Ştefania Maria Custură, Vilma-Irén Mihály and Zsuzsa Tapodi, eds. *Întâlnirea cu celălalt. Studii de contactologie şi imagologie* [*Encounter with the Other. Studies in Contactology and Imagology*]

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The volume has 204 pages and contains scientific articles from the domains of contactology and imagology written by doctors of philology, researchers, teachers, and PhD students from different Romanian or foreign (Greek, Hungarian, Italian, Serbian) universities. The 17 articles of the volume are grouped into three thematic chapters: Stereotypes – Representations (7), Images through Literature (6), Intercultural Transfer (4).

The volume is the outcome of the *Fourth International Conference on Imagology* held at Sapientia Hungarian University of Transylvania in Miercurea Ciuc, which aimed to return to "the issue of images of nations in the context of global postmodernism, which has generated a wide area of studies about representations of identity and otherness"(*Preface*).[1] The volume presents the topics of the conference which "focused on the concept of imagology, understood as an essential condition for ethnic and cultural equilibrium" (*Preface*) and some key concepts such as "identity," "otherness," and "references to the Other." The term "contactology" covers a wide range of topics dealing with self-image, representation of the self and representation of the Other as it can be seen from the titles of the three chapters. The aim of the conference as well as of the present volume was to establish a professional dialogue in a cultural and socio-political context located in a region of linguistic diversity and cultural interference.

The publication tackles the concepts of the Other and otherness from several different perspectives such as gender, ethnicity, skin colour, social status, politics,

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1   Quotations from the Romanian article were translated by the reviewer, I. T.

religion, geography, linguistics, etc. Some of the articles even use a multi-level approach and combine the above mentioned perspectives. Obviously, some of these perspectives are impossible to be handled in isolation. For example, language and ethnicity are closely bound and, as Alexandru Gafton (15) affirms, "there is such an organic relationship between nation and language that linguists and historians state that glottogenesis is equal to ethnogenesis, that the appearance of a language also means the appearance of a nation and vice versa." The issue of gender is discussed in several articles, and is built upon the dichotomy of male/female, patriarchal/matriarchal, men/women considered to be the most obvious by Gafton (21), who also mentions that this dichotomy, which has been prevailing from prehistoric times, is rooted in the different fields of activity associated with man and woman. Male activity is related to public domains, while female activities are linked to the private spheres (*idem*). An article which discusses the issue of gender is that of Andreea Petre, entitled *Femininul, o figură a alterității în „Pădureanca" de Ioan Slavici* [*Feminity – An Image of Alterity in the "Girl from the Forest" by Ioan Slavici*].

Ethnicity is a recurring topic throughout the volume, being treated in general (Alexandru Gafton, Béla Bíró) and in particular (Klára Papp – the Greeks, the Jews, the Hungarians, the Romanians; Dumitru Elena – the Hungarians, the Romanians). Some authors focus on the complexity of defining ethnicity (Levente Pap – the Szeklers) or on the complex nature of ethnicity, providing an ethnic collage of literary characters (Anca Andriescu Garcia – literary characters as the sum of different ethnicities: Jewish, Spanish, Italian, Maltese, etc.). Ethnic diversity often generates conflicts as in the case of tradesmen of different ethnicity – Jews, Greeks or even Armenians versus local traders (Klára Papp). In this latter case, we can also sense an interference of ethnicity and social status, sometimes the notions merchant/tradesman being understood as a synonym for Jew, Greek or Armenian. Klára Papp also shows that under the name of "traders named 'Greeks'" we can actually find Greeks, Serbians, Macedonians, etc. (Papp, 32).

Ethnic conflicts are also presented in literature as shown by Elena Dumitru in *Aspecte ale raporturilor interetnice în povestirea „Stele ardelene" de Tamási Áron* [*Aspects of the Intercultural Relations in "Transylvanian Stars" by Áron Tamási*]. Literary analysis is thus another way to present and discuss the situation of minorities, especially the issues related to Hungarian minorities and the Szeklers after the Treaty of Trianon. This is a world of taboos characterised by a strong "instinct of preservation and defence which is consciously highlighted by the author in exaggeration in order to point out another basic aspect which can occur in any multi-ethnic society, namely mixed personal relations and marriages" (Dumitru, 136).

Another interesting topic is the origins of Szeklers, which has attracted and will continuously attract several researchers because of its debatable character.

According to Pap (60) "[t]he issue of Szekler origins is one of the great enigmas of history" even if there are a variety of theories, the oldest being the Hunnic origin, as it is shown in Pap's article on *Originea secuilor în opera „De originibus populorum Transilvaniae" de Ion Budai Deleanu* [*The Origins of the Szeklers in "De originibus populorum Transilvaniae" by Ion Budai Deleanu*]. Regarding the Szeklers' self-representation, the author points out that "[t]he Szeklers do not have their own country but they have their own territory, they also have their myth of origins and a history of their own. The Szeklers are somewhat more conscious than other nations from the Carpathian Basin as they have a Socratic attitude towards their own origin: they know for sure that they do not know anything for sure" (Pap, 61). The article then presents the image of the Szeklers as depicted in Budai Deleanu's writing.

