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# Naturalising Perceived Otherness: Embodied Patterns of Violence

*Melinda Niehus-Kettler*

*This essay takes an Anglophone Cultural Studies approach to reflect on the interdependence among as well as the individual (implicit) impact of the elements constituting our (embodied) power structures. These are, e.g., bodily experience/s such as shame and fear, everyday and institutional discourses and practices, but also manifestations of differences and particularities that we transform into phenomena such as “norms”, “binary systems” and “binary organisations”. The analysis of seemingly cyclic “Othering processes” and patterns of violence shows how people who identify as trans\*, inter\*, or non-binary have to live through and embody epistemological, emotional, and/or physical violence. At the same time, the descriptions illustrate numberless potential forms of resistance and change.*

Keywords: binary systems, embodied power structures, embodiment, abuse cycles, patterns of violence, Othering, resistance, percept cycles, LGTBQI+ communities, punishment

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*Gender*, “as a corporeal field of cultural play, ...[entails] strict punishments for contesting the script by performing out of turn or through unwarranted improvisations” (Butler 2004: 910). In one scene of the Netflix series *Orange Is the New Black*, we can discern the social sanctioning of “gender inappropriate behaviour” and appearances as part of everyday discourses among family members (Lorber 2009: 60). It is the punishment of the character “Carrie Black,” AKA “Black” or “Big Boo”. Perceiving epistemic, emotional, and psychological forms of violence, the viewers learn that, as a child and teenager but even in her twenties, she felt alienated, was mocked and shamed for not fulfilling social and gender ideals. Her parents and community coerced her into wearing dresses, blending in, and hiding her individuality. Now, at the age of 42, she has avoided to meet her family for years. In a retrospect, her experiences living the life of a *butch*, i.e. a perceived masculine lesbian, are portrayed in a dialogue. The character “Black” wants to say Goodbye to her dying mother, she is lambasted talking to her father on the hospital corridor, though. He maintains that his dying wife could not “handle” the “sight of her dyke daughter”, that it would “upset her” (Makris 2015: 0:43). “Black” takes it that he is implying it would “make her [even]

worse” (Makris 2015: 0:44). The father insists that “Black’s” short hair and outfit, which consists of trainers, regular jeans, and a hooded sweatshirt, is merely “a costume”, that it would not “kill” her to change her appearances for her family (Makris 2015: 0:45). Warning his child to consider whether “[her] costume is worth what [it is] costing [her]”, he also claims that “no one gets the privilege of being themselves all the time” (Makris 2015: 0:45). “Black” argues, however, that her mother could have taken “some of the time” in the last 40 years to work on “accepting” her daughter “for who [she is], rather than mourning every fucking thing that [she is] not” (Makris 2015: 0:46).

BLACK/BIG BOO: [in a constrained voice] I...have had to fight...for this...all my life, Dad. All my life. Strangers, girlfriends...fucking...even my own parents...all asking me to be something that I’m not. Do you have any idea what that feels like!? Like...your whole fucking existence is being denied — like, ‘Whoa, you’d be better off if you were invisible....!’ Yeah... , I refuse to be invisible, Daddy. Not for you. Not for Mom. Not for anybody....So..., I’m sorry...[she leaves the hospital crying]. (Makris 2015: 0:46)

This dialogue can be read as reflecting how expressing our gender identity in real life warrants judgements and sanctions (Butler 2004: 910). If we decide to simply be our-/selves, we do so at our own peril. Gender can indeed be conceived of as a vital element of our power structures since it is one of their most affective concepts. It constitutes a part of our ubiquitous ordering mechanisms that rely on dichotomies. It is a category sustaining and re-/generated by patriarchal, capitalistic, and (post)colonial systems. Above all, any system, to protect itself, will go to great lengths to silence and render invisible anyone who questions its order/s and/or alleges the abuse of power. Re-/enforcing bodily experience/s such as fear, shame or contempt, discrediting discourses as well as incapacitating and confining practices are part and parcel of these manoeuvres. By doing so, our (self-proclaimed) authorities discipline and sanction those perceived as different from the *norms*. In other words, they predominantly sanction, e.g., perceived female, non-binary, transgender, and non-western identities. It seems that, within cycles of abuse, violent social, parental, corporate, and governmental authorities repeatedly delegitimise *the others’* agency and self-definition. Thereby, they delegitimise the survivors’ sense of self as well.

In the following paragraphs, scrutinising *othering* processes and abuse cycles from an Anglophone Cultural Studies-informed perspective, I will delineate some of the most effective elements of our power structures. These appear to make up our perceived identities, but also our affective makeup and accumulated knowledge in terms of *somebody*, *something*, and *ourselves*. Among these elements are bodily experience/s, everyday and institutional discourses and practices defined and structured by metaphorical concepts of *the others* as *threats*, as *patients*, *sinner*s, and/or *criminal*s. In particular

authors of medical, colonial, religious, and legal discourses have re-/created and disseminated a number of fictional stories that re-/generate our “economy of credibility”, which still affects *the others* much more adversely than our human *norms* (Fricker 2007: 1, 6, 151). Within cyclic systems, these narratives, commonly distributed and controlled by (self-)proclaimed authorities, reinforce dominant ideologies. They beget, nurture, and manifest in segregating and eliminating practices, phenomena such as binary systems and the concept of *deviance*. It seems, in the course of time, all of these elements and processes re-/create perceived *otherness*, i.e. a social construct and potpourri of (bodily) attributes that have a negative connotation.

