

# **Making Strangers** Outsiders, Aliens and Foreigners

Edited by

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# Table of Contents

<b>Acknowledgments</b>	v
<b>Introduction</b>	vii
Abbes Maazaoui	
<b>PART ONE: LANGUAGES OF POWER</b>	xv
<b>1. “You must needs be strangers”: Stigma and sympathetic imagination in Shakespeare’s <i>Sir Thomas More</i></b>	1
Jeffrey R. Wilson, <i>Harvard University, USA</i>	
<b>2. (E)stranging the modern nation: Transnationalism and bastard border crossings in the Duke of Rivas’s <i>The Foundling Moor</i></b>	13
Amanda Eaton McMenamin, <i>Wilson College, USA</i>	
<b>3. “A dream deferred”: Narratives about the DREAMers in politics and the arts</b>	27
Beatriz Calvo-Peña, <i>Barry University, USA</i>	
<b>4. “Crimes of solidarity”: France’s contemporary crisis of hospitality</b>	39
Abigail Taylor, <i>University of Sydney, Australia</i>	
<b>PART TWO: ALIEN GEOGRAPHIES</b>	55
<b>5. Outcast, foreigner, worker, enemy: Exile and conflicting identities in Mario Rigoni Stern’s <i>Storia di Tönle</i></b>	57
Marguerite Bordry, <i>Université Paris-Sorbonne, France</i>	

<b>6. In search of a home of one's own:</b>	
<b>Sandra Cisneros's <i>The House on Mango Street</i></b>	67
Ezra S. Engling, <i>Eastern Kentucky University, USA</i>	
<b>7. Blind spots, tunnel vision, and the narratives of the immigrant and colonial subject</b>	79
Laureano Corces, <i>Fairleigh Dickinson University, USA</i>	
<b>8. The Arab who wasn't there: Alterity in Lawrence Durrell's <i>Alexandria Quartet</i></b>	91
Walid Romani, <i>Université du Québec in Montréal, Canada</i>	
<b>9. The ethics of the ghostly: A ghost medium in J. M. Coetzee's <i>Life &amp; Times of Michael K</i></b>	101
Chia-Sui Lee, <i>National Taiwan University, Taiwan</i>	
<b>PART THREE: TROUBLED IDENTITIES</b>	113
<b>10. Strangers, foreigners and aliens in Conan Doyle's novels: From imperialistic appropriation to literary subversion</b>	115
Amandine Guyot, <i>Université Paris 13, France</i>	
<b>11. A strange encounter of aesthetics with the imperial politics in Alex Strick van Linschoten and Felix Kuehn's <i>Poetry of the Taliban</i></b>	129
Yubraj Aryal, <i>University of Montreal, Canada / Central Normal China University, China</i>	
<b>12. Aesthetics of alienation: The displacement/displacing narrative of <i>In the light of what we know</i></b>	145
Shastri Akella, <i>University of Massachusetts (Amherst), USA</i>	
<b>Contributors</b>	159
<b>Index</b>	163

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My interest in the experiences of the stranger came naturally to me. Not only have I lived in three countries (Tunisia, France, and the United States), my family and brothers and sisters have also been scattered across three continents and nationalities. The theme of migration and border crossings has been present in many of my publications. Most recently, I have edited, in connection with this theme, two special issues for *The Lincoln Humanities Journal*, the first on *Borders* (2014), and the second on *Us and Them* (2017). In the spring of 2017, I coordinated an international conference on “Making Strangers” at which some of the contributing authors initially presented an earlier version of their papers (M. Bordry, L. Corces, E. Engling, C.-S. Lee, A. McMenemy, W. Romani, and A. Taylor). I also taught a course on Human Diversity in French and Francophone Thought (“Nous et les autres dans la pensée française et francophone”). This book is an extension of both the conference and the course.



# Introduction

Abbes Maazaoui

*No one is intrinsically Other; one is Other only because he is not me. By saying that he is Other, I have not really said anything yet.*

— Tzvetan Todorov (my translation) <sup>1</sup>

We are not born strangers; we are made. The title of the book reflects this fundamental premise and indicates that strangeness is the result of a deliberate and purposeful act that has social, political, and linguistic implications. As Sarah Ahmed writes, “it is the process of expelling or welcoming the one who is recognized as a stranger that produces the figure of the stranger in the first place” (4). Even though it may be born out of an uncontrollable urge to survive, the making of strangers remains an intentional process. According to Rodolfo Mendoza-Denton, humans have a “natural proclivity to make distinctions between ‘us’ and ‘them’” and tend to classify, categorize, and conceptualize their power relationships with strangers. Considered as a potential threat, strangers are divided into various groups, defined, and often negatively labeled.<sup>2</sup> In an apt article titled “Stop Calling People ‘Aliens,’” Careen Shannon notes that “calling people from foreign lands by names that reflect one’s own prejudices appears to be a consistent trait across cultures, and there is no dearth of examples of how human beings tend to adopt dehumanizing appellations for those perceived as ‘other.’”

The number of designations and epithets referring to strangers is only limited by the imagination of those erecting boundaries and creating categories: “In fact, the designation of differences—between individuals, human groups, societies, cultures, civilizations—, classifications, hierarchies, value judgments, [and] stigmatization of all kinds have an inexhaustible linguistic richness and the distinction of each of these entities in relation to each other [has] an equally great variety of ideological stratagems” (Erica Deuber Ziegler and

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<sup>1</sup> “Personne n’est intrinsèquement Autre, il ne l’est que parce qu’il n’est pas moi; en disant qu’il est autre, je n’ai encore rien dit vraiment.”

