

INTRODUCTION TO THE SPECIAL ISSUE: EUROPE AND ITS OTHERS

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Received: January 2016; accepted January 2016

This special issue aims at analysing geographical imaginations of 'EUrope's' encounters with its geographical others. The premise is that these encounters are key to the understanding of European identity issues, as they are the sites of the negotiation of cultural and political boundaries between EUrope and non-EUrope. The notation 'EUrope' refers to the European Union (EU) – as opposed to Europe (Boedeltje & Van Houtum 2008) – and the many dimensions of the process of Europeanisation associated with this project of regional integration (Rovnyi & Bachmann 2012; Moisiu et al. 2013). The term 'geographical imaginations' describes the ways in which we spatially represent and make sense of places both near and far away. Manifestly, such 'imagination' have tangible political and geopolitical impacts through their contribution to shaping and proscribing EU policies and identities, as well as influencing both the nature and the depth of the relations between EUrope and its others. The selected contributions analyses each a specific encounter and their juxtaposition is meant to highlight the multiple others with whom EUrope engages and the diversity of approaches geographers deploy to investigate and conceptualise othering processes.

OTHERING, IDENTITY AND GEOPOLITICAL IMAGINATIONS

Othering processes separating the other from the self can be observed at any scale

level. They are widely acknowledged in human geography and other social sciences to explain in-group and out-group relations and the very formation of these groups (Staszak 2009). In political geography and international relations, geopolitical representations opposing us in our homeland and them outside are widely acknowledged in the formation of national and other territorial identities.

Inspired by existentialist philosophy (Sartre), feminism (Beauvoir) and by psychoanalysis (Lacan), social scientists have foregrounded relations between self and other in the formation of (collective) identities, most specifically in postcolonial studies. Some confusion emerges though from slightly different usages and the use of capitals, often neglecting the original distinction between the Other and the other in Lacan's work. In Lacan's psychoanalysis, the first refers to the *grand autre*, the symbolic Other in whose gaze the subject acquires identity, the second to distinction from similar others. In postcolonial theory the Other is the imperial centre, while the colonial others are those marginalised by the imperial discourse. Spivak (1985) has coined the term othering for the process by which these others are created, namely, by which otherness is created. While writing this introduction, we reread this seminal article and noticed with incredulity that the paper was originally presented at an Essex conference entitled 'Europe and Its

Others'. She opens the article with the following:

Two years ago, when a conference with the title "Europe and Its Others" was proposed by the Sociology of Literature Group at Essex, I made some pious remarks about an alternative title, namely, "Europe as an Other." (Spivak 1985, p. 247)

Her unsuccessful plea strangely resonates with the content of this issue, that attempts to foreground the others' view of the EU, rather than to remain EU-centric.

Othering was at the core of the work of Edward Said on *Orientalism* (1978) which has been particularly influential in cultural geography (Gregory 1994, 2004). Othering processes in geography have been studied in critical border studies, in connection to bordering processes (Van Houtum & Van Naerssen 2002, Van Houtum 2010) and to borderscapes (Ferrer-Gallardo & Van Houtum 2013, Brambilla et al. 2015), and the ongoing shift from othering neighbouring places to othering mobile others (Amilhat Szary & Giraut 2015). They have also been studied from the perspective of critical geopolitics to highlight the relation between nationalism and geopolitical representations of others (the 'us' here and the 'them' there; Dalby 1990; Dijkink 1996; Chatuverdi 2002; Moisis 2015). Othering has been studied in international relations too (Campbell's 1992 seminal work on security and identity and more recently Reinke de Buitrago 2013).

Both the border work of the EU and its place making through the European Neighbourhood Policy have been extensively studied by political geographers (especially Bialasiewicz et al 2009; Scott 2009; Bialasiewicz 2011; Celeta & Coletti 2015; for a review see Mamadouh 2015). In international relations othering has been foregrounded in relation to the Eastern enlargement (Neumann 1999) and the EU relations in the Mediterranean (Diez 2004, 2005) while others' image of EU have been acknowledged (Lucarelli 2008, 2014; Stråth 2010).

The EU has many geographical others: reluctant members (such as the United Kingdom), candidate member states (such as

Turkey), neighbouring states (in the Arab World), strategic partners such as Russia or China. For the European Union the Other with a capital O is the United States (Bialasiewicz et al. 2005; Elden & Bialasiewicz 2006, be it more from the view point of the othering of the EU by the US). Chronopolitical others have been noted to matter for the European integration project. Most attention went to the excess of nationalism, the two World Wars and the Shoah in the first half of the twentieth century as Europe's other (Diez 2004) but its colonial past is another important ghost (Hooper & Kramsch 2007). Contrary to what Diez (2004) was suggesting, a chronopolitical other is no alternative to a geopolitical other, instead 'othering is always simultaneously geopolitical and chronopolitical (Rozorov 2010)' (Klinke 2013: 686).

Two final remarks need to be made. First many othering processes pertaining to the European Union are internal (especially othering between member states, see Baig & Dağdelen 2013). Second othering, though imperative to any identity, comes in various shapes: each articulating different degrees of otherness, ranging from a different other, through an inferior other, to the other as an existential threat (Diez 2005). The type of othering processes at work in a specific encounter is therefore crucial for the way relations evolve. As we'll see below othering processes involving the EU are far from being reduced to plain antagonism.