These lief-altering manoeuvres can not only be regarded as *othering* processes but also as forms of epistemic, economic, colonial, political, medical, and reproductive violence. They constitute and bring forth forms of emotional, psychological, physical and/or sexual abuse that affect all of us.

I strongly believe in challenging generalisations and universalism, in acknowledging the impact of embodied intersectionality.<sup>1</sup> It is essential to recognise the particularities, the discrepancies, the powerful and valuable differences among *and within* the groups of *the perceived others/ the norms, the perceived abusers/ the abused*. It feels equally important to emphasise that not all or only *the perceived others* identify as survivors of forms and cycles of violence. Neither do all or only *the perceived norms* constitute our (self-proclaimed) authorities. Against the backdrop of precarity and the fact that different parts of our identity intersect – for example, our sexual orientation, gender identity, bodily and cognitive abilities, *racial*, socio-economic and/or religious background – it seems crucial to add that those whom our societies have constructed and (still) perceive as *the others* are more susceptible to forms of injustice and violence, though (e.g. Fricker 2007: 1, 6). Due to different but intertwined and complementing supremacist ideologies, *the others* are certainly very likely to embody and become survivors of shaming and sanctioning processes. They are likely to embody and become survivors of de- and infra-humanisation, infantilisation, isolation, confinements, sexual and/or physical violence. And, in a rather general way, the scope, position, and treatment of survivors of abuse appear to be effected and re-/defined by our discrediting and incapacitating discourses and practices. These are, more often than not, structured by implicit metaphorical concepts of *the others* as

1 It is a given that I can and will only speak for myself. In this chapter, based on my personal background and education, based on my metaphorically and literally limited perspective, I will delineate western constructions of otherness rooted in and vivified by binary systems. The terms that are given in italics must be regarded as social constructs and are accordingly marked – among other things, to simplify the reading process. Moreover, I do not mean to suggest that anything such as a homogenous group of, e.g., the others, the abused, of survivors, women, non-westerners, and/or members of the LGTBQIA+ communities exists.

threats or mere objects, as less-than human transgressors, wards, and/or invalids.

In my mind, we embody this multilayered tissue of violence via and through diverse *percepts*, namely our sensations, emotions that we recognise in others, representations, objects, and phenomena that we perceive, but also (metaphorical) concepts. With my delineations, I will put some of Michel Foucault's, Judith Lorber's and Sara Ahmed's theories into dialogue with the violent discourses, practices, and bodily experience/s that many of us live through in real life – and which are mirrored in the Netflix series *Orange Is the New Black*. I conclude by describing fragments of our identities in the form of a concept that I have termed *percept cycles*. This sketch might open up ways of imagining our embodying processes. It illustrates how *othering* processes and, thereby, forms of violence affect and manifest in our bodies and (hi)stories. In the end, forms of violence re-/enforce and justify silences and invisibility. Furthermore, they effect lacks of legitimised bodily autonomy as well as lacks of legitimised bodily, social, and global mobility. In doing so, they seem to become part of and perpetuate (mostly unquestioned) *othering* processes and embodied trans-generational cycles of abuse.

Returning briefly to *Orange Is the New Black*, it is salient how punitive measures are applied by (self-proclaimed) authorities outside as well as inside, before and after "Litchfield Penitentiary", for example by parents and partners, by inmates and correctional officers (Abraham 2015: 0:15). Overall, the depicted living circumstances within and beyond the prison walls can be regarded as inspired by and reminiscent of Foucault's concept of the *Panopticon*, i.e. carceral structures as a metaphor for our society and its modern regimes to control and discipline the individual and the species body (Foucault 1995: 148). While the show is based on Piper Kerman's memoir, *Orange Is the New Black: My Year In a Women's Prison* (2010), the characters' offences as manifest in their former, actually harmful criminal acts (drug trafficking, robberies, murders, etc) fade into the background. By contrast, the prisoners are punished for becoming visible within heteronormative and sanist power structures, for allegedly gender-inappropriate and/or insane conduct. The individual storylines mirror how our real-life, harmful dichotomisation, e.g. by sexual orientation, gender, class, *race*, and health "constructs the gradation of a heterogenous society's stratification scheme" (Lorber 2009: 60). Moreover, the diverse characters' (hi)stories exemplify how categories and hegemonic ideals such as cisgender, male, and/or sane, are mis-/used to sanction and "define the Other" (Lorber 2009: 61). For example, in a scene set in "Litchfield", the African-American character "Sophia Bursat" who identifies as a transgender woman refuses to answer, is stripped and beaten up following some other inmates' demanding to know "what's between [her] legs" (Abraham 2015: 0:09). Having been subjected to infra- and dehumanising discourses for a while, "Sophia" is attacked and