<sup>2</sup> It has been argued that the categorization process of “us” versus “them” is the cause of outgroup derogation. Cf. Brewer; Hewstone et al.; Zhong et al.

Geneviève Perret 15; my translation).<sup>3</sup> This “inexhaustible linguistic richness” testifies to the creative categories used to establish boundaries. Some are widely used and even validated by political authorities, such as language, tribe, race, gender, religion, region, birthplace, and nationality. Others, which are equally pervasive but perhaps used in a less official capacity, include references to perceived intelligence, body type, professional skills, psychological characteristics, and social and behavioral traits. The English language provides a case study in how languages reflect, enforce, and perpetuate the human “urge to categorize.”

English terms for the “inappropriate/d Other” (Trinh) are too numerous to discuss in this introduction.<sup>4</sup> Thus, we will limit our comments to the title of the book, which includes four generic words that share meanings and overlap in use: *stranger*, *outsider*, *alien*, and *foreigner*. According to *Random House Webster’s College Dictionary*,<sup>5</sup> these terms can be taken to mean “not one of us,” and “refer to someone regarded as outside of, or distinct from, a particular group” (“Stranger”). While they seem synonymous from a referential perspective and can be used interchangeably, they are not completely interchangeable. Their use elicits subtle but distinct social and emotional connotations. It may be accurately argued that such semantic differences constitute varying examples of how language strives to establish boundaries between “us” and “them.”

Symbol of the universal other, the word *stranger* comes from Latin via the Old French “*estranger*,” which meant foreign, unfamiliar, distant, inhospitable. Similar to the French word *étranger*, “*stranger* may apply to one who does not belong to some group—social, professional, national, etc.—or may apply to a person with whom one is not acquainted” (“Stranger”). This means that “strangers . . . can be made at home and at the border”; they “might come from across the ocean, or from relatively nearby, or from nowhere at all” (Parker 230; 25). In this context, anybody can be made a stranger. A boyfriend may be a stranger to his girlfriend’s family, as would a person from another town,

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<sup>3</sup> “En fait, la désignation des différences—entre les individus, les groupes humains, les cultures, les civilisations—, les classifications, les hiérarchisations, les jugements de valeur, les stigmatisations en tous genres disposent d’une richesse linguistique inépuisable et la distinction de chacune de ces entités par rapport aux autres d’une tout aussi grande variété de stratagèmes idéologiques.” The writers add that “any description of the real, including the depiction of ‘others,’ constitutes an activity of construction and translation” (“Toute description du réel, y compris la qualification des ‘autres,’ constitue une activité de construction et de traduction”; 15).

<sup>4</sup> Cf. for example, the sample list of over 100 racial epithets provided in Croom (2008, p. 44-45). Cf. also the online *Appendix: English Terms for Outsiders*.

<sup>5</sup> *Random House Webster’s College Dictionary* will be shortened to *Random House*.

another country, or another planet. As Ulrike K uchler and her colleagues write, “the stranger is an exemplary liminal figure: he is at once near and far, a member of a group, but moving at its periphery” (1). Expanding on Sigmund Freud, Julia Kristeva even goes so far as to say that there is a stranger in each of us, representing that which one does not like about oneself: “Strangely, the stranger lives in us: he is the hidden face of our identity, the space that ruins our home, the time when harmony and sympathy are lost. . . . The stranger begins when the consciousness of my difference arises and ends when we all recognize ourselves as strangers, resisting linkages and communities” (“R eflexions sur l’ tranger”; my translation).<sup>6</sup> The malleability of the concept of stranger is commensurate with the indefiniteness of the human condition, its ebbs and flows.

The word *Outside* categorizes otherness in terms of space and time, opposing here and there, inside and outside, present and absent. Being of a different clan or family, or not belonging to the same racial, ethnic, linguistic, social, political, or cultural space, the outsider represents the “elsewhere within here”<sup>7</sup> and conjures up the image of breaking and entering. As Jean-Luc Nancy points out, “The [outsider] must possess some of the intruder’s inherent characteristics . . . Otherwise, he loses his strangeness . . . Most of the time, we refuse to admit this . . . Yet, intrusion is inseparable from the truth of the [outsider]” (11-12; my translation).<sup>8</sup> It is no wonder then that the outsider, whose “power is singular *and* anonymous” (Derrida 172)<sup>9</sup> can bring out unwanted anxiety and be perceived as a threat to well-defined national, linguistic, and racial entities.

The third word, *foreigner*, comes—via Old French *forein*, *forain*—from the Latin *foras* (“outside”), derived from *foris* (“door”), and had the now-lost literal meaning of “being outside the door.” It “emphasizes the difference in language, customs and background”, and is similar to *stranger* and *outsider* but has the added and dedicated quality of being “not native to” the country, state,

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<sup>6</sup>“ trangement, l’ tranger nous habite: il est la face cach e de notre identit , l’espace qui ruine notre demeure, le temps o  s’ab iment l’entente et la sympathie. . . . L’ tranger commence lorsque surgit la conscience de ma diff rence et s’ach ve lorsque nous nous reconnaissons tous  trangers, rebelles aux liens et aux communaut s. ” Lecture, 1 October 2014.

