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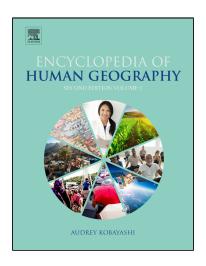
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Other/Otherness

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Glossary

Ethnocentrism The propensity of a group (in-group) to consider its members and values as superior to the members and values of other groups (out-groups).

Exotic Belonging to a faraway, foreign country, or civilization and thus demarcated from the norms established in and by the West.

Exotism Characteristic of exotic things/places/people.

Exoticism A taste for exotic objects/places/people.

Other Member of a dominated out-group, whose identity is considered lacking and who may be subject to discrimination by the in-group.

Othering Transforming a difference into otherness so as to create an in-group and an out-group.

Otherness Characteristic of the Other.

In-group A group to which the speaker, the person spoken of, etc. belongs.

Out-group A group to which the speaker, person spoken of, etc. does not belong.

The questions of the Other and otherness took the geographical world by storm beginning in the 1980s. Of course, geographers were interested in the elsewhere before that period. Homer enchanted his readers with his description of faraway, dreamlike lands; Herodotus was fascinated by Persian society; Hippocrates sought to explain societal diversity through the environment's influence. Renaissance-era explorers were amazed by the peculiarities of the civilizations they discovered. Since the end of the 19th Century and the institutionalization of colonial geography in Europe, geographers have sought to document the particularity of the physical environment and tropical societies.

All of these approaches seek to explain the spatial heterogeneity of societies. Although they claim to be more or less objective, they seek to demonstrate that Western civilization is superior to others and to explain why this is so.

Beginning with the development of radical geography and then feminist geography in the 1960s, geographers belonging to these traditions have taken an interest in minority groups who distinguish themselves from the (White, male) norm. But this interest had more to do with denouncing systems of oppression than with inquiring into the otherness of minority groups. It was not until the development of postmodern, postcolonial, and queer analyses that otherness became a geographical issue. In order to reach this point, geographers have had to ask questions about the diversity of groups in terms of socio-discursive construction and identity politics, rather than in terms of supposed objective difference, as had been done until then. These antiessentialist approaches deny the existence of any given prediscursive biological or social "reality" on which the distinction between one group and another could validly be based.

Definitions

Otherness is the result of a discursive process by which a dominant in-group ("Us," the Self) constructs one or many dominated outgroups ("Them," the Other) by stigmatizing difference—real or imagined—presented as a negation of identity and thus a motive for potential discrimination.

The creation of otherness (also called *othering*) consists of applying a principle that allows individuals to be classified into two hierarchical groups: them and us. The out-group is only coherent as a group as a result of its opposition to the in-group and of its lack of identity. This lack is based upon stereotypes that are obviously simplistic and largely stigmatizing. The in-group constructs one or more others, setting itself apart and giving itself an identity. Otherness and identity are two inseparable sides of the same coin. The Other only exists relative to the Self, and vice versa. The difference among the members of each group is underestimated, when the difference between the members of one group and the other is overestimated. Such a bias improves the coherence and the singularity of each group, stabilizing identity and otherness, and facilitating stereotyping.

The asymmetry in power relationships is central to the construction of otherness. The power at stake is discursive: it depends on the ability of a discourse to impose its categories. But this ability does not depend solely upon the logical power of the discourse, but also upon the (political, social, and economic) power of those who speak it. Only the dominant group is in a position to impose the value of its particularity (its identity) and to devalue the particularity of others (their otherness) while imposing corresponding discriminatory measures. Therefore, if the Other of Man is Woman, and if the Other of the White race is the Black race, the opposite

is not true (Beauvoir, 1952; Fanon, 1963). As argued by Gayatri Spivak, dominated out-groups are Others precisely because they are subject to the categories and practices of the dominant in-group, and because they are unable to prescribe their own norms and project their own voice. Out-groups cease to be Others when they manage to escape the oppression forced upon them by ingroups, in other words, when they speak up and succeed in conferring upon themselves a positive, autonomous identity ("black is beautiful"), and in calling for discursive legitimacy and a policy to establish norms, eventually constructing and devaluing their own out-groups. Another—and maybe more radical—way to contest othering is to refuse the dichotomy on which the process is based and to promote alternative and transgressive identities, such as hyphenated identities claiming that one could belong to more than one group, or queer identities that refuse gender and sexual binaries.