summoned to “Joe Caputo”, the “director of human activities”. She is informed that she will be taken to the *SHU*, i.e. the “Special Housing Unit”, which means she will be placed into solitary confinement (Abraham 2015: 0:09, 0:15). Whereas the warden concedes that “it’s [never] ok to punish the victim of a hate-crime”, he also acknowledges that the attack is the result of “herd mentality”, that “people don’t like what they can’t understand” (Abraham 2015: 0:09, 0:15). According to him and other institutional authorities, “Sophia” being isolated and confined is “for [her] own protection” (Abraham 2015: 0:09, 0:15, 0:56).

The two scenes that I have mentioned are obviously part of fictional stories. Still, they can be perceived as reflecting *and* challenging how real-life individual, institutional, and historical violence re-generate silences, invisibility and, thereby, the binary system of *the norm/ the other*. The meta-narrative and embedded stories, i.e. the characters’ individual (hi)stories illustrate how some individuals and social groups are more susceptible to “epistemic injustice” and various forms of violence (Fricker 2007: 6, 118,120, 148-151). Time and time again, they experience multiple forms of confinements for the simple reason that epistemic, economic, and psychological violence limit their legitimate agency. Above all else, the two scenes highlight how the parental and institutional authorities insinuate and clearly state that they do not only care for and protect allegedly *normal* human beings. They pretend to care for and to protect the heterosexual mother and the cisgender prison community from the sight of those who identify as lesbian and transgender respectively. And, despite their actually abusive behaviour, these authorities also pretend to care for and to protect “Black” and “Sophia” from themselves, namely from their allegedly *abnormal*, dangerous dispositions, from their agency and gender identity becoming visible. All in all, the living circumstances of the protagonists can be interpreted as depicting how survivors within abusive individual and societal relationships repeatedly experience gaslighting, pre-convictions, as well as re-victimisation.

## 1 Within cycles of othering processes, within cycles of abuse?!

Vital elements of any harmful bond seem to be epistemic, economic, psychological, emotional, and/or sexual violence. More often than not, damaging individual relationships and the compliance of those who are being hurt are also manifest in and re-/enforced by systemic violence. The abused person’s and/or social group’s conformity is usually caused by financial dependency, the fear of social stigma, but also a lack of bodily, social, and global mobility.

The two scenes in *Orange Is the New Black* can be regarded as mirroring these very conditions, but also the characters' resistance to the inherent power dynamics. In a wider sense, the violent – actually very often merely self-proclaimed – authorities in the Netflix show can be conceived of as representing real-life abusive human beings and social institutions. It could be the allegedly ethical teacher, the supervisor or physician who abuses their position of trust and power. Violent individuals often hide behind the mask of the caring parent or partner, the protective friend, the democratic politician, the righteous clergyman or the philanthropic NGO – the seemingly morally superior authorities. Virtue-signalling is one of the most effective tricks up their sleeves.

Generally, in order to re-/generate hegemony, patriarchy, capitalism, and (post)colonialism have re-/created the illusion of our human authorities' infallibility, integrity, and goodwill. They re-/generate and justify the belief in the *norms'* absolute competence and purportedly *natural* supremacy. Moreover, it seems as if these systems do not only re-/produce, but even reward violence and contempt for others.. They appear to make use of devaluation and elimination tactics to keep allegedly less valuable human beings in their place. Ultimately, on the one hand, abusive systems profit from the myth of the inferiority of *the others* who are “defined by [their] faults, devalued and susceptible to discrimination” (Staszak 2009: 43). On the other hand, these systems depend on the myth of the superiority of people who “embody the norms, are valued” and have, as a result, the power to make up “categories” and impose legitimised sanctions (Staszak 2009: 43). Actually, most of us are familiar with this phenomenon. Despite our parental and institutional authorities' claiming to care about and/or to love everyone equally, some of us become the scapegoat. Some of us become the favourite child (for a while) – perhaps because we look so much like our parents, because we do not question our authorities' decisions and comply with their rules. Simply put, individual and societal power dynamics and structures can be perceived as encompassing and re-/producing highly effective bodily experience/s, discourses, practices, and (manifestations turned) phenomena. All of which beget, nurture, and manifest in non-violent and violent social, parental, corporate, and governmental (self-proclaimed) authorities. Many of whom (feel entitled to) delegitimise, regulate, and punish other human beings – oftentimes, to stay in a superior position and control.

Drawing on Foucault's theories on disciplining discourses and practices, we can presume that an individual's or a nation's body are (implicitly) categorised for various reasons, but most definitely in the interest of our authorities. The examination and labelling of populations in general and, e.g., new-borns and members of the LGTBQIA+ communities in particular constitute highly effective means to mark identities. They can also be conceived of as very harmful and lasting ways to surveil, order, and de-/form identities.



