Who 'We' Are: Otherness, Nationalism and the Media

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Abstract

Media play a key role in shaping who 'we' are – not just on an individual level, but also on a national level. However, to define the Self, we need an Other – which can then shapeshift in order to fit the discourse required. Making use of examples from Japan and the UK, two countries with a strong sense of national 'uniqueness', I will look at how the media construct 'Otherness' in both countries, who these Others are and how they are appropriated. Thus, in times in which nationalist movements are on the rise, it becomes even more important to look at how the media contribute to or dismantle nationalistic debates.

1. Introduction – Them or Us?

Media continue to affect notions of who 'we' are, "provid[ing] the models of what it means to be male or female, successful or a failure, powerful or powerless. Media culture also provides the materials out of which many people construct their sense of class, of ethnicity and race, of nationality, of sexuality, of 'us' and 'them'" (Kellner 1995: 1). This potential of the media is independent of which country they are produced in or for. Only the discourses are different across countries and they shift over time, as what constitutes who 'we' are changes constantly. Consequently, the creation of an 'Other' is always a political as well as emotional tool that feeds directly into the creation of a 'Self' and its 'national' identity, helping to forge a sense of belonging for the one and a sense of exclusion for the other. In this sense, the media have an important part to play, as they can be seen as directly responsible for creating this sense of an imagined community (Anderson 1991). But every Self requires an Other, someone who is on the outside, someone who is not 'us', or in Lacan's (1968) sense, the 'big Other', the Other by whom we define who we are. The Self and the Other always exist in binary oppositions, and Othering becomes almost a necessary practice to define what it is that holds 'us' all together, because 'we are not them'. Very often, this 'holding together' can take more extreme forms, as whatever is different is stereotyped at best and ostracized at worst. To put it into Frederickson's words, "My theory or conception of racism, therefore, has two components: difference and power. It originates from a mind-set that regards "them" as different from "us" in ways that are permanent and unbridgeable" (2015 [2002]: 9). In fact, the binary of 'us and them' is such a strong undercurrent within the national discourse that, for example, a two-episode documentary series on Britain's relationship with the EU, broadcast

by the British public broadcasting service BBC was named *Europe: Them or Us* – thereby constructing a binary opposition between Great Britain and the rest of Europe.[1] This shows clearly how deeply these binaries underlie the discourses of Self and Other and how they are reflected in the media. At the same time, however, such notions also hint at another brand of racism, namely cultural racism, or, in other words, the extent to which "race is now 'coded as culture'" (Solomos and Back, cited from Fredrickson 2015 [2002]: 8).

In this paper, I will look at two case studies, Japan and the UK, two 'island nations' in a geographical sense with a supposed 'island mentality' opposite its nearest neighbours. However, I will *not* be looking at how a phenotypically different Other, say white people in Japan or Asian people in the UK, are represented, but I will set my focus on 'close Others', focusing on Othering processes when cultural and phenotypical proximity is involved. In other words, how do the Japanese represent other East Asians, and how do the British represent other Europeans? And how does the construction of Japaneseness and Britishness, however vaguely defined, work when cultural proximity is part of the game?

Even though two 'island nations' with a supposed 'island mentality' are a compelling point of comparison that has already often been made, what is usually omitted in arguments about their 'difference from the rest' is that the reasons for Japan's alleged distance to its Asian neighbours has a completely different historical dimension than Britain's supposed distance to the rest of Europe. To explain those differences, it is necessary to briefly look back at history.

2. A not so 'Splendid Isolation'? Japan's interactions with the Asian continent

Island or not, a complete withdrawal from the affairs on the continent is, and has always been, impossible, given Japan's comparative closeness to the Asian mainland. The influence of China, often via a Korean filter, is well visible in Japan, as, after all, Japan uses the Chinese script and Confucian philosophy continues to be important to this day. However, Japan has always swayed between periods of intensive learning and periods of comparative seclusion. The most prolonged time of seclusion, termed *sakoku* (closed country) in Japanese, lasted from the 17th century to the 19th century. Japan, however, never shut itself entirely away, trade with the rest of the world continued, although to a more limited extent than before. With trade did, of course, also come knowledge and skills. Even though foreigners were not generally permitted to enter the country, there were annual trade delegations in which they did see the rest of Japan. When this period of relative seclusion came to an end in 1853, after roughly 250 years, it was the heyday of Western imperialism. With the help of 'gunboat diplomacy', Japan's ports were opened to a form of trade in which Japan very much was the junior partner. In

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[1] This documentary was hosted by the BBC's chief political editor Nick Robinson and broadcast on 12 and 19 April 2016 on BBC Two. Media discourses in the UK often equate Europe with the EU, not making a distinction between the political organization and the continent.

order to not suffer the fate of being colonized, Japan embarked on a mission to modernize, and developed from a secluded island in which firearms had been banished to a country with a modern army and infrastructure in about half a century. As its own progression from 'regressive' to 'modern' was so rapid, the rest of Asia, but mainly China and Korea, were seen to be as backward as Japan once used to be. China in particular, was Orientalized – it became an internalized vision of Japan's past, of how Japan itself once was and which consequently needed help in evolving (Tanaka 1993). The same imperialist discourses of superiority and inferiority as in the 'West' began to take hold in Japan, with the aim to make Japan one of the players, not one of the playthings, on the imperial playground. Ultimately, Japan should rise to 'free' the Asian continent from a stranglehold of the Western imperial powers. After the first Sino-Japanese War in 1894/95, in which the Japanese crushingly defeated the Chinese, Taiwan became Japan's first colony. Korea was annexed only fifteen years later, in 1910.