Fighting for the rights of the out-group may seem problematic insofar as the group exists as a group only in the eyes of the dominating in-group. For instance, defending gay people would mean first to admit a heteronormative categorization based on a form of homophobic essentialization. Strategic essentialism, a term coined by Spivak, is a political strategy allowing the members of a discriminated out-group to stand for their rights even at the risk of acknowledging—for a short time—the essentialized and stigmatizing identity given to them by the othering in-group.

Even if othering is fundamentally binary, the same person is necessarily submitted to several different but nevertheless simultaneous othering processes: for instance as Black, as poor, as homosexual, as disabled, as Muslim, etc. Thus, the experience of sexist othering imposed on a Black and a White woman is not the same, just as the experience of racist othering is not the same when applied to a male or a female Black person. The dichotomous processes of othering should always be analyzed at the intersection of the domination matrices where it actually occurs, as argued by Kimberlé Crenshaw. Intersectionality might present challenges when fighting discrimination, with each discriminated subgroup—or even individual—being located at a specific place along this intersection and having not much in common with others. For instance, there may be inherent limitations in a fight for "women" when White and Black women do not face the same discrimination and do not share the same identity. Nonetheless, they are both subjected and vulnerable, and, as suggested by Judith Butler, this vulnerability could be the basis for a coalition enlisting all minorities in their fight against the othering processes to which they are subjected.

The West and the Rest

The ethnocentric bias that creates otherness is undoubtedly an anthropological constant. All groups tend to value themselves and distinguish themselves from Others whom they devalue. For instance, according to Claude Lévy-Strauss, many autoethnonyms (such as Inuit or Bantu) refer to "the people" or to "the human being" considering the out-groups as more or less nonhuman.

On the other hand, the forms of this ethnocentrism are varied and have been constructed by discourse and practice throughout history. Certain constructs are specific to certain societies (such as the heterosexual-homosexual dichotomy) and others seem universal (such as the male-female dichotomy). All societies, then, create the Self and the Other with their own set of categories. Western society, however, stands out for two reasons.

First, otherness and identity are based on binary logic. Western thought, whose logic has been attached to the principle of identity, the law of noncontradiction, and the law of the excluded middle since the time of Aristotle, has produced a number of binaries that oppose a positively connoted term with a negatively connoted term, lending to the construction of the Self and the Other. Many such dichotomies exist: male-female, human-animal, believer-nonbeliever, healthy-ill, heterosexual-homosexual, Black-White, adult-child, etc.

Second, colonization allowed the West to export its values, which became acknowledged almost everywhere through the process of cultural integration. Western categories of identity and otherness, transmitted through the universalist claims of religion and science and forcibly imposed through colonization, have thus become pertinent far beyond the boundaries of the West.

This article only discusses Western constructions of otherness, which is mainly framed by the race, class, and gender matrices of domination and their intersection. This focus does not mean that other societies are unaware of the process. Rather, their particular categories of the Self and the Other have been less widely diffused than are those of the West. Therefore, for example, the system of races, although very recent and Western, has been imposed everywhere as a framework to conceive of human diversity, while the older caste system, belonging to the Indian world, has not.

Geographical Others

We, here, are the Self; they, there, are the Other. How and why do we think that those who are far away are more radically different, to the point of being Others? How can otherness be essentially geographical?

In Ancient Greece, the geographical form of otherness opposed Greek-speakers and Barbarians. A Barbarian was a person who did not speak Greek and thus had not mastered the *logos* (and was not familiar with democracy). His culture was lacking and he belonged to another civilization (Fig. 1). If this otherness comprises a geographical dimension, it is because cultural surfaces are divided into supposedly homogenous spatial blocs (countries, zones, continents, etc.). This construction of otherness is based on a hierarchy of civilizations and requires the use of a universal criterion that allows their comparison. Language and political systems fulfilled this role until the advent of Christianity and Islam, and then religion replaced them to oppose Us, believers,



Figure 1 Joseph-Noël Sylvestre, Sack of Rome by the Visigoths, 1890, oil on canvas,197x130cm, Sète, musée Paul-Valéry. (Wikimedia Commons: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Visigoths_sack_Rome.jpg)

and Them, nonbelievers. The Renaissance and the discovery of new civilizations, especially in America, brought the issue back to the forefront, paving the way for Westerners to search for the means to classify societies. The idea of universal progress, or a chronology that is valid for all societies, allows societies to be organized into a hierarchy from the most primitive (Hottentots, Kanaks, Bushmen, Pygmies, etc.) to the most civilized (Europeans.)