<sup>7</sup>Trinh, T. Minh-Ha, *Elsewhere, Within Here*. Cf. also Interview with Mrina Grzini, June 2, 1998. <http://trinhminh-ha.squarespace.com/inappropriated-artificiality/>

<sup>8</sup>“Il faut qu’il y ait de l’intrus dans l’ tranger, sans quoi il perd son  tranget  (...). Le plus souvent, on ne veut pas l’admettre (...) Pourtant, il est indissociable de la v rit  de l’ tranger.”

<sup>9</sup>Emphasis is in original.

or nation, thus highlighting the international perspective of border crossing (“Stranger”).

Although the words *stranger*, *outsider*, and *foreigner* suggest not belonging to a particular group, they “are not [often] used with the intent” to discriminate. But in the sense that they still imply that there is something not “normal” about the individual concerned, “their nature of non-inclusion sometimes makes them offensive terms” (*Appendix*). Notwithstanding their latent power for discrimination and exclusion, they do not have the overtly derogatory connotations of the term *alien*. Like most of the other words, *alien* entered the English language via French from the Latin *aliēnus* (“belonging to another”), which was derived from the earlier *alius*, meaning “other” (*Oxford English Dictionary*).<sup>10</sup> So, initially, the word *alien* had more or less the same meanings as the three other words in the title, and referred to someone who comes from somewhere else and/or belongs to “another family, race, or nation”; a stranger, a foreigner, but with a specialized emphasis on “one who is still a subject or citizen” of another country than the country of residence (*Merriam-Webster*, “Alien”).

It was in the latter meaning’s context that the term “alien” was used in the U.S. federal statute, specifically in the Alien and Sedition Acts of 1798<sup>11</sup>, and in current immigration and nationality acts.<sup>12</sup> As an integral part of the political and juridical vocabulary, the word *alien*, if we follow *Random House*, thus acquired special legal status and a well-defined meaning: “a foreign-born resident who has not been naturalized and who owes allegiance to another country.” Ironically, and maybe because of it, the word later gained a second set of pejorative meanings, among them “distasteful” and “hostile” (*OED*; *Random House*), and became “stronger than FOREIGN in suggesting opposition, repugnance, or irreconcilability” (*Merriam-Webster*). More recently, thanks to mid-20th-century science fiction, it has taken on a third set of meanings: a creature from outer space or “another world”; an “extraterrestrial”; in short, a non-human (*OED*; *Random House*).

These added connotations are revealing, and not because the name-calling of people perceived as “other” is new or unusual. As alluded to earlier, it is a universal phenomenon consistent across cultures, rooted in the dehumanizing logic of giving a demeaning name to that which is considered “other.”<sup>13</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Oxford English Dictionary will be abbreviated to OED.

<sup>11</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alien\\_\(law\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alien_(law)).

<sup>12</sup> Cf. [http://library.uwb.edu/Static/USImmigration/1790\\_naturalization\\_act.html](http://library.uwb.edu/Static/USImmigration/1790_naturalization_act.html) ; and Cf. <https://www.uscis.gov/laws/immigration-and-nationality-act>

<sup>13</sup> For an excellent overview of name-calling across cultures, see Erica Deuber Ziegler & Geneviève Perret, *Nous autres*, in particular the chapter titled “L’autre comme une construc-

What is interesting about the naming of extraterrestrials after foreigners, and the use of the same label “alien” for two different entities, is the fact that it may have inadvertently revealed how American society views not only extraterrestrials but also all foreigners: “So it’s not that we think foreigners resemble Martians, *it’s that we think Martians resemble foreigners*. Put another way: It is not the case that, the first time we saw a foreigner, he reminded us of a Martian. Rather, when we in the English-speaking world first conceived of the possibility . . . that there might be Martians . . . we imagined them to be akin to foreigners” (Shannon, “Stop Calling”; emphasis in orig.). Clearly, calling extraterrestrials “aliens” is not meant to be a compliment, and from this point forward, neither is calling foreigners “aliens.”<sup>14</sup>

Words—such as stranger, outsider, alien and foreigner—matter. The current debate over immigration policy reform and the language used to address foreign-born individuals or minority groups from within is not a merely superfluous vocabulary exercise. Whether the word is outsider, foreigner, stranger, alien, illegal alien, undocumented alien, unlawful alien, unlawfully present alien, or unauthorized immigrant, they all, to a varying degree, conjure up an experience of powerlessness.<sup>15</sup> These words, through their very utterance, either convey or deny certain civil and political rights and privileges, such as those regarding property ownership, voting, access to healthcare, deportation, expatriation,<sup>16</sup> and refoulement.<sup>17</sup> Quoting Catherine MacKin-

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tion permanente.” See also the work of Adam Croom for the study of racial epithets and slurs: “Racial Epithets, Characterizations, and Slurs.”

<sup>14</sup> It comes as no surprise that many have recently argued for replacing “alien” (or “illegal alien”) with some other term. In 2015, Congressman Joaquin Castro of Texas introduced a bill that would require the federal government to replace the term “alien” with “foreign national.” He stated that “America is a nation of immigrants, yet our federal government continues to use terms that dehumanize and ostracize those in our society who happen to have been born elsewhere” (“A Step toward retiring the term ‘Alien’”). Others want to keep the word “alien”. Their arguments are: the word is very precise; it is part of the federal law; and any other word would be an exercise for euphemism and political correctness (Eric Ruark, “‘Illegal Alien’ The Proper Terminology”).