*Otherness* and *deviance* are the sources and symptoms of these processes that represent forms of individual, social, and institutional control (Foucault 1995: 191). Foucault suggests that our “body,” in other words, our bodily experience/s, affective makeup and accumulated knowledge are “carefully fabricated” by “manifold relations of power” (1980, 93; 1995, 217). These are “established, consolidated” and “implemented” through the “production, accumulation, circulation and functioning of” discourses and practices (Foucault 1980: 93; 1995: 140, 170/171, 217). For example scientific, religious, anthropological, and economic discourses “discipline the body, optimize its capabilities, extort its forces, increase its usefulness and docility” (Foucault 1995: 155). It is through and via our discourses and practices that we seem to transform simple manifestations of bodily differences into phenomena such as categories and dichotomies – among them are male/ female, cisgender/ transgender, heterosexual/ homosexual, western/ non-western (Niehus-Kettler 2022: 55) At bottom, these powerful labels can be reduced to the binary systems *the norm/ the other*, *normal/ deviant*. Our physicians, parents, supervisors, and governments devalue and impose a marked change of human bodies. In doing so, they re-/enforce and encourage the accumulation of capital as well as the accumulation of bodies. They also re-/enforce and facilitate multilevel exploitation and our fulfilling so-called social duties.

Patriarchy, capitalism, and (post)colonialism are systems that are, by design, weighted in favour of *the norms* and (self-proclaimed) authorities, in favour of the state’s institutions. As a consequence, these have the power to perpetuate (even wrongful) pre-convictions and keep (inhumane) belief, value and evaluating systems in place. They re-/create medical, legal, political, and/or historical discourses and phenomena such as ideals. They control our narratives and, thereby, our individual and shared histories. For example, not fulfilling gender norms and ideals and/or exhibiting (sexual) agency is still perceived as a transgression warranting (social) sanctioning measures. First and foremost, this affects people who are read as *not male, not heterosexual, not binary, not cisgender*, etc. Judith Lorber explains that there is “no essential femaleness or maleness, femininity or masculinity, womanhood or manhood”; however, as soon as gender is ascribed, usually instantly after birth, “the social order constructs and holds individuals to strongly gendered norms and expectations” (2009: 60). In case “we do gender appropriately, we simultaneously sustain, reproduce, and render legitimate the institutional arrangements” (West and Zimmerman 1987: 246). In case we un-/consciously “fail to do gender appropriately, we as individuals — not the institutional arrangements — may be called to account (e.g. for our motives and predispositions)” (West and Zimmerman 1987: 246).

Our (self-proclaimed) authorities, their disciplining and sanctioning measures that de- and transform our individuality appear to come in many shapes and forms. They might manifest in an abusive spouse’s or parent’s

condescending and patronising language, gaslighting manoeuvres, in actual smear campaigns that discredit their partner or child in public. Eventually, the violator's pretence and discursive practices do not only shame, isolate and bring the abused person into disrepute. They keep them from finding allies as well. Still, due to the abuser's deceptive image of the altruistic guardian and protector, their thinly veiled framing and devaluing people is often misinterpreted as an expression of their actually worrying and caring about others. However, disciplining and sanctioning measures that de- and transform our perceived identities and individuality might also manifest in smear campaigns on a whole other level. For example, since the 17th century, in patriarchal, western, and capitalistic cultures, members of the LGTBQIA+ communities have been ignored and silenced, but also represented and treated as sinners and criminals. To varying degrees, they have also been accused of posing a threat and embodying dangerous diseases. Religious and medical discourses, which had fabricated the two-sex model as well as the myth of non-existent or abnormal female sexual drives, readily created the cure and punishment when *de facto* delegitimised desires were expressed (Laqueur 1990: 8/9). Until the 1960s, the legislation of the United Kingdom forced males who were conceptualised as embodying *deviant sexualities* to spend considerable time in prison and/or to undergo hormone therapy (Sexual Offences Act 1956, 1967).

By and large, our perceived identities and, thereby, people's affective makeup and knowledge in terms of *the others* have largely been made up by discrediting and incapacitating discourses (and practices). Affected by social sanctioning processes, the survivors have been diagnosed with, treated and punished for various kinds of constructed (mental) illnesses, e.g. *moral corruption*, *sexual perversion*, *hysteria*, and *moral insanity*. All of which constituted common legal and medical cases in the west until the latter half of the 20th century (The Sexual Offences Act 1956). In sum, by the means of triangulation and smear campaigns, abusers and those who side with them – often to benefit on a financial or emotional level – deny the survivors' and/or *the others'* morality, cognitive and bodily abilities. More importantly, they re-/present alleged lacks thereof in public. Oftentimes, the degradation takes the form of discursive practices characterised by de- and infra-humanisation, pathologisation and criminalisation. On a micro, meso and macro level, these deceptive re-/presentations and one-sided narratives are tantamount to pre-convictions. And within cyclic systems, they re-victimise those who have been enduring various forms of violence.