From the end of the 19th Century onward, anthropology, ethnology, and geography (still poorly differentiated) sought to give scientific basis to a typology of peoples and societies, a typology that is more or less explicitly a hierarchy. Darwin's theory of evolution offers a coherent scientific framework to explain species diversity through the diversity of the environments where natural selection takes place and through the relative isolation of these environments, which makes them favorable to the development of differentiated species. In order for it to "justify" the otherness among people, Darwin's theory needs only be transposed to human societies, with the development of a hierarchy of different environments and societies, and the implementation of certain differences as principles for exclusion. Therefore, Europe's climate and natural resources would explain the fact that (one of?) the world's most advanced societies developed there, while the extreme climates and lack (or abundance, which works equally as well) of natural resources characteristic of all other parts of the world would lock humanity there into a prior and primitive evolutionary stage.

Obviously, thinking of civilizations as different like Others justifies the supremacy of Ours and legitimizes its propensity to dominate them. The Greeks must go to war with the Persians, believers with nonbelievers, Europeans with Indigenous peoples. At worst this is extermination or enslavement; at best it spreads the Good Word, civilization, and progress.

The second geographical form of otherness does not oppose civilizations. Rather, it opposes civilized (meaning fully human) humanity and humanity still out in nature (or almost animal) (Fig. 2). It is the Savage, etymologically the Man of the Forest, opposed with man from cities and fields. This figure stigmatizes the human being who has not (yet) left his natural state. Folklore, if not European reality, is overflowing with such Woodsmen. Hairy and violent, they threaten villagers (especially the women of the village). But the figure of the Savage imposes itself as the descriptor of those who would constitute a lesser form of humanity during the Renaissance and the great explorations of Africa and, especially, America. It is thought that they go naked, cannot talk, engage in cannibalism, etc. They are even more worthy of extermination than are the Barbarians because their ability to integrate into Humanity is called into question. This form of otherness has a spatial component because civilization is seen as being diffused from a central location (Jerusalem, the city, Europe), and savages are in faraway zones (Australia) or the interstices (our forests.)



Figure 2 Cannibals in Brazil in 1557, Théodore de Bry. Grands voyages. Vol. II: Americae tertia pars (1592). In Brasiliam, etching (Wikimedia Commons).

Carving humanity into races and the world into continents is the third and most recent template that Europe has used to create a spatial form of otherness. This template still uses the figures of the barbarian and the savage but puts a new criterion into place that allows us, White people, to be opposed to them, people of Color. Skin color and certain secondary signs that physical anthropology has helped to identify are used to distinguish White human beings, the "superior" phase of humanity, from "inferior" races. Each race has a corresponding continent, a natural birthplace from which it can flourish. The anthropological fiction of races and the geographical fiction of continents allow these categories to be reified and naturalized by giving them a supposedly geographical legitimacy and a false sense of evidence ("it's obvious"). They feed off of each other to justify colonial policy and the domination of one race and continent over others. Looking beyond the many races, it is actually a binary form of otherness: the opposition of colonist/native or White/of Color.

Orientalism, as analyzed by Edward Said, encompasses all of these components (Fig. 3). The Oriental is characterized by his barbarity, his savageness, and his race. The Orient is the geographical fiction that gives him the basis for geographical legitimacy. Orientalism is the discourse through which the West constructs the otherness of the Turks, Moroccans, Persians, Indians, Japanese, etc., all reduced to the same stigmatizing stereotypes, and thus gives itself an identity in opposition to them. The West thereby gains the right, if not the duty, to dominate the Orient, to save it from despotism, superstition, misery, vice, slavery, decadence, etc.



Figure 3 Jean-Léon Gérôme, The Snake Charmer, c. 1879, 83x122 cm, Williamstown, Clark Art Institute (Wikimedia Commons: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Jean-L%C3%A9on G%C3%A9r%C3%B4me - Le charmeur de serpents.ipg).

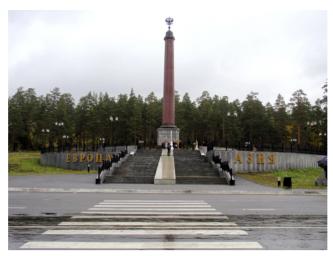


Figure 4 Europe—Asia: Monument on the border of Europe and Asia (Pervouralsk), built in 1837.(Wikimedia Commons: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Pervouralsk_Border_Europe_Asia.jpg).