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Moore, “Throughout history and case law, ‘several terms have been used to identify this class of individuals: illegal aliens, undocumented aliens, unlawful aliens, unlawfully present aliens, and unauthorized aliens.’” (804)

<sup>16</sup> For example, prisoners and slaves. Corey Brettschneider writes in “Why Prisoners Deserve the Right to Vote”: “Most important, the Supreme Court decided that prisoners cannot have their citizenship stripped as a punishment for a crime. As Justice Earl Warren wrote in the 1958 case *Trop v. Dulles*: ‘Citizenship is not a right that expires upon misbehavior.’” (June 21, 2016).

<sup>17</sup> Cf. “No Human Being is Illegal” by Mae M. Ngai. “The current debate over immigration policy reform reminds us that sovereignty is not just a claim to national right; it is a

non— “Social inequality is substantially created and enforced—that is, *done*—through words and images”—Shannon adds that “referring to immigrants as ‘aliens,’ when ‘alien’ is commonly understood to be derogatory ..., not only reflects immigrants’ place in American society, but in a very real way it enforces it.”

If words matter, so does their application. Theoretically, no one is exempt from being labelled a foreigner. History provides endless examples. For instance, in the United States, our four words have been applied to not only those who come from somewhere else (refugees, asylum-seekers, exiled, immigrants, etc.), but also to those who come from within, those the Algerian writer Y.B. calls “intranger[s],”<sup>18</sup> such as “Native Americans, blacks, Latino Americans, Asian Americans, women, the poor, and political minorities” (Parker, IX).<sup>19</sup> Persistently labeling various groups as “aliens” and “undeserving others” testifies to the constant shifting of boundaries between insiders and outsiders, and to the pervasive need to differentiate between “us” and “them.”

It is in this context that the phrase “making strangers” should be understood. Strangeness is the product of intentional labeling that has vast implications for those designated as strangers. In a world characterized by the contentious politics of identity, resources, goods, and services are increasingly allocated based on group membership. So, it is no surprise that the two antonymous and purposeful processes of “expelling” and “welcoming,” which, according to Sarah Ahmed, “produce the figure of the stranger,” are embodied in today’s two most intense ideological forces: on the one hand, the promotion of open borders, hybridity, globalization, and the free movement of people, goods, and services; on the other, the enforcement of stronger borders that privilege and “idealizes the local, the particular,” the familiar, the “ethnically pure” (Dame Gillian Beer vii). Recent national elections in the United Kingdom, France, and the United States provide a vivid reminder of how the issue of otherness can be rhetorically elevated to an imminent existential threat and foisted on the public as a defining moment in a nation’s cultural, political, and linguistic survival.

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theory of power (Carens 1998)”. See also her book, *Impossible Subjects*, on the origins of the concept of “illegal alien” in American law and society.

<sup>18</sup> Cited in Edwige Tamalet Talbayev (245).

<sup>19</sup> Kunal M. Parker in *Making Foreigners: Immigration and Citizenship Law in America, 1600-2000*, cites the example of American women married to immigrants: in 1907, Congress passed the “expatriation law” (7; 16). Cf. also, “Why Trump is making Muslims the new Chinese” by Mae Ngai, who reminds us of the “Chinese Exclusion ..., [which] lasted from 1882 to 1943.”

In response to what has been dubbed the refugee crisis, studies on foreignness have increased substantially over the last decade. Yet, they have focused on specific areas such as regions, periods, ethnic groups, and authors. Predicated on the belief that this so-called “twenty-first-century problem” is in fact as old as humanity itself, this book analyzes cases based on both long-term historical perspectives and current occurrences from around the world. Bringing together an international group of scholars from Australia, Asia, Europe, and North America, it examines a variety of examples and strategies, mostly from world literatures, with the purpose of shedding light on one of the most pressing issues facing the world today: the place of “the other” amid fear-mongering and unabashedly contemptuous acts and rhetoric. History provides countless examples of such forces at work in the form of invasion, war, colonization, ethnic cleansing, deportation, genocide, slavery, and Islamophobia.<sup>20</sup> Sadly, it will continue to repeat itself as long as humans are compelled to label others and assign them to artificial categories such as race, gender, religion, birthplace, and nationality. As David Zindell writes, “This urge to categorize was the true fall of man, for once the process was begun, there was no easy or natural return to sanity” (85).

The essays in this collection examine various encounters with the other, in reality, and works of art, both throughout the centuries and from around the world. They are grouped into three sections that represent different perspectives on foreignness.