Abusive human beings and (social) institutions do not merely make up and instrumentalise discourses that are part of individual and systemic violence, though. The devaluation and exploitation of self-created *deviant* identities, the stories of allegedly unintelligent, unethical, and/or unhealthy wives and daughters – who might also identify as members of the

LGBTQIA+ communities – heavily rely on spacial constructs, too. They are the results of the discursive construction of *otherness* and, in turn, perpetuate and simplify the marginalisation and elimination of those who live through patterns of violence. Spacial constructs such as the separation between the public and the domestic sphere as well as gender, *race*, and class segregation beget and nurture the silence and invisibility of the survivors. At bottom, abusive organisations feed and thrive on physical and psychological confinements.

In “We Other Victorians,” Foucault delineates, among other things, the domestic-public dichotomy and its repercussions. He explains that until the 17th century, “[s]exual practices [still] had little need of secrecy” and that “one had a tolerant familiarity with the illicit” (1979: 3). He adds that the (self-proclaimed) authorities, e.g. “[t]he legitimate and procreative couple laid down the law,” and “reserved the right to speak while retaining the principle of secrecy” (1979: 3). Consequently, “sexuality became carefully confined; it moved into the home” (Foucault 1979: 3). In the meantime, albeit “not in the circuit of production” (or rather, the circuit of reproduction), “illegitimate sexualities” and “pleasures that [were] unspoken” became elements of “profit” (Foucault 1979: 4). In particular “if [they] insisted on making [themselves] too visible,” they were publicly condemned *and* relegated to the margins of society, to houses of confinement such as the “mental hospital”, work houses and prisons, but also to “[brothels]” (Foucault 1997: 4). This way, the allegedly *deviant* identities have been re-/integrated into cycles of profit. In fact, they have been subjected to confinements, to cycles of cures and cycles of sanctions justified by their constructed perversions and illnesses.

Obviously, there are many more direct, implicit, and long-lasting ways of delegitimising identities and their use of public space/s. A person might be denied the right to express their gender identity in particular, or their agency in general. They might be hindered or forbid to work, socialise and/or leave the house by their violent parent or spouse. Our patriarchal, capitalistic and (post)colonial social systems seem to (still) re-/enforce and renew these restrictions. Moreover, while limiting *the others'* rights to bodily, social, and global mobility, forms of verbal, psychological, and emotional abuse are positively correlated with our proclivity to use physical violence (Rudmann and Mescher 2012: 741). For example moral, dehumanising, and criminalising discourses beget, nurture, and manifest in physical and/or sexual violence. They re-/produce phenomena and sanctioning practices such as *marital rape*, *corrective rape*, so-called *fag hunts*, *trans* and *gay bashing*. Not unlike many humans whom we perceive as cisgender women and/or non-western, someone identifying as a non-binary person or a transgender man might be “more fearful of crime in general than” the perceived human *norms*; so their re-/enforced bodily experience/s in terms of sexual and physical violence also

“[restrict] their freedom of movement and use of public spaces” (Rudman and Mescher 2012: 708).

After all, the aforementioned elements of our power structures and forms of violence have an intra-personal effect. They condition those who are abused to see themselves through the abusers’ eyes and from their perspective. This way, individual and (social) sanctioning measures re-/generate the survivors’ shame and alienation time and time again. Since these experiences are internalised and embodied, they often become enduring forms of self-judgement and self-punishment (a result and manifestation of these processes might be enduring self-doubt or the *impostor syndrome*). As part of gaslighting manoeuvres, survivors are taught to doubt their bodily experience/s, their agency and social value. As their emotions are invalidated, they are trained to conceptualise their selves as shameful and undeserving of attention. In “Shame Before Others,” Sarah Ahmed describes “shame” and “the gift of the ideal” as experiences and a social construct that have a largely positive effect on us and our relationships (2014: 106). Feeling shame can be a way to “reconciliation” and a way of “re-integrating” those who have “failed” someone (back) into “social bonds” (Ahmed 2014: 106-109). She considers “shame” also as a “sign of” our own or someone else’s “failure,” though (2014: 103). I conceive of bodily experience/s of shame as representing indeed essential elements of our relationships and power structures. They are sources and symptoms of pre-/convictions and (trans-generational) stigmatisation, they constitute and contribute to physical and psychological confinements (Niehus-Kettler 2022: 58/59).

Shame affects our individuality and perceived identity from an early age. The “negation that is perceived” is commonly “painful” and “experienced before another” (Ahmed 2014: 103, 104). In an echo of Foucault’s concepts of the *Panopticon*, the medical and disciplining gaze, we can also assume that we feel shame and the need to self-correct when no one else is present to witness our presupposed failures (Foucault 2003: 29, 48, 54; Foucault 1995: 143, 154, 170). It might be the alleged failure to act morally and/or exhibit gender-appropriate behaviour. If we fail to fulfil ideals – which are, after all, fabricated to re-/integrate us into cycles of profit – our experiencing shame translates into a “movement back into [ourselves]” [„which] “is simultaneously a turning away from [ourselves]” (Ahmed 2014: 104). This sensory movement entails an individual having “nowhere to turn” (Ahmed 2014: 104). So, as an interpersonal and an intra-personal effect, our living through and embodying shame “involves the de-forming and re-forming of bodily and social spaces” (Ahmed 2014: 102/103). We might feel self-conscious and alienated, we might dissociate ourselves. Basically, those who are a-/shamed are being silenced and forced to become invisible. They often silence and hide themselves. And as they lose their sense of self, they might become the identities that their abusive partners and/or their abusive (imagined) commu-

nities want them to be. To put it plainly, they are coerced into becoming human beings that neither trust, nor value, nor dare to decide for themselves. At heart, while bodily experience/s such as shame and fear seem to be vital elements of our power structures, they are indeed fatal and vital elements of abuse cycles, too (“Power and Control Wheel”).