Otherness generated by skin colour is another issue discussed by several authors in the volume. Lena Dimitrakopoulou presents the Greek perception of the black and black culture in her article entitled *Reprezentări ale „alterității": portretul rasei și al culturii afro-americane în Grecia de la mijlocul secolului al XIX-lea până în anii interbelici* [*Representations of 'Otherness': the Portrayal of the Black and Black Culture in Greece from the Mid Nineteenth Century to the Interwar Years*], while Custură Ștefania Maria discusses the issue as represented in press publications and arts in the article *Identitate și alteritate în jurnalul lui Johann Martin Honigberger, „Treizeci și cinci de ani în Orient"* [*Identity and Otherness in the Journal of Johann Martin Honigberger*]. The two authors discuss otherness by giving examples not only of the negative vs. positive perceptions but also of direct information and impressions.

Social status is another distinctive feature, often generator of conflicts, whether real or fictional, as it is shown in the articles that discuss this issue. Social differences are present through the dichotomy of rich versus poor. This topic is dealt with in the article written by Klára Papp, entitled *Negustorii greci și evrei din comitatul Bihor în secolul al XVIII-lea, în oglinda proceselor-verbale de consemnare a unor mărturii* [*Greek and Jew Tradesmen of Bihor County in the 18th Century as Present in the Official Reports of Testimonies*] along other issues such as religious or ethnic differences. This article shows that high social status might trigger ethnic, linguistic or religious benefits as well. Due to their social status, Jew and Greek tradesmen obtained other rights as well, such as having their own churches, using their mother tongue, owning properties, having nobility titles, even their "education became compulsory" (Papp, 50).

Ideology is presented on both political and religious levels. On the political level we can find the presentation of the communist ideology, for example in the *False reprezentări naționale și etnice propagate de literatura școlară în perioada comunistă* [*False National and Ethnical Representations Widely Promoted in the School Literature during Communism*], an article written by Cosmina Cristescu

and Cristina Pipoş. The article presents two periods of the communist regime, the one marked by Gheorghe Gheorghiu Dej and the other by Nicolae Ceauşescu, and focuses on the idea of textbooks as "instruments of propaganda."

The same topic is discussed in Anca Andriescu-Garcia's article *Duşmanul construit sau despre cum se transformă propaganda în istorie* [*Inventing the Enemy. When Propaganda Becomes History*]. This article, besides the analysis of Eco's novel *The Prague cemetery*, speaks about the concept of the "new man" (in Marxist and fascist vision) of the 20th century, which "oscillates between these two extreme images—one of mythical origins, and one which is antagonistic to everything that preceded it, and is presumably completely new" (Andriescu-Garcia, 157). The novel analysed by Anca Andriescu-Garcia in the aforementioned article can also be read, from the perspective of "fictional politics," namely, where ethnic, religious etc. differences are pushed to caricature, as it is shown by the author. Andriescu-Garcia identifies the "invention of the enemy" as being the key metaphor in Eco's *The Prague Cemetery*. In *Inventing the Enemy* Eco writes: "Having an enemy is important not only to define our identity but also to provide us with an obstacle against which to measure our system of values and, in seeking to overcome it, to demonstrate our own worth. So when there is no enemy, we have to invent one." The article written by Susana-Monica Tapodi *Dimensiuni recente ale alterității în literaturile contemporane maghiară şi română* [*Recent Dimensions of Otherness in Contemporary Hungarian and Romanian Literature*] also reflects on political ideologies as it presents political oppression as a force that erases ethnic, religious boundaries to the extent of unrecognizability in the novels of Ádám Bodor (*The Sinistra Zone*) and Corin Braga *Claustofobul* [*The Claustrophobe*]. The two novels share a lot of similarities and common elements such as the main topics and issues that are presented in the novels—"dehumanizing dictatorship, the world of concentration camps, a reality that transforms into a nightmare" (Tapodi, 143)—the dark atmosphere of the narrative, and the scene of "interethnic area." The author shows how in the two novels ethnic, religious, cultural identity or even general human issues are marked by politics, which distorts all types of identity and humanity to the extent of eliminating faith and belief and transforming them into tools of totalitarian political ideology.