EXPLORATIONS OF OTHERING PROCESSES INVOLVING EUROPE

This issue features five articles and two associated essays in the sections *Window on the Netherlands* and *Outlook on Europe*.¹ The authors in this special issue have slightly different conceptualisations of identity and othering, and the other(s) involved, oscillating between constructivist and poststructuralist approaches. The European Union is backgrounded and its others are foregrounded to emphasise the relational character of othering.

The first two papers deal with candidate member states and the way their candidacy

has impacted national identity and the associated geopolitical representations of the state and its place in the world. Zeynep Arkan (2016) examines the Turkish side of the interaction between Turkey and the European Union. She studies how the identity of Turkey has been reconceptualised by the JDP government that came to power in 2002, in the light of its candidacy, since joining the EU was challenging existing geopolitical representations of Turkey's position in the world. She discusses practices of othering and focuses more specifically on references to Europe and the European Union in Turkish foreign policy, and shows that re-imagining the role of Turkey and re-imagining 'Europe' went together.

Alun Jones and Julian Clark (2016) scrutinise how Iceland negotiates its relation with EUrope and thereby contributes to the scripting EUrope from outside. They discuss the geopolitical manoeuvrability of states and how their positioning strategy can change over time. In this paper, they analyse how Icelandic uniqueness is performed in negotiations with the European Union. They explore Iceland's successive repositionings towards the European Union, and towards the other Nordic countries.

The third and the fourth papers deal with the framing of the maritime regions bordering the EU. Xavier Ferrer-Gallardo and Olivier Kramsch (2016) consider the Mediterranean, both cradle of European civilisation and divide between Europe and its Southern others. They reveal the two contrasting logics at work at the Southern border of the European Union: the logics of cohesion expressed in the Euro-Mediterranean partnership of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) and the logics of fracture expressed in the hardening of border controls. They propose the concept of an archipelago-frontier to describe this situation. Moreover they revisit the cartographic imagination of Al-Idrissi, the legendary geographer at the court of Norman King Roger II of Sicily in the twelfth century, in their quest for alternative representations of the Mediterranean.

Phil Steinberg (2016) brings us to another maritime region: the Arctic, that he calls the Polar Mediterranean to stress the commonal-

ities with the Mediterranean, although the awakening to the opportunities of the Arctic is very recent. Steinberg revisits the Mediterranean experience as both inland sea and barrier, and shows how similar processes are at work in the Arctic. He considers 'mediterraneans' as culture hearths, as zones of (dis)unity, as sites of commercial opportunity, and as geostrategic zones of conflict. Finally he analyses the tension produced by the trope of the inland sea and the creation of proximate and distant others.

The fifth paper is very different as it moves away from politicians, decision-makers and diplomats to study everyday identity formation, more specifically the phenomenon of Russian cyber-brides. Ian Klinke (2016) contends that the fantasy of the Russian cyber-bride exposes the pervasiveness of geopolitical representation of Easternness. Drawing on critical geopolitics, but foremost on psychoanalysis, he examines the geopolitical imaginations of the British cyber-grooms and demonstrates the usefulness of the distinction between the big Other (Western society) and the little other (the gendered otherness of Russian women) to make sense of their expectations.

In the *Window on the Netherlands*, Hanna Janzen (2016) investigates further the relations between sexuality and identity at the national level. She revisits the Russian-Dutch year of friendship (2013) and the many confrontations that took place between Russia and the Netherlands that very year. They were justified by Dutch and Russian popularised discourses of cultural difference based on different approaches to LGBTI rights, thereby fostering antagonism and restricting the scale of political negotiation within Europe.

Finally, the *Outlook on Europe* published in this issue, features an essay by Olivier Kramsch (2016) about the ends of Europe ... in South America. He reflects on the contradictions of European territorial governance at its postcolonial frontier peripheries through an analysis of the bridge newly built over the river Oyapock which marks the border between French Guiana (a French overseas territory and one of the outermost regions of the European Union) and Brazil. He stresses the utopian geopolitics of the bridge

– conceived by successive French and Brazilian presidents as a bridge between the EU and Mercosul. Oblivious to the needs of local communities, the project was completed in 2011, but the bridge is not yet open for traffic (as the road through the Brazilian jungle remained impassable – that is: according to the French side). Recently the two countries fixed the inauguration to be held in August 2016 at the latest. Only time will tell whether the bridge will foster interactions between both shores, and how it will impact both the position of this EU island in South America and the othering processes at work in the relations between the EU and Mercosul.

Taken together, these contributions highlight the highly dynamic and diverse character of othering processes. Informed by critical geopolitics and postcolonial studies, political geographers are well equipped to contribute to the most needed enterprise of deconstructing (geographically shaped and rooted) occurrences of othering and performances of otherness, but also to identify different types of othering. This is particularly needed at a time EUrope seems increasingly unable to understand its many others (candidate member states, neighbours and strategic partners, but also an increasing number of averse member states, as well as migrants, neo-nationalists and alienated youths attracted to transnational fundamentalism) – and consequently itself. Hopefully this collection is more than a gesture in the right direction and provides new insights on EUrope and (some of) its others alike.

Note

1. The issue originated in two sessions organised by the authors at the 20th International Conference of Europeanists in June 2013 in Amsterdam under the title ‘Negotiating cultural and political boundaries of EUrope and its Other(s)’.

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