Enduring *othering* processes and cycles of abuse, human beings who are forced to live through various forms of violence might feel eliminated from the public sphere. Within actual and/or perceived states of dependency, i.e. power imbalances re-/generated by our patriarchal, capitalistic, and (post-)colonial systems, there are still few legitimised representations of their perspectives, their life stories and/or forms of being. This is not only caused by personal smear campaigns and/or our institutions’ discrediting and incapacitating discourses. It is also the use of physical and psychological confinements that repeatedly force the abused to feel devalued and isolated. Physical force, neglect, and the silent treatment – which, on a societal level, translates into *symbolic annihilation*, seem to form cyclic systems. As part of re-victimisation, *the perceived others* and/or survivors are punished repeatedly, especially when they speak up and become visible. They are subjected to ridicule and/or threats when they embody resistance and/or question our (self-proclaimed) authorities’ prejudices. These tactics, in turn, re-/generate lacks of self-representations and a lack of diverse stories. They re-/produce “epistemic injustice” and a “gap” in “collective hermeneutical resources” (Fricker 2007: 1, 6, 151). Before all else, while re-/producing individual and systemic violence, abusive individuals as well as patriarchy, capitalism and colonialism cause and rely on divisions. They sow doubt among the members of communities who could become allies and allege the abuse of power, who could eventually concentrate on and benefit from their shared interests. Conveniently enough, using divide-and-conquer tactics, our violent (self-proclaimed) authorities might deflect us from discerning and challenging the patterns of their abusive behaviour.

Taking all these forms of violence into consideration, we can conclude that survivors and those who are conceptualised as embodying one or more forms of *otherness* are still denied some of our allegedly inalienable rights, e.g. the right to bodily autonomy and the pursuit of happiness. For example organisations such as Human Rights Watch still “document and expose abuses based on sexual orientation and gender identity” and/or gender expression; these include “torture, killing and executions, arrests under unjust laws, unequal treatment, censorship, medical abuses, discrimination in health and jobs and housing, domestic violence, abuses against children, and denial of family rights and recognition” (“LGTB Rights”). In the end, our power structures, especially the purportedly *normal* and, thereby, *valuable* (self-proclaimed) authorities, have re-/created types of otherness that are not valued, i.e. forms of *otherness* that we ought to cure, correct, and hide. What

is more, these very authorities re-/produce the highly profitable remedies and confinements. Seemingly paradoxically, by representing and treating some identities as unreliable, unsound and/or dangerous, they have not only re-/presented the disease and the crime, they have also come up with the cure and the punishment.

## 2 Embodying patterns of violence

The question whether or not *othering* processes can be regarded as forming (trans-generational) abuse cycles requires analyses beyond the scope of this essay. Ultimately, social bonds in-/formed by both *othering* processes and abuse cycles can be conceived of as encompassing self-sustaining cycles of profit, though. To put it differently, they both constitute and facilitate fairly uninterrupted financial, psychological and/or reproductive and sexual exploitation. And whereas the violent partner's and/or the violent parental, corporate, or governmental authorities' excuses might alternate, abusive people and power structures seem to habitually rewrite history. In spite of appearances, they select, eliminate, and re-/present events, individuals and groups in ways that suit their current purposes. Oftentimes, they manage to convince their communities *and* those being abused that the maltreatment either never happened, or that it is not as harmful as those who are actually harmed perceive it. Victim-blaming is common, in other words, the violators accuse the already wounded and vulnerable to have poor work ethics, to be guilty of lying, of irrational behaviour and/or (sexual) provocation. In cycles of abuse, the survivors repeatedly feel punished, but also forgiven again. Particularly these varying phases could create the deceiving impression that the abusive person or society is, after all, caring for and protecting the abused ("Power and Control Wheel").