Islamophobia, which developed in the United States and Europe after 9/11, the invasion of Iraq, and several waves of radical Islamic terrorism, has been described by scholars such as Douglas Little as a form of neo-Orientalism, shaping both Western popular culture and foreign policy. For instance, Jasbir Puar describes how homonationalist—and femonationalist—ideologies have been instrumentalizing homophobia—and sexism—so as to contrast in a xenophobic way "civilized" Western countries (supposedly where gays and women are not discriminated) to Islamic countries (supposedly where they endure barbaric violence). Religions, causing conflicts that would, according to Samuel Huntington, lead to a "clash of civilizations," seem at the beginning of the 21st Century to be a central factor in processes of othering.

Performative Borders

Basing othering on geography does not mean basing it on distance. On the contrary, distance, just as difference, could be measured and supposes a form of continuity between here and there, and between people living in different places. The Other does not live in a more or less distant place: he or she lives elsewhere, in another place. Borders are the geographical expression of othering. There must be a visible and unquestionable border separating the in-group and the out-group, or at least a no man's land; because there is no place between the in-group and the out-group where anybody could live or even exist. Othering, being based on a dichotomy, does not allow a continuous space. Space has to be discrete, broken into clearly delineated places, such as the place of the in-group and that of the out-group.

Bordering is ordering and othering: the spatial order builds in-groups and out-groups, identity, and otherness. Borders do not segregate preexisting distinct groups: they produce these groups as different. As early as 1969, Fredrik Barth suggested that ethnic groups are not based on a distinct core identity they share and that anthropologist should study; they are based on the boundaries separating one group from the others and where the interactions between the in-group and the out-group take place. Borders' performativity rests in their ability to create the groups they are meant to segregate (Fig. 4).

Borders' performativity works in four ways. First, there is the enunciation or the drawing of the border on a map or in a treaty, which claims that there is a border and specifies its location, splitting space into two different places, producing territories, national in-groups, and out-groups. Second, there is the materialization of the border in the landscape, which uses boundary markers to make the line visible and easy to read, and fences or walls to make it difficult to cross, such that everyone will see and acknowledge that there are two territories and hence two kinds of people. Third, there is the performance of official agents such as police, customs agents, and immigration officials who control the border, forcing all individuals to stop and take the presence and the meaning of the border into account. Finally, there is the performance of all the people who (try to) cross the border, subjecting themselves to controls, showing passports, and answering questions, or alternatively trying to pass the border illegally: willingly or not, they consolidate the dichotomy between the two countries. All these performances make the border happen, actually producing the identity of the in-group and the otherness of the outgroup.

In order to consolidate the existence and opposition of the in-group and the out-group, the border should be obvious and unquestionable. The othering process is legitimized and stabilized if the border is based on supposedly indisputable facts: human geography (race or ethnicity, language, religion, history, economy, etc.)—or even better because it is less contestable—physical geography (a shoreline, a river, a mountain ridge, etc.). Then, the opposition between the Other and the Self is taken for granted, as a natural fact. Borders do not only create and separate nations: they exist and work on many different scales, creating and separating all kinds of groups.

Spatial Organization

Not all forms of otherness are fully (or even mainly) geographical in nature. Women, homosexuals, the insane, Jews, and Muslims, all major figures of otherness in the West, owe their stigmatization to something other than their location. They are, after all, found among the Self. In addition, migrations (notably forced migrations in the context of trade) have resulted in making geographical Others from elsewhere come and live here among us.

The cohabitation of the Other and the Self in a common space is not a given. On the one hand, discriminatory policies toward Others are more difficult to implement if the two populations are intermixed. On the other hand, their cohabitation makes it more risky to maintain the particularities (real or imagined) and the stereotypes that distinguish the Self from the Other. Finally, it seems that symbolically, nothing can trump an otherness based on and justified by geography and borders. It would be all the more clear if men came from Mars and women came from Venus. Also, sets of spatial constructs and practices are based on the discursive construction of otherness to separate the Self from the Other.

Segregation is the most evident of these constructs. Confining Blacks and Jews to ghettos prevents them from intermixing with and therefore contaminating Whites and Christians. Furthermore, confining Others to community life among themselves in a degraded ghetto—where the concentration of poverty and exclusion compounds their effects—creates favorable conditions for the development of visible misery and a specific culture. These serve *a posteriori* as justification for the stigmatization and isolation of the discriminated group and confirm the dominant group's sense of superiority. The ghetto creates otherness. In addition to "pure" forms of ghettos created by law, there exist less clearly delimited forms of segregation that are maintained by the land market and/or the symbolic, or material violence of the dominant groups. There again, the in-group and the out-group derive part of their identity and their otherness from the more or less stigmatizing space prescribed to them (for example, the inner city or the suburbs).