The first section, “Languages of Power,” deals with language and its use as a means of deliverance or as a weapon to “limit and define,” “shame, humiliate, colonize,” and criminalize (hooks 167-68). It features four essays that examine issues of language manipulation through a discussion of classical and contemporary works, as well as current case studies. Jeffrey R. Wilson starts this section with an analysis of the speech Shakespeare added to Anthony Mun-

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<sup>20</sup> Cf. the brief but potent article of the historian Alain Ruscio on the origin of Islamophobia in France in particular and the West in general, “Islamophobie, un mot, un mal plus que centenaires” (“Islamophobia’, a word, an evil hundreds of years old”). He demonstrates how the “systematic hostility toward Islam . . . goes back to the Crusades.” Unlike the centuries-old Islamophobia, the civil war in Ivory Coast is a recently-manufactured crisis based on a policy that sought to establish social hierarchy between Ivoirians based on the extent of their “ivoirité”, *i.e.* their generational ranking: “The Ivorian crisis originated in a xenophobic movement that demonized the other [those considered strangers by this policy], the neighbor with whom one has lived for years. The other then becomes the abstract representative of an absolute evil that must be eradicated either by driving him out or by killing him” (Amnesty International; 15 November 2004. Cited in <http://histoirecoloniale.net/les-Ivoiriens-victimes-de-l.html>; my translation).

day's *Sir Thomas More* (1603). The passage illustrates the role of imagination, both rhetorically and dramatically, in the reduction of stigmatization in a "person's thoughts, words, and actions." Such a reading takes imagination to be, if not a "cure," at least a transformative force in our encounters with others, and a useful "key component of the new global order" (Appadurai 31). Amanda Eaton McMenamin discusses the dangers of "the (neo)modern conception of the nation-state, obsessively tending toward one race, one language," one ethnicity, one culture, and one religion. Using Duke of Rivas's medieval tale of the foundling Moor, she interprets Rivas' nineteenth-century Spanish text as a warning and a reminder that Spain's failure to become a premier power of the Western world was a consequence of its rejection of diversity and its imposition of a "homogenous Castilian identity" over a "real heterogeneous national populace," full of Christians, Muslims, and Jews. From the past to the present, the current migration crisis in France and the United States provides Beatriz Calvo-Peña and Abigail Taylor with evidence of how labels and categories can be used to classify and criminalize people. Beatriz Calvo-Peña, detailing the DREAMers' current condition, draws upon Susan Bibler Coutin's concept of "legal nonexistence" (98) to describe the legal limbo in which immigrants are exposed to deportation, low wages, denial of medical care, and the potential of violence. Helped and victimized at once, the DREAMers vividly illustrate the effects of language on a people's destiny. In *Postcolonial Hospitality*, Mireille Rosello hypothesizes about the "assumption of reciprocity" and wonders whether a guest is "always implicitly an equal, who could, presumably, reciprocate at a later date, in a different space, at a different time" (9). Abigail Taylor indirectly answers this question in the negative, as she studies the real-life situation of asylum seekers in France. She focuses particularly on the French government's active criminalization of citizens who act in solidarity towards vulnerable exiles, giving rise to irrational thinking and oxymoronic expressions such as "crime of solidarity."

The second section, "Alien Geographies," contemplates the experience of individuals who live in two cultures or countries while being accepted by neither. Marguerite Bordry focuses on exile and conflicting identities in Mario Rigoni Stern's *Storia Di Tönle*, as well as on the damage caused by nationalism, an abstract principle which condemns Tönle to remain an alien both in Italy, his country of forcible adoption, and in Austria, his country of birth. Ezra S. Engling looks at the experience of "cultural homelessness", and the search by outsiders for "that elusive culturally comfortable home of one's own" that can ward off insidious threats such as misogyny, racism, xenophobia, and poverty. For Engling, Sandra Cisneros's *The House on Mango Street* epitomizes such a relentless and unattainable pursuit. Laureano Corces addresses the limits of knowing and the tensions between knowledge and power, "the known and the unknown." Using Albert Camus's *L'étranger*, Kamel Daoud's

*Mersault, contre-enquête*, and Juan Mayorga's *Animales nocturnos*, he explores how (not)naming and (not)knowing can define a relationship between people and entice "certain individuals to wield power over others." In "The Arab Who Wasn't There," Walid Romani analyzes how existing popular and stereotypic conceptions and images (the *déjà-vu* and the *déjà-là*) about the Orient help shape the portrayals of Arab characters in *The Alexandria Quartet*. Adopting an Orientalist approach, Lawrence Durrell de-realizes (that is, erases) Egypt in his narrative, so much so that Arabs of Egypt are, to paraphrase Victor Turner, literarily "invisible (though physically visible)" (98). Chia-Sui Lee, on the other hand, discusses "real" invisible creatures, namely ghostly ones. The ghost's outsider status is a fitting metaphor for the present/absent condition of marginalized groups. Examining the role of the ghost medium in J. M. Coetzee's *Life & Times of Michael K*, Lee contends that ghosts are endowed with ethical power and can teach humans new modes of living and thinking about otherness.

The third section, "Troubled Identities," is devoted to various forms of foreign-induced identity anxiety and survival strategy. It investigates the fragility of migrant identity at the individual and collective levels. Amandine Guyot points to the fact that 19th century fin-de-siècle British imperial thinking was highly concerned with contamination and invasion by foreigners and criminals—*i.e.*, colonized people. Her essay explores issues of criminality, identity, and representation in three of Conan Doyle's novels, *The Sign of Four*, *The Mystery of Cloomber*, and *Uncle Jeremy's Household*, and considers their potential for conformity and resistance. Using Alex Strick van Linschoten and Felix Kuehn's *Poetry of the Taliban*, Yubraj Aryal offers a thought-provoking analysis of the uncomfortable encounter between Taliban aesthetics, imperial politics, and Western readers. Adopting post-World War II critical approaches of Adorno and Benjamin, he questions poetry's relevance for victims of violence, for whom "atrocities can hardly be [stopped by a] sonnet, lyric, *ghazal*, or free verse." Shastri Akella analyzes immigrant alienation as an effect of migration and displacement. In reading Zia Haider Rahman's *In the Light of What We Know* (2014), Akella shows how displacement affects the novel's narrative strategies and exposes the narrative of alienation as the alienation of narrative.