The volume also discusses ideology from a religious point of view. Alexandru Gafton in his article entitled *The Other* claims that "faith, in general, and religious faith, in particular is stronger than nationality" (Gafton, 19). Religious ideologies are presented in the volume through the dichotomies of catholic versus protestant, Jews or Turks versus Christians, orthodox versus catholic or dichotomies such as sacred and profane, the pure versus the impure. Gafton also mentions the importance of religion in shaping identity and points out its disadvantages which are rooted in the fact that "believers are limited in their thoughts, behaviour and relationships with others […]. Identity comes from

consistency and not equilibrium, whether it is dynamic or not. National identity is too general and can be diminished, while religion imposes several limitations which can make a community homogeneous and differentiate it from all other communities" (Gafton, 20).

In line with the above mentioned idea of limitation we can also mention the article written by Erika Mária Tódor, entitled *Hărțile şi căile de cunoaştere în contextul alterității lingvistice* [*Maps and Ways of Knowing in the Context of Linguistic Otherness*]. The article is based on a wider research called "Barometru cultural 2010" [Cultural barometer 2010] carried out by Gallup Romania in cooperation with the Romanian Institute for Research on National Minorities from Cluj-Napoca. The article presents "the world within the context of linguistic diversity" (Tódor, 198). The author discusses knowing and understanding reality in Gadamerian terms, namely as "the ability to listen to the other" (*idem*). The author also highlights that the Gadamerian perspective leads to another interpretation of language acquisition, this being no longer a matter of linguistics, but an epistemological one and thus the acquisition of a language requires not only learning but also knowing each other, learning accompanied by understanding existential forms and specific culture of the Other.

Bi- and multilingualism are also discussed by Béla Bíró, who in his article *Prejudecata prejudecății* [*The Preconception of Prejudice*] claims that "[I]n order to arrive at a context of real multiculturalism and reciprocity minority languages should be given official status and legal opportunities should be created so that minority languages would be accessible for the members of the majority community, at least within the territory" (Bíró, 28).

Linguistic diversity is the topic of other two articles, namely, *Reflectarea stereotipurilor etnice în proverbe* [*Ethnic Stereotypes as Reflected in the Proverbs*] by Ioan Milică and *Imagini culturale ca o problemă în procesul traducerii* [*Cultural Images as Problems in Translation*] by Dagmar Maria Anoca. The article written by Milică uses Goffman's concept on social identity as a relation between virtual and actual identity and he states that "the relationship between projection (the virtual identity) and observation (the actual identity) can generate balance/convergence or imbalances/differences where identity and diversity reciprocally and critically constitute and delimit each other" (Milică, 186–187). The author discusses ethnicity through proverbs which can build a positive or negative image about the other.

The article written by Dagmar Maria Anoca emphasizes some of the translation problems generated from cultural diversity and brings examples which show that certain phrases or terms with positive connotation in one language (e.g. Slovak) through denotative translation into Romanian may lose their meaning or can even transform into negative, pejorative terms (Anoca, 166). Besides translation difficulties caused by cultural diversity, the author presents some examples

where gender representation in different languages (Slovak and Romanian) may also generate problems.

The main topic presented by Ramadanski's article *Interacțiuni culturale* [*Cultural Interactions*] is, on the one hand, the mystification of a text written by Mór Jókai by the young Chekhov, and, on the other hand, the triple mask of a young Russian contemporary novelist, Faina Grimberg, who presented herself as the translator of a Hungarian author but this Hungarian author turns out to be just a pseudonym for an immigrant couple who live in London (Ramadanski, 130). The author shows that Faina Grimberg has published several novels "under the names of some fictive foreign authors and she stated to be their translator [...] The translator as the mask of the author is nothing else but the reversion of the idea of plagiarism" (Ramadanski, 128).

Geography appears in some articles of the volume as a marker of otherness through the dichotomies East/West, civilized/uncivilized or primitive, etc. An interesting article is that of Valentin Trifescu who in *Inventarierea spațiului alsacian în istoriografia de artă regionalistă din prima jumătate a secolului al XX-lea*" [*The Inventory of the Alsatian Territory in the Historiography of Regional Art in the First Half of the Twentieth Century*] presents the disputes over a territory located at the borderline of two great powers, France and Germany. The author shows that despite territorial, linguistic and ethnic controversies important cultural elements were born which later became symbols of Alsatian identity and art, such as the bell towers (campanile).

I believe the present volume is important and relevant not only because of the wide range of identity issues discussed (religion, ethnicity, gender, social, political, etc.) but also because of the different perspectives and domains from which these issues are approached (psychology, philosophy, theology, statistics, linguistics, literature, history, etc.). Furthermore, the volume deals with issues and terminology that have often been (and will probably be) considered taboos as it presents concepts such as intolerance, stigmatising, caricature, fixed ideas, prejudice and preconceptions. As one of the authors states "Where there are two competing elements, hierarchy already appears" (Gafton, 21) but "the inability to understand the other implicitly means the inability to understand the self" (Gafton, 22).