In phases of relative calm, violent individuals and/or social institutions might apologise for denying an individual and/or a social group basic human rights — simply to reinforce the bond between the abusers and the survivors, i.e. to re-/gain trust and remove resistance. Now and then, abusive (self-proclaimed) authorities make concessions and appear altered. They grant, now and then, (short-lived) so-called privileges. Sometimes, they actually allow an abused person to feel valued, to become seen and heard at home, in school, at university, at work. The abusers might revise and/or support a change of medical, political, and/or ethical discourses. They might implement affirmative actions. They might expand *the others'* opportunities to become visible as authors of and/or as protagonists in everyday and institutional discourses, literature, sports competitions, the music and film industry. Also, abusive institutions might create new laws and policies that do not force

survivors of domestic violence and/or members of the LGTBQIA+ communities to assimilate and accept the abuse as *normal*. As part of individual and potential social cycles of abuse, they could legitimise *the others'* bodily autonomy, they could (temporarily) legitimise bodily, social, and global mobility in one way or another. For example for female spouses and/or members of the LGTBQIA+ communities and/or colonised peoples, this presupposes and includes the right to dress and behave the way they feel, leave their homes, exchange affections in public, to use social and public spaces without the fear of being reprimanded and punished for it. Still, it seems that a violent person's and/or a violent social systems' ill-concealed contempt for the survivors rarely changes. Rarely do their manipulations change. Sooner or later, new or slightly altered discrediting narratives and new or slightly altered alleged scientific facts sustain prejudices, and yet another (veiled) phase of discrimination and violence begins. Almost invariably, it is the abused person and/or social group that is accused of causing disruptions and harm when they break their silence and challenge the abusers' conduct. This way, in a general sense, it is the reaction to the violence that is perceived and represented as problematic in public, not the violence itself.

The aforementioned forms of violence can be conceived of as constituting *othering* processes but also, to a certain extent, as cycles of abuse. Without a doubt, they make up some of the most effective elements of our power structures that we internalise and embody. Within the theoretical framework of a larger research project, I have conceptualised and described elements of our power structures, i.e. bodily experience/s, discourses, practices, and manifestations (e.g. of bodily attributes) turned phenomena, as different forms of *percepts*. Inspired by Foucault's theories on discourses disciplining our individual and the species body as well as Lakoff and Johnson's concept of *Embodied/Experiential Realism* the model of *percept cycles* originated as my visualisation of *othering* and embodying processes. Due to the fairly limited scope of this chapter, I will refrain from describing it in (too much) detail. To put it briefly. we perceive our power power structures surrounded by our family members, friends and complete strangers, at the hospital, in school and a conference room, in parliament and church. And we seem to internalise, embody, and perceive them through and via an ever-growing multi-layered fabric of diverse *percepts*, e.g. through and via our sensations, emotions that we recognise in others, representations, objects, and phenomena that we perceive, but also (metaphorical) concepts in our minds. These concepts usually rely on, involve, and revive (trans-generational) culture-specific values, interpretations, and bodily experience/s (Niehus-Kettler

2022: 63/64).<sup>2</sup> In essence, we experience and embody our power structures in the blink of an eye, in the course of our lifetime, but also over generations.

All the while, our diverse percepts appear to be cycling. They move in and follow a regularly repeated sequence of events. For example our sensations, but also emotions such as contempt, scorn, anger or shame that we recognise in someone else may beget, nurture, and manifest in percepts in the form and in terms of our everyday language and discourses. This might be, e.g., conversations among family members or among peers on social media. Sooner or later, most of these percepts re-/create and become part of percepts in the form and in terms of institutional discourses, everyday and institutional practices – and phenomena such as (rarely new) and vivified binary systems that constitute versions of *the norms/ the others*. The products might be new or vivified percepts, e.g. revised or familiar representations, objects, and phenomena that we perceive. These could take the form of social sanctioning measures, medical, legal, and political discourses, and/or segregating and confining practices. All of these elements can be regarded as oftentimes structured and defined by (metaphorical) concepts, e.g. metaphorical concepts of *the others* as threats, as invalids or criminals, as dangerous non- or less-than-human entities. Over time, namely in the blink of an eye, in the course of a week, a month or our lifetime, but also over generations, all of these percepts, in turn, re-/generate, affect, and become part of new and/or slightly altered percepts. These might take the form of bodily experience/s of fear, impuissance, (alleged) inferiority or superiority that, again, re-/generate and become part of everyday and institutional discourses and confining practices. Among them might be new and altered legislation, definitions, health and immigration policies, the rejection of a third-gender option in official documents– or practices that must be regarded as forms of medical violence or medical colonialism.

What adds to the idea of (trans-generational) circular processes in terms of our embodying power structures and in terms of conceptualising and treating human beings as *the others* are not only theories from cultural studies

- 2 The different meanings and conceptualisations of ‘percept’ are highly dependent on which discipline defines the term, e.g. philosophy, psychology, or linguistics (“Epistemological Problems of Perception”). To allow for intra-personal and interpersonal differences among our percepts I need to include all of the understandings and definitions of ‘percept’ and often use it as an umbrella term for: a ‘recognisable sensation or impression received by the mind through the senses’ (Harper Collins dictionary online, American English, definition 1); a recognition of emotions (Li 2015, 92); an ‘object or phenomenon that is perceived’ (Harper Collins dictionary online, British English, definition 2); and a ‘concept’ in our minds (Harper Collins Dictionary online, British English, definition 1). Metaphorical concepts appear to be a powerful combination of diverse percepts as we understand one concept in terms of another.