The twelve essays in this volume approach the figure of the stranger as a product of social, political, linguistic, ontological, and narrative processes. The current political drama surrounding the subject of migration is no doubt on the mind of each author in this collection. It is hoped that this book, marked by a diversity of texts, examples, and approaches, sheds light on the plight of immigrants, refugees, and all those who are excluded because of race, gender, national origin, religion, and ethnicity; and encourages reflec-

tion on how the arts, and especially world literature, can help us navigate and think through the ever-present crisis: the place of the “stranger” among us.

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# Index

## A

Adorno  
Theodor, xv, 130, 131, 134, 135,  
136, 138, 139, 141, 142, 143  
aesthetics, xv, 129, 130, 131, 132,  
133, 134, 135, 136, 137, 138,  
139, 140, 154, 155  
Afghan, 131, 132, 141  
Afghanistan, 129, 131, 132, 133,  
134, 136, 139, 140, 142, 150, 153  
Ahmed  
Sarah, vii, xii  
*aidants*, 42  
*Al-Andalus*, 16, 17, 19  
Alexandria, xv, 91, 92, 94, 96, 100  
Algeria, 80, 81, 82, 83, 84, 85  
Algerian, xii, 81, 82, 84, 85, 86  
*alien*, viii, x, xi, xii, xiv, xvii, 64, 97  
alienation, xv, 80, 81, 145, 146,  
147, 148, 149, 150, 151, 152,  
153, 154, 155  
aliens, xi, xii, xvii, 3, 28, 115  
Allsopp  
Jennifer, 40, 42, 43, 50  
Anderson  
Benedict R., 14, 15, 25  
anti-Semitism, 41  
Anzaldúa  
Gloria, 69, 77  
apartheid, 1, 82, 83, 103  
arts, xvi, 28, 30, 101, 111, 135, 142,  
160  
Asiago, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63,  
64, 65  
asylum, xii, xiv, 1, 39, 40, 44, 49, 50  
Auschwitz, 135, 136, 137, 139, 143  
Austria, xiv, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63,  
64

## B

barbarism, 130, 133, 134, 135, 136,  
137, 138, 141, 142  
Batson  
C. Daniel, 8, 9  
Beer  
Dame Gillian, xvi  
Benjamin  
Walter, xv, 97, 130, 131, 134,  
135, 136, 137, 138, 139, 141,  
142, 143  
Boehmer  
Elleke, 117, 126  
Bourbeau  
Philippe, 49, 50  
Brantlinger  
Patrick, 115, 116, 117, 118, 119,  
121, 126

## C

Caliphate, 16, 17, 21  
Camus  
Albert, xiv, 81, 83, 84, 85, 89,  
146, 151, 156  
Canclini  
Nestor G., 156  
Carens  
Joseph H., xii, xvi  
Casal  
S. S., 72, 77  
Castile, 14, 15, 17, 20, 21, 22, 23, 25  
categorize, vii, viii  
Cazanave  
Caroline, 99, 100  
Cebulko  
Kara, 28, 35, 36, 37  
CESEDA, 39, 41, 42, 53  
Chicana, 67, 70, 74

Christians, xiv, 14, 15, 16, 18, 20,  
24, 25, 99

Cisneros  
Sandra, xiv, 67, 68, 69, 70, 72,  
73, 74, 75, 76, 77, 78

citizenship, xi, 28, 29, 30, 31, 33,  
34, 35, 36, 41, 46, 47, 48, 58, 63,  
64, 162

civil war, 1, 103

Coetzee, xv, 101, 102, 104, 110,  
111, 112

colonial subject, 80, 84, 134

colonized, xv, 117, 118, 119, 124

contamination, xv

Córdoba, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 23

crime of solidarity, xiv, 41, 42

criminalization, xiv, 40, 42, 43, 44

cultural documents, 130, 135, 136,  
137, 139, 141, 142, 143

## D

DACA, 29, 30, 31, 34, 35, 36, 37

dacamented, 37

Daoud  
Kamel, xiv, 81, 85, 86, 89

DAPA, 30

Dasgupta  
Sudeep, 154, 156

de Rivas  
Duke, 19, 25

Deleuze  
Gilles, 124, 126, 159

*Délinquants Solidaires*, 40, 43, 44,  
51

Derrida, ix, xvi, 6, 101, 108, 109,  
111, 159

Devji  
Faisal, 139, 143

discrimination, x, 2, 5, 8, 48, 67, 70

displacement, xv, 77, 145, 146,  
153, 154, 155

diversity, xiv, xv, 16, 46, 47, 99

Donoghue  
Denis, 146, 147, 151, 155

Doyle  
Conan, xv, 115

DREAM Act, 28, 29, 33, 37

DREAMers, xiv, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31,  
33, 34, 35, 36, 37

