cultural becoming' of a group of University of Adelaide higher degree students from a number of different ethnic backgrounds.

The intellectual framework of the thesis was based on Znaniecki's (1930) distinction between education as imposed cultural development, and self-education as the consciously directed activity of the creative individual. This theory of education was compared with Durkheim's superorganic concept of cultural norms, Bourdieu's theory of cultural reproduction, Freire's concepts of domestication and liberation and Giroux's view of students as active agents in their learning. The framework of Humanistic Sociology, as developed by Znaniecki and extended by Smolicz, was adopted for analysing individuals' cultural development or becoming in multicultural Australia. The concepts of group and personal cultural systems and core values were found to be useful tools for the study of individual identity and cultural valence. The methodology employed in this investigation was that of memoir analysis. This approach enabled the researcher to understand the factors which had influenced the authors' social development and had made them what they were in their own cultural terms.

The study involved the collection and analysis of memoir materials from thirty six higher degree students who were asked to write about the educational and cultural experiences which they felt had influenced their lives. Approximately half of the memoir authors came from English-speaking backgrounds, while the other half were born into non-English-speaking homes. These two categories were further subdivided according to whether the writer was born overseas or in Australia. This ethnic composition of the participants enabled patterns of educational and cultural influences, identified from an initial content analysis of the memoirs, to be compared across cultural and linguistic

backgrounds. The relevance of each of these factors in the remembered experiences of the writers was discussed in detail in relation to the four ethnic-birthplace groupings.

A second stage of analysis enabled the writers to be classified into five ideal types, based on a modification of Kloskowska's (1993) model of 'National Identification and Cultural Valence.' In this juxtaposition of the patterns of cultural activation and the national identification revealed in the memoirs, it became apparent that although all the respondents of English speaking background were in the Univalent, Single National Identification category they could be distinguished into two subgroups - those with Pluralistic Attitudes and those with Monistic Attitudes. In the case of respondents of non-English speaking backgrounds, a third could be classified as Bivalent, and of Single National Identification, a third as Bivalent, with Dual National Identification, and a third as Polyvalent, with Dual National Identification.

The conclusions considered the implications of the five ideal types for educational policies and practices in a multicultural society. The overwhelmingly monocultural ethos of the formal schooling experienced by most ESB authors highlights the need for multicultural education which is inclusive in cultural content. The bicultural or polycultural personal systems of the NESB writers illustrate the emergence of what Casmir (1993) refers to as the 'third culture'. In addition, the extent to which Znaniecki's concept of self-education was a factor in influencing the social and cultural becoming of the memoir writers was discussed. The findings point to the significance of informal educative activities generated by the respondents themselves at later stages in their lives as having an important influence in shaping their personal development, particularly in relation to the activation of and attitudes towards minority ethnic cultures.