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FOREIGNER

For as long as human beings have been living together in groups, cultures, or societies, differentiation from one's Other has been a major concern in order to guarantee in-group coherence as well as allow for external differentiations from other groups. What is perceived as foreign, how this is experienced and dealt with, varies according to the conceptional delimitations and mental patterns of organization which define the relationship between the domestic and the foreign (Benveniste 1969; Wimmer 1997). In the process of identifying and constituting one's own Self, each society and period generates its own specific figures of the foreign as exemplary, counter, or oppositional images.

This self-reference, i.e. the perception, articulation and discursive construction of everything foreign from the respective perspective of the Self, has become the basis for the 'xenological' interest in the foreign as a cultural trope (Wierlacher 1993; Wierlacher/Albrecht 2003). Xenological studies form an interdisciplinary focus for such issues of alterity as have been raised in cultural anthropology and structuralist anthropology after Lévi-Strauss, in comparatist imagology (witness the stress laid by Dyserinck 1993 on the *Fremderfahrung* as mechanism in inter-ethnic image formation), and in the areas of intercultural or philologies, Cultural Studies and intercultural hermeneutics. Such studies share an interest in the conditions for the formation and transformation of images of the Other.

The term 'foreign' as it developed from Simmel (1908) to Kristeva (1988) is more specific than other concepts such as otherness, difference and alterity. In German in particular (*Fremdheit*) it is semantically programmatic (Hermanns 1996; Jostes 1997; Albrecht 2003). Foreignness opera-

tionalizes otherness and alterity in a relational sense. Thus, the foreign is not an objective quality of whatever is distant, strange, unknown, unfamiliar, or rare (Wierlacher 1993) but relative vis-à-vis the observer's subjective experience or knowledge (Krusche 1990). It is part of a given social reality and, as such, subject to historical and cultural change. As individual perceptions and interpretations of reality are always connected with collective constructions of meaning, each individual's interpretative activities depend, more or less, on predominant models and their changing cultural and social functions.

Interpretations of the 'foreign' thus carry affective qualities. →Exoticism, xenophobia, and →ethnocentric views are specific ways to organize and structure the perception and interpretation of alterity as foreign (Foster 1982; Koebner & Pickerodt 1987; Erdheim 1988; Albrecht 1997). They conceive of what is seen as foreign either as something special or as stimulating, threatening, or inferior to one's own culture or society.

Thus, conditional upon historical circumstances, the notion of the →barbarian in classical antiquity was transformed from the negative counter-image of Greek excellence and virtue (*arete*) to the superior guardian of unspoilt simplicity and wisdom ('sophia') (Stutzinger 1993). The monstrous peoples and anthropomorphous creatures of medieval mythical geography illustrate the eurocentric point of view of a Christian cosmology that was authoritatively established (Kühnel 1993). As authority- and tradition-based knowledge was superseded by empirically-based knowledge, foreign people came to be seen as human beings with a different way of living. As figures of otherness, they were, at the same time, turned into 'inferior races' or 'noble savages' through utilitarian, exoticizing, or self-critical discourses (Kramer 1977; Kohl 1986) and, in the process, became part of European procedures of self-identification (Wimmer 1997). Repressed desires and apprehensions, fantasies and idealizations were projected upon foreign peoples (Erdheim 1988). An outstanding genre for the (literary) construction of images of foreign cultures, →travel accounts offer insights into this projective character of the category of the foreign. As sources for the analysis of intellectual history, they reveal how such images of the foreign are constituted and on what notions of the Self they are based (Harbsmeier 1994). The projection of other nations, whose post-medieval development has been analysed in the long-standing specialism of comparatist imagology, likewise highlights the interdependence of (national) images of the foreign and those of one's own self.

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