and philosophy, but also literary studies and cognitive linguistics. Compound percepts such as metaphorical concepts can be conceived of as grounded in and, in turn, as affecting our tacit knowledge and bodily experience/s, they structure our conscious thought and actions (Lakoff and Johnson 2003: 3). They seem to be begotten and nurtured by, as well as manifestations of “natural” *experiences*, e.g. our “interactions with other people within our culture” — among other things, “in terms of social, political, economic, and religious institutions” (Lakoff and Johnson 2003: 117). Metaphorical concepts do not only manifest in metaphorical expressions. They define not merely “the words we use,” but also our very concepts of things and human beings (Lakoff and Johnson 2003: 5, 116). They appear to “create realities for us, especially social realities. A metaphor may thus be a guide for future actions. Such actions will, of course, fit the metaphor. This will, in turn, reinforce the power of the metaphor to make experience coherent” (Lakoff and Johnson 2003: 156). For example anti-gay, anti-immigration and war propaganda that re-/present human beings as danger and/or less-than human entities centre around and contribute to widely-known harmful metaphorical concepts. These vivify and perpetuate bodily experience/s of fear, indifference, and contempt, as well as discrediting everyday discourses and institutional eliminating, segregating, and confining practices.

As time moves in cycles, our percepts seem to move in cycles – and our life (hi)stories seem to move in cycles, too. As percepts accumulate, become part of one another and evolve, they take on an increasingly complex life of their own. We continuously experience and embody them while they re-/generate and manifest in one another. As mentioned before, as a consequence, percepts develop into a multilayered tissue of compound percepts that is organic and, at the same time, constructed. Including percepts of resistance, they become a hybrid *materiality* of acquired and grown knowledge (Niehus-Kettler 2022: 65/66). I understand this materiality to make up what other human beings (implicitly) perceive as our identities. At the same time, seen from another perspective, this materiality forms our personal affective makeup and accumulated knowledge in terms of *somebody*, *something*, and *ourselves*. We seem to sense, get to know, and embody representations, (metaphorical) concepts, objects and phenomena – e.g. devaluating discourses and practices, a person, a song, or an emotion that we (repeatedly) perceive and recognise – in the form of percept cycles. Depending on the time we have known them and the strength of the emotional connection to the person, song, representation, and/or phenomenon, the inherent percepts constitute and contribute to a strongly intertwined, multilayered fabric of percepts — *or*, a rather holey fabric of a couple of loosely connected percepts (Niehus-Kettler 2022: 66). In other words, we embody the elements of power structures, e.g. bodily experience/s that re-/generate manifestations, phenom-

ena, discourses, and practices, in terms of and as represented by *somebody*, *something* and *ourselves* via and in the form of numberless percepts.

Evidently, all of our identities, our affective makeup and knowledge may be regarded as truly personal and, in the same vein, as remarkably universal in nature. They depend on our partly shared historical and cultural frameworks. They can also be conceived of as the symptoms and sources of the percepts and, thereby, the forms of violence that we, as individuals and social groups, live through and embody. More importantly, it seems that, by virtue of our perceiving and embodying our power structures via and through percept cycles, *othering* processes and our personal and universal (hi)stories might repeat themselves. All forms of abuse that we are subjected to have the power to re-/generate embodied (trans-generational) patterns of violence and trauma. They also de-/legitimise our (self-proclaimed) authorities, our individuality, and agency. At bottom, it could be comforting to know that one percept, e.g., an emotion that we recognise in the face of another human being can make a world of difference. At the same time, a few percepts in the form and in terms of representations that we perceive and concepts in our minds, e.g. so-called medical facts and allegedly dangerous sexual conduct and dispositions, have the power to change our lives and perceived identities forever as well. Social change and justice might hinge upon each and every single one of our percepts. Above all else, however, they rely on our embodying resistance to cycles of violence, more precisely, on our willingness to *carefully* listen and to question narratives and our own perspective (Niehus-Kettler 2022: 65).

Circling back to our binary systems, we can establish that indeed very different categories and dichotomies are being ab-/used to re-/generate hierarchies and define the social groups perceived as *the others/ the norms*. However, whenever I contemplate the legal, political, religious and/or spatial dimensions of the relationships between *the others* and *the norms*, I find the similarities among individual, institutional, and historical violence re-/producing forms of *otherness* striking. That is not to say, by no means, that it is always and only the perceived *normal* and, thereby, generally more privileged moiety of these binary systems that turns out to be an abusive individual and/or a violent (self-proclaimed) authority. I do feel, however, we should not ignore that individuals, groups, imagined communities and nations that conceive of themselves as *normal* and, thereby, as *more valuable* and de facto *more valued* might have very similar and shared interests. Moreover, deliberating the similarities and the differences among *othering* processes and (domestic) abuse cycles could help us to discern and challenge embodied patterns of violence on a micro, meso, and macro level. I question words and I question conduct. By now, I rarely doubt patterns, though. If we can not distinguish between protection and manipulation, if we can not distinguish

between care and control, unenlightened self-interest might be masquerading as affection or philanthropy.

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