Carolin Gilbaya

"Stranger (of) Here and Everywhere"

The Construction of Ethnicity in Selected Renaissance Plays

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“They were men enough to face the darkness.”
(Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*)

To my parents
Carola Stern-Gilbaya and Ibrahim Gilbaya.

In particular to my mother.
Without her loving support
this project would not have been possible
in the first place.

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Carolin Gilbaya, May 2017

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I. Theoretical Analysis

1. Introduction

> The crossing of ethnic borders and encounters with those of different ethnic background is one of the most significant experiences in the formation of our identities. (Stephen Spencer, *Race and Ethnicity*)[1]

> Our identity is partly shaped by recognition or its absence. Often by the misrecognition of others. (Charles Taylor, *Multiculturalism and the Politics of Recognition*)[2]

To create an ego, an alter is needed.[3] While notions of 'self' differ due to historical environment, theoretical foundation and political perspective,[4] there seems to be one indispensable formative element, one essential entity that is crucial for the establishment of singular and collective identities: the Other (see also Drost, 2010, 1).

Without a countermodel to dissociate oneself from, without a counterpole to distance oneself from, without a counterimage to distinguish oneself from, both, individuals[5] and groups, cannot dimensionally develop their specific characteristics (see also Assmann, A. 2006, 215).[6] The most striking of all antitheses[7] required is the *stranger*, is s/he marked by being *different* with regard to the pre-eminent paradigms of human nature: gender, age, class (see also McClintock, 1995, 5, 61; Spencer, 2006, 26; Loomba, 1998, 105, 122, 172), religion, sanity, and customs – in terms of "culture lines rather

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1 Spencer, 2006, 45.

2 Taylor, 1992, 25.

3 The present thesis follows Wolfgang Kaschuba who assumes that identity does not exist by itself but "stets auf soziale Relationen und kulturelle Interpretation verweist; sie konstituiert sich überhaupt erst durch die Bezugnahme auf ein Anderes" (Kaschuba, [1999] 2003, 138). According to Kaschuba this "Aushandlungsprozeß zwischen den Selbstbildern und den Fremdbildern in sozialen Begegnungs- und Beziehungssituationen gehört sicherlich zu den kompliziertesten Balanceakten, die wir im Alltag vollführen" (Kaschuba, [1999] 2003, 136). As is said in the epigraphs, though, apart from this form of relational (see Fumerton, 1999, 38) constitution, role models that one feels attached to, that one feels more similar to, are also needed.

4 The rich variety of concepts aiming at answering the fundamental question of how human beings shape themselves and are shaped by their environment are heterogeneous. Different ideas and ideals are attached to the self.

5 An individual is defined here with Aleida Assmann: "Individuum bezeichnet den einzelnen Menschen unter dem Gesichtspunkt seiner Differenz gegenüber allen anderen Menschen" (Assmann, A., 2006, 205).

6 However, "[i]ndividuelle Identität wird jedoch nicht nur von außen festgestellt, sondern auch von innen hervorgebracht; dann ist sie Teil einer individuellen Identitätsarbeit, die Formen der Selbsterforschung, Selbsterkenntnis und Selbstinszenierung einschließt" (Assmann, A., 2006, 205).

7 As will be explained later, strangers are also not as dissimilar as expected.

than color lines" (Gilroy, 2001, 1).[8] Despite their inherent discrepancies, the foreign and the familiar, since depending on the complementing or contrasting constituent, are, paradoxically, closely connected in a reciprocal relationship ranging from affirmation to subversion, from attraction to rejection, from exoticism to racism (see also Young, 1995, 3).[9]

In the English Renaissance,[10] the epoch this study examines, as an age which, not only forms the concept of *the new man*[11] after Descartes' famous credo 'cogito ergo sum' – "*I think*, *therefore I am*" (Descartes, I,7, [1644] 1950, 132, emphasis in the original) – ,[12] but also forms the notions of *nations*[13] (cf. Münkler, 1998, 16; Anderson, [1983] 2006, 36; Starkey, 1992, 147; Varela/Dhawan, 2005, 17), it is the stranger in

8 Thus, often, the powerless and marginalized, as well as the feared and the fascinating, are denoted in these terms (see also Parry, 2004, 34, 93).

9 As Jürgen Osterhammel explains the imperial paradox: "Auf der anderen Seite setzte die Idee der Zivilisierung aber ein Minimum an Anerkennung der 'Anderen' als entwicklungsfähige Subjekte voraus. Wie die Europäer an sich selbst erfahren hatten, kann es nur derjenige zu 'höherer' Zivilisation bringen, der lernfähig ist" (Osterhammel, 2007, 51-52). This will be illustrated with the textual examples in the second part of the study.

10 Apart from using the appealing and very suitable term *early modern* period, the author of this study will also use the established label *Renaissance*, to show the wide range of the epoch between the 14th and the 16th centuries, its link to classical antiquity, its rootedness in medieval thought.

11 As Aleida Assmann explains: "Das Interesse an individueller Identität entwickelte sich in der frühen Neuzeit von zwei Seiten aus: von außen durch die Formen staatlicher Kontrolle und Überwachung sowie von innen durch Techniken der Selbstforschung" (Assmann, A. 2006, 205).

12 Among early modern groundbreaking changes there is the crucial discovery of the individual. Due to the immensely increasing influence of *Humanism* and the slowly decreasing influence of the churches – which, however, are still of great power – human beings are perceived as originals, not as parts of an indistinguishable mass, as is one of the anthropological concepts of the Middle Ages. Renaissance selves, this study assumes, can be cautiously regarded as the first individuals, the desired first forms of agents of the free will, who embody the intriguing idea of an apotheosis, of being able to mould a unique personality of their own – connected with all the downsides to it.

13 In all these respects the early modern period is, as David Starkey suggests, also "an age of reform" (Starkey, 1992, 146). Anthony D. Smith defines a nation as "a named and self-defining human community whose members cultivate shared memories, symbols, myths, traditions and values, inhabit and are attached to historic territories or 'homelands', create and disseminate a distinctive public culture, and observe shared customs and standardized laws" (Smith, 2009, 29). According to Münkler nations are based on the "Entwicklung von Identitätsvorstellungen […] durch die Bevölkerungsgruppen, die nicht in direkter Interaktion und Kommunikation miteinander stehen, Vorstellungen von Zusammengehörigkeit und Gemeinsamkeiten entwickeln" (Münkler, 1998, 16). Anderson, in his seminal work [1983], defines *nations* as imagined communities that are not natural but fictional entities (see Anderson [1983] 2006, 22, 36-46). England, gradually establishing an empire, is preoccupied with such nation-forming.