On a smaller scale, the constructs confining the insane or the condemned in asylums and prisons fit the same logic. Their confinement sets them apart, worsens their condition, and confirms their particularity. They derive part of their identity—or rather, their otherness—from their prison. The domestic confinement of women can be analyzed in the same terms: by forbidding them access to public spaces and reducing the woman to her domestic role, patriarchal society creates and reproduces gender inequality. Female otherness is created by discourse, but also by spatial practices and constructs.

This process works on all scales: from gangs who occupy different urban neighborhoods to nations separated by interstate borders. A material and symbolic spatial assignation is added to linguistic, religious, ethnic, and other oppositions: people think that they owe their identity and superiority to those of their territory, and they ascribe to others the faults of their respective territories. Benedict Anderson has shown how discursive and spatial processes participate in the construction of national imagined communities and, thus, in the construction of figures of otherness against which these communities define themselves.

Exotism

Exotism constitutes the most directly geographical form of otherness, in that it opposes the abnormality of elsewhere with the normality of here. Exotism is not, of course, an attribute of the exotic place, object, or person. It is the result of a discursive process that consists of superimposing symbolic and material distance, mixing the stranger and the foreigner, and it only makes sense from one, exterior, point of view. As a construction of otherness, exotism is characterized by the asymmetry of its power relationships: it is Westerners who, during the phases of exploration, then colonization, defined elsewhere and delimited exotism. The word exotic has become a synonym of tropical or even colonial. It is out of the question to describe Europe as exotic until minds and words are decolonized.

Exoticism is characterized by giving value to the Other, contrary to ethnocentric bias. From Homer's fascination with faraway, more or less imaginary peoples to Jean-Jacques Rousseau's nostalgia for the noble savage, from the Romantic Orientalism of 19th-Century writers and painters to the primitivism of a Gauguin painting, from curiosity for ethnic tourism to the recognition of specific rights for first peoples, the West celebrates the Other and even proclaims its superiority through multiple forms (that are not always unambiguous).

The taste for exotica was established in the 18th Century when exotic turquerie, chinoiserie, japonaiserie, etc. came into fashion. It became commonplace in the 19th Century with colonization and spread to the tropical world. Up to that point, it was essentially characterized by the import of exotic products, by their pastiches, and by travel books and then colonial literature. Only certain privileged persons, well-to-do aristocrats or explorers, traveled to experience the pleasures of exotic lands. The development of mass tourism in the 1960s leveled the playing field and made their exotism a major resource for many countries.

According to Victor Segalen, exoticism is the pleasure of a sensation that, worn down by habit, is excited by novelty. But Segalen notes that from the end of the 19th Century onward, everything has been seen and radical exotism, the exotism experienced by the first explorers, is dead. In fact, Tzvetan Todorov demonstrates that it is paradoxical to value or desire something that is unknown. Exoticism consists more of showing enthusiasm for what has already been seen, said, or painted; what has been marked elsewhere as picturesque and been reproduced as such. The otherness of the exotic is not the brute and brutal otherness of the first encounter; it is the bland otherness, staged and transformed into merchandise, of the colonial world offered up as a spectacle, as in Orientalist paintings, human zoos, and exotic dance. Exoticism is less the pleasure of confronting otherness than the satisfaction of experiencing a reassuring version of this confrontation, true to our fantasies, that comforts us in our identity and superiority.

Conclusion

Geography is a remarkably effective producer of otherness. On the one hand, certain spatial patterns are very efficient, albeit discrete, in constructing and maintaining alterity. On the other hand, geography, like physical anthropology or history, has in the past proposed and continues to provide tales that provide foundations for discursive constructions of otherness. Yet these tales, rather than being taken for what they truly are—that is to say fictions delegitimized by their links to colonial regimes—have acquired a veneer of inevitability by grounding themselves in apparent scientific rationality.

Since alterity is consubstantial to relations of power and processes of oppression, geographers concerned by these relations must take personal responsibility in identifying and studying the spatial patterns that ground them. A critical and reflexive perspective therefore demands identifying and deconstructing the various more or less learned and so-called scientific geographical representations that serve as discursive bedrock for oppression.

See Also: Cultural Politics; Gender, Historical Geographies of; Ghettos; Homelessness; Postcolonialism; Race/Ethnicity; Segregation; Self-Other; Psychoanalysis; Territory and Territoriality.

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