

## Editorial

### **Otherness as a Social and Cultural Determinant of the Past, Present and Future**

It is likely that anyone who encounters the term otherness for the first time would think it describes something different from us and yet akin to us. And they would be right, just as they would simultaneously be wrong. Otherness is an exceptionally complex term, which cannot be understood separately from the idea of the self. When we want to articulate who is, to us, the other, we also have to articulate who is their opposite – the latter being us. Therefore, when speaking of the other, we inevitably speak of ourselves. The coupling of terms myself/other was mentioned already by Hegel, who emphasized that the identification of the Other enabled the synthetization of one's own identity (112). The Other (who is often identified within ethnic, racial, religious, geographical, and many other cultural and social categories) functions as a mirror. For Georg Simmel, for example, the Other is more than a stranger who is either close to or distant from us. The Other is an element that can simultaneously be a member of the group, outside of it, and in a confrontation with it (144). For Emanuel Levinas, the Other is what I am not. It is identified as one similar to us, but also different and extraneous. Precisely this extraneousness, which Levinas also refers to as alterity, illuminates a subject's path toward himself by demonstrating that which is intrinsic – where he belongs (43, 48). By identifying the Other, a person or a group is labeled in a process in which we construct our own roles, our position within the society, and the meaning of ourselves. To have an Other is essential to creating an identity, for by identifying the Other, we facilitate the understanding of that which is “here” and that which is “there” because, as Antony Smith emphasized, identity is not created merely from one's own experiences, memories, and myths, but through positioning oneself in relation to the collective identities of Others (11-36, 43). This process of synthetization of one's own identity consists of forming an awareness of an in-group, which is based on a necessary delimitation toward an out-group.

That is why, according to Durkheim, the drawing of boundaries is essential to the never-ceasing process of forming an identity. Creating social boundaries becomes a precondition, not a consequence of social integration (115-22). Therefore, in the process of othering, it is imperative to understand the dynamics and mechanism of the creation of boundaries by which we define who, where, and when (someone) is the Other. However, the boundaries are often blurred. They are shifting, sometimes completely imaginary and invisible (Baudrillard and Guillaume 50) and they depend on the viewpoint of the one who defines them, or rather imagines them – as Benedict Anderson vividly demonstrated while writing on the forming of modern nations. In the binary opposition of Us/Them, according to Fredrik Barth, it is crucial to understand the slash between those two words – meaning, the processes and context within which the boundaries are created, which consequentially leads to a better understanding of the dynamics of the identity formation (Wimmer). Thereby, the drawing of boundaries (be they real or symbolic ones) leads to the creation of social, cultural, and moral categories, on the basis of which the hierarchies among groups are generated (Kastoryano 79). This consists of (self-)categorization, (self-)stereotypization, and (self-)presentation of collective ideal types (Hogg and Abrams 21), or rather of ego/ethnocentric aspirations for which it is imperative to place the values of one's own group at the top of the ladder. In that process, although the Other could (and should) be seen as equal (Tekin 14), there are occurrences of demonization (witch-hunts and persecutions of heretics), dehumanization (racism), exploitation (colonization), subordination (slaveholding), neglect (ghettoization), even outright destruction (genocide) of the Other. A common justification of that process is that the Other is being brought to civilized, modern, orderly, and exalted (our) systems and values, while the actual purpose is the strengthening of one's own identity, the increase of one's own power, or even advancing one's own career, as Edward Said demonstrated on the example of the Orient. Therefore, the process of othering stems from a clear awareness of oneself, but one detached from the awareness of the Other. Ignorance of foreign systems of symbols and values, i. e. the network of meanings which one has to understand in order to rise above ego/ethnocentricity (Geertz 3-33), results in the process of othering. It is an unceasing process, for in its essence lies the synthetization of one's own identity. In other words, as Charles Tylor clarifies, although the "myself" is familiar with the idea or an obligation toward the other, the

“myself” is also confronted with the idea of purely biological prerogatives to an ideal fulfillment of oneself. According to the first idea, the “myself” should treat the others decently and excel among those similar to themselves. However, according to the second idea, the “myself” should continue to independently strive toward self-realization (Tylor 5; cf. Neumann 10), regardless of whether that would exclude the Others – or ourselves, as we are locked within our self-made boundaries and limitations.