Durell  
Lawrence, xv, 91, 100

## E

Egypt, xv, 5, 91, 93, 94, 97

Ellis Island, 155, 156

empathy, 6, 7, 8, 9

estrangement, 82, 89, 150

ethics, 101, 109, 111, 161

ethnicity, xiv, xv, 13, 18, 111

European, 2, 10, 11, 14, 15, 16, 23,  
25, 42, 43, 51, 53, 60, 82, 83, 134,  
148, 152, 159

exile, xiv, 18, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 85,  
160

exoticism, 91, 92, 95, 96, 97, 98, 99

extraterrestrial, x

## F

Fares  
Gustavo, 72, 78

feminism, 67, 77

Fernando  
Mayanthi, 48, 51

*foreigner*, viii, ix, x, xi, xii, 41, 43,  
45, 57

foreigners, xi, xv, 2, 15, 28, 40, 41,  
42, 44, 48, 50, 87, 102, 115

Foucault, 79, 89, 130, 159

France, xii, xiv, 2, 4, 39, 40, 41, 45,  
46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 57, 82,  
98, 100, 161, 162

French, viii, ix, x, xii, xiv, xvii, 2, 5,  
6, 11, 14, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 45,  
46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 80,  
81, 82, 83, 84, 85, 97, 99, 160,  
161, 162

Freud, ix

## G

Galinsky  
Adam D., xvii, 8, 10

gender, viii, xiii, xv, 67, 70, 111,  
160

genocide, xiii

German, 4, 5, 7, 57, 62, 130, 135,  
136, 137, 142, 161

Germany, 60, 61, 93, 136  
 Gherib  
   Emira, 63, 65  
 ghosts, xv, 101, 102, 108, 111, 161  
 GISTI, 40, 42, 45, 51  
 globalization, xii, 160  
 Golden Age, 13, 17, 18, 19, 160  
 Gordon  
   Avery F., 10, 89, 108, 111

**H**

home, viii, ix, xiv, 31, 32, 39, 57, 58,  
 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 67, 69, 70, 71,  
 72, 73, 75, 76, 83, 85, 88, 106,  
 140, 148  
 homelessness, xiv, 71, 76  
 Honigmann  
   E.A.J., 3, 10  
 hooks  
   bell, xiii, xvi  
 hospitality, 6, 21, 41, 45, 50, 104,  
 109, 162  
 human rights, 40, 41, 45, 141  
 Hunt  
   Lynn, 6, 10  
 Husserl  
   Edmund, 146, 149, 156  
 Huysmans  
   Jef, 41, 49, 51

**I**

ideology, 4, 47, 131, 133, 135  
 illegal, xi, xii, xvii, 28, 31, 35, 42, 58  
 imagination, vii, xiv, 1, 3, 6, 7, 8, 9,  
 96, 99, 102, 108, 110, 133, 145  
 immigrants, xi, xii, xiv, xv, 1, 2, 3,  
 27, 28, 29, 33, 34, 36, 44, 81, 87,  
 102, 146, 155  
 imperialism, 131, 132, 134, 139,  
 140, 141, 142, 143  
 Inghilleri  
   Maira, 148, 156  
 invasion, xiii, xv, 15, 118, 119, 122,  
 131, 136  
 Islamic, 16, 25, 94, 130, 132  
 Islamophobia, xiii  
 Italy, xiv, 39, 57, 60, 61, 63, 82, 98

**J**

Jews, xiv, 14, 15, 16, 25, 47, 132,  
 136, 139, 143

**K**

Kalay  
   Faruk, 69, 78  
 Kemp  
   Richard, 129, 130, 133, 134, 138,  
 140, 141  
 Keyes  
   Elizabeth, 33, 37  
 knowledge, xiv, 74, 75, 79, 80, 81,  
 83, 84, 86, 87, 88, 93, 101, 104,  
 142, 151, 155  
 Koopman  
   Eva Maria, 6, 7, 10  
 Kristeva, ix, xvi, 104, 112  
 K uchler  
   Ulrike, ix, xvi, xvii  
 Kuehn  
   Felix, xv, 129, 132, 138, 140,  
 141, 143

**L**

Laborde  
   C ecile, 47, 48, 51  
*laicit e*, 46, 47, 48  
 Linschoten  
   Alex Strick van, xv, 129, 132,  
 138, 140, 141, 143

**M**

mansplaining, 74, 78  
 Massey  
   Douglas S., 34, 37  
 Mayer  
   Hans, 80, 86, 89  
 Mayorga  
   Juan, xv, 81, 86, 88, 89  
 McKellen  
   Ian, 1, 2, 3, 4, 11  
 medieval, xiv, 13, 14, 15, 16, 18, 74,  
 99  
 medium, xv, 41, 101, 102, 104, 106,  
 107, 110, 111, 153, 161

Mendoza-Denton  
 Rodolfo, vii, xvii  
 Menocal  
 Maria Rosa, 14, 25  
 Mexican, 27, 30, 31, 32, 38  
 migration, xiv, xv, xvii, 1, 59, 81,  
 87, 148, 154, 159  
 minority, xi, 7, 57, 80  
 misogyny, xiv, 67, 73, 76, 77  
 Moore  
 Karen Nelson, xi, xvii  
 Moors, 15, 16, 21, 24  
 Moura  
 Jean-Marc, 92, 95, 96, 100  
 Mucchielli  
 Laurent, 44, 52  
 Munday  
 Anthony, xiv, 1, 2, 3, 10  
 Muslim, 14, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21,  
 22, 23, 24, 47, 49, 51, 82, 93, 99,  
 140, 145  
 Muslims, xii, xiv, xvii, 14, 15, 16,  
 20, 24, 25, 47, 82, 91, 94, 99

## N

Nancy  
 Jean-Luc, ix, xvi, xvii  
 nationalism, xiv, 14, 47, 58, 63, 64,  
 131  
 nationality, viii, x, xiii, 14, 15, 18,  
 52, 63, 65  
 nation-state, xiv, 13, 14, 15, 17, 21,  
 23, 25  
 Native Americans, xii, 7  
 nativism, 1  
 naturalization, x, 49  
 Nazism, 136  
 Ngai  
 Mae M., xi, xii, xvii

## O

Obama  
 Barack, Michelle, 27, 29, 30, 32,  
 37, 38  
 Orientalism, 91, 100, 134  
 otherness, ix, xii, xv, 67, 71, 72, 77,  
 81, 102, 104, 105, 109, 111

others, viii, xii, xiii, xiv, xv, 7, 8, 21,  
 28, 46, 48, 72, 77, 81, 82, 84, 85,  
 88, 94, 102, 103, 109, 129, 130,  
 133, 134, 136, 141, 145, 149,  
 151, 162  
*outsider*, viii, ix, x, xi, xv, 67, 69, 71,  
 73, 75, 76, 80, 81, 85, 89  
 outsiders, xii, xiv, xvi, 41, 48, 49,  
 70, 71, 72, 77, 80, 81, 88, 102,  
 146, 162

## P

Parker  
 Kunal, viii, xii, xvii  
 Patler  
 Caitlin, 30, 35, 36, 37  
 Pecotic  
 Ediva, 146, 147, 148, 152, 156  
 Pérez  
 William, 22, 34, 37  
 Philippines, 31  
 Pinker  
 Steven, 6, 11  
 pluralism, 46  
 poetry, 129, 130, 131, 132, 133,  
 134, 135, 136, 137, 138, 139,  
 140, 141, 142, 143, 144, 154  
 power, vii, ix, x, xii, xiv, 5, 7, 15, 44,  
 73, 79, 81, 82, 84, 87, 88, 101,  
 102, 103, 104, 106, 108, 111,  
 129, 133, 137, 138, 140, 142,  
 147, 148, 152

## R

race, viii, x, xiii, xiv, xv, 2, 13, 18,  
 25, 131  
 racism, xiv, 67, 77, 97  
 Rahman  
 Zia Haider, xv, 16, 17, 145, 146,  
 152, 154, 156  
 Raissiguier  
 Catherine, 48, 52  
 refugees, xii, xv, 3, 9, 10, 148, 154  
 religion, viii, xiii, xiv, xv, 14, 18, 23,  
 25, 46, 49, 111, 131, 132, 134  
 Rigoni Stern  
 Mario, xiv, 57, 58, 63, 64, 65  
 Rosello

Mireille, xiv, xvii  
 Rotas  
   Alex, 146, 157  
 Ruscio  
   Alain, xiii, 52

**S**

Said  
   Edward, 74, 93, 100, 134, 140  
 Sartre  
   Jean-Paul, 80, 146, 149, 157  
 Sassen  
   Saskia, 88, 89  
 Schülting  
   Sabine, 5, 6, 11  
 Scott  
   Joan Wallach, 47, 48, 52  
 secularism, 41, 45, 49, 162  
 securitarian, 44, 49, 50, 162  
 Segalen  
   Victor, 91, 95, 99, 100  
 Shakespeare, xiii, 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8,  
   9, 10, 11, 162  
 Shannon  
   Careen, vii, xi, xvii, 9  
 Shih  
   Margaret, 8, 11  
 Slama  
   Serge, 41, 50, 52  
 Spain, xiv, 2, 4, 13, 14, 15, 16, 18,  
   19, 24, 25, 80, 81, 82, 86, 161  
 Specter, 102, 112  
 Spivak  
   Gayatri, 134, 144  
 Stanton  
   Domna C., 48, 52  
 stigma, 1, 3, 5, 8  
*stranger*, vii, viii, ix, x, xi, xii, xv,  
   xvii, 3, 5, 14, 41, 76, 80, 81, 84,  
   86, 92, 101, 103, 109  
 strangers, vii, viii, ix, xii, 1, 2, 4, 5,  
   6, 11, 14, 59, 82, 85, 109  
 Syria, 1, 148

**T**

Taliban, xv, 129, 130, 131, 133, 134,  
   137, 138, 139, 140, 141, 143  
 Todorov, vii, xvii  
 totalitarianism, 135  
 transnationalism, 15, 20  
 travel, 28, 40, 96, 97, 98  
 Trinh  
   T. Minh-Ha, viii, ix, xvii  
 Trump  
   Donald, xii, xvii, 36, 38

**U**

undocumented, xi, 28, 29, 30, 31,  
   33, 34, 35, 36, 39, 44, 80, 87, 88,  
   89  
 United Kingdom, xii, 129  
 United States, xii, xiv, 27, 28, 29,  
   30, 31, 32, 37, 38, 67, 76, 86, 98,  
   102  
 universalism, 41, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49,  
   162

**W**

women, xii, 3, 27, 34, 47, 58, 69, 71,  
   72, 73, 74, 75, 76, 129, 131, 132,  
   137, 139, 141

**X**

xenophobia, xiv, 41, 67, 76, 77

**Z**

Zamora  
   Ana, 27, 30, 38  
 Ziegler  
   Erica Deuber, vii, x, xvii  
 Zindell  
   David, xiii, xvii