It is precisely this “independent striving” that caused so many instances of othering throughout history, but in the present as well, as the spread of the epidemic, migration crises, and environmental disasters alter the economic, political, and cultural landscape of the world. The persistence of these numerous forms of othering in the culture and society of mankind prompted a group of researchers at the Catholic University of Croatia in Zagreb to embark on a project entitled “Otherness as a Social and Cultural Determinant of the Past, Present and Future” in 2017, led by the author of this introduction. While working on the project, we attempted to study the ways in which otherness had formed societies and cultures and to identify the elements of otherness that constructed the key social identities. While doing so, we focused on challenging the theory and the textual manifestation of othering. Therefore, the lodestar of the project was the concept of text as a source, which was critically analyzed according to the anticipated goals of the project, sometimes by reaching for knowledge outside of the strictly academic canon. This implied searching for manifestations of otherness by using an interdisciplinary approach and a theoretical, epistemological, and methodological articulation of not only its historical and anthropological aspects but also its folkloristic, psychoanalytical, and literary aspects. Ultimately, the project aimed at providing substantiated, relevant results that would, by transcending ethnocentric views, demonstrate more clearly the importance of otherness in the formation of identity and its fluidity.

For that purpose, this issue brings seven papers offering different views on the phenomenon of othering. In his paper “Dog-headed Creatures as the Other: The Role of Monsters in the Construction of the Croatian Identity,” the author of this introduction studied the concept of “dog-headed creatures,” which was used by European writers as early as the Classical Antiquity (and, later, in the Middle and the Early Modern Age), to explain the existence of “demonic” peoples and groups outside of the cultural circles acceptable to themselves. The author detected this concept in

manuscripts on the Croatian traditional culture from the end of the 19th century and demonstrated that the stories of dog-headed creatures were used for othering the Ottomans and other undesirable groups. The concept has been used later by contemporary Croatian cultural politics, which, by publishing the texts on dog-headed creatures, wanted to demonstrate that Croatia belonged to the Western and “civilized” cultural circle, in a time when new national identities were forged across Europe. Ivan Majnarić’s paper, entitled “The Others and the Croats in Early Medieval Eastern Adriatic History,” utilizes the viewpoint of the post-colonial theory of the Middle Ages and contextualizes the othering presented in the two oldest Eastern Adriatic medieval historical accounts on the example of the “destruction” of the city of Salona and the identities linked to it. This case demonstrates the diachronic perspective of the use of the concept of othering, but also its function in constructing a text which, in order to get the intended message across, implies that a past, undesirable Other can be transformed into a present, desirable Other. Nataša Polgar’s paper, “Drugost ženskog/vještičjeg tijela: institucionalne prakse o(d)značivanja” (“The Otherness of Woman’s/Witches’ Body: Institutional Practices of (De)Signification”), brings an exceptionally innovative analysis of the structuring of a witch’s body, based on the examples from the Early Modern judicial procedures on the territory of today’s Croatia. The author relies on the Lacanian and post-Lacanian interpretation of the body and the place in which a witch’s body was put. By emphasizing the fear of the Other as the fuel of all types of xenophobia toward witches, the image of the witch is analyzed as a construct of a patriarchal society with strong political dimensions. Karla Žagi’s paper, “Perceiving the Migrant as “Other”: Analysis of Three Main Categories in the European Migration Context,” deals with the contemporary processes of othering the migrants in Europe in general and specifically in Croatia. It demonstrates that the othering of migrants can be perceived in behavioral-perceptive, symbolical, and lingual categories, which makes the stance of the local populace toward migrants very complex, while the process of othering persists as a part of everyday life. Migrants are also the focus of the paper “A Critical Discourse Analytical Approach to Othering: Echoes of Syrian War in Turkish Children’s Literature” by Neslihan Kansu-Yetkiner, which did not originate within the aforementioned project but on the basis of the call for papers for this issue. In the paper, the author analyzes three examples of Turkish children’s literature on the topic of the Syrian civil war and demonstrates how children’s literature, which is used to inculcate societal norms, rules, and ideologies, is a tempting medium for denigrating and stereotyping the

Other in order to construct a positive image of the Self. The last two articles do not deal with the process of othering directly though they point out some related mechanisms. In his paper “Mapping the Anomalous in Caryl Phillips’s ‘Heartland,’” Murat Öner analyzes Caryl Phillips’s story “Heartland,” which focuses on the dehumanization and displacement of slaves from their African homeland during the British colonial rule. The author shows that the process is marked by a series of symbols – landscape, prison, trading post, the coast, the ocean, the ship above and below deck – which are gradually inscribed into a human being on his way from a free man toward an enslaved estranged body. The author of “Croatian Translations of Paradise Lost,” Kristina Grgić, analyzes five Croatian translations of Milton’s religious epic. She shows how Croatian literate culture changed and evolved in the course of almost two centuries that stand between the oldest and the latest translation. The author pays special attention to those parts in which translators, some of whom were priests, attenuated Milton’s criticism of and ironic stance toward the Catholic Church, adjusting the text to the predominantly Catholic Croatian readership.

With this thematic issue, which chronologically moves from identifying the process of othering in the Classical Antiquity to a contextualization of othering in the form shaped by modern-day wars, we attempted to contribute to the understanding of this complex, nearly omnipresent, and transhistorical concept. If we succeeded in offering at least a few explanations regarding its functioning, or in encouraging other authors for further considerations, our efforts were not in vain.

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