Subsequently, Japan expanded its influence on the Asian mainland, but not benignly, on the contrary, the Japanese colonial rule was exceptionally brutal, forcing the colonial citizens in Korea and Taiwan to adopt Japanese names and customs as well as limiting the use of their native languages. In 1931, with the creation of Manchukuo in what is now China's Northeast, a nominally independent puppet state under Japanese control, Japan arguably became the most important player within the Asian context. However, Japan's appetite to expand its sphere of influence was not satisfied, and it marched into China in 1937, embarking on a brutal war. It is the lack of long-time engagement during the period of relative seclusion, and the subsequent attempt to establish Japan as regional hegemon with a feeling of being superior by having avoided colonization, that feeds directly into Japan's troubled relationship with its Asian neighbours today. A perceived lack of recognition of responsibility as aggressor during those wars by the Japanese political establishment has furthermore alienated the country from Asia. In addition, cold-war realpolitik made it difficult for Japan to engage with the People's Republic of China for most of the post-war period. The lack of a regional multilateral organization has not helped Japan in finding partners in its former enemies and peace treaties that left out controversial issues have all but isolated Japan in Asia. The reasons for this isolation are thus pre-dominantly historical, mirroring Japan's prior engagement as imperial power over its neighbours.

3. Splendidly isolated, but never actually isolated – Britain and Europe

Conversely, throughout its history, in spite of politically opportune claims to the contrary, Britain has never really been isolated from affairs on the European continent and has always intervened, or taken sides, when its interests were at stake. Be it by fighting over Calais during the 15th and 16th centuries, or during the Napoleonic Wars at the beginning of the 19th century, Britain did not ever have a period of 'sakoku'. Nonetheless, the term 'splendid isolation' is often heard with regards to British politics.

An isolationalist policy (real or not) is often attributed to the then Prime Minister Lord Salisbury in the late 19th century, during the heyday of British

imperialism. It falls roughly in the time of the Tripartite Intervention of Russia, France and Germany preventing Japan from getting a stronger hold on mainland Chinese territory after it had won the first Sino-Japanese War in 1895. The intervention of the three continental powers in effect made Britain look isolated within Europe. This was, however, not to stay the case for long, and the Entente Cordiale between France and Britain, signed in 1904, already brought this to a conclusion. In effect, however, 'isolation' was supposed to mean minimal involvement in affairs on the continent. Although 'isolation' commonly means an "embarrassing lack of friends among the other powers" (Howard 1967: 77), it became a popular discourse which continues to resurface to this day. However, never did Britain cease to engage in political affairs happening across the English Channel, most notably so by fighting against Germany in two world wars and being part of the Western bloc during the cold war, with a notable military presence on the continent throughout the time. Its supposed isolation, splendid or not, is thus often appropriated to define 'difference' whenever needed, but it is more invented tradition than it ever was a policy.[2]

4. Inventing Great Britain – Us and Them in British media

The wide use of national symbols' and national denotations in the British media is striking. Anything can take the label 'Great British'. For example, *The Great British Bake-Off*, a programme in which hobby bakers compete for the title as the best hobby baker, *Great British Menu*, in which professional chefs have to design a menu for a dinner at a special occasion, or, more recently, *Great British Garden Revival*, *Great British Railway Journeys*, to name but few of the BBCs programmes, which are complemented by *Rory Bremner's Great British Views* on the private station ITV, respectively *A Great British Christmas* on another private station, Channel 4. Often, the logos of these shows will feature a union flag somewhere. While this could be seen as a branding exercise, maybe harking back to the days of 'Cool Britannia' under Tony Blair's leadership,[3] it also creates the feeling of an 'imagined community' – the 'Great British people' taking part in a common activity. Admittedly, the 'Great Britishness' is not very well defined and simply serves as a label. Nonetheless, it made headlines when a young housewife of Bangladeshi origin, wearing a headscarf won *The Great British Bake-Off* in 2015 – as it was seen as a step towards acceptance of 'difference' and the integration of Muslims into British society; and her representation was remarkably different from other images of veiled women in the British media.[4]

In addition to labelling programmes 'Great British', national stereotypes will also often be evoked – even if the programme itself does not have anything to do with an 'Other'. A show called *Hurricanes and Heatwaves: The Highs and Lows of British Weather* called the supposed relationships between Britons and

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[2] For a discussion on how the supposed 'policy' came about, see Howard 1967, Charmley 2004 and Charmley 2013 [1999].
[3] For a brief discussion of Cool Britannia see Kirsch 2015b.
[4] On representations of veiled women in British media see Sadar 2014.

their climate, "a national obsession", and the whole programme did not just mention how much the British love to talk about the weather, but the significance of the forecasts within this 'national obsession' was reiterated a number of times. In other words, and pointedly put, you have to be British in order to care about the weather.

The 'singling out' of Britain as different, special and, indeed, unique is like a leitmotif through the British media, private and public alike and the aforementioned documentary *Europe: Them or Us* thus falls on fertile ground. The opening words of this documentary use the preconception that Britain is "an island apart". Looking at media discourses on the EU, immigrants from other EU countries coming to the UK have taken centre stage. They are often represented along the same tropes as during the time that Stuart Hall wrote about racism towards immigrants from Britain's former colonies.[5] Immigrants from other EU countries are scapegoated, made responsible for 'stealing jobs' and 'bleeding dry' British social systems, reminiscent of the rhetoric heard in the 1970s with respect to black people. Ever since the rise of the UK Independence Party,[6] UKIP for short, discourses on immigration has shifted from the periphery to the centre of the debate around Britain's membership in the European Union and in fact, formed a large part of the arguments of the various political campaigns for Britain to leave the European Union.[7] While it would be for a different paper to look at the campaigns in detail, the focus here will be set on what came before the referendum about Britain's EU membership on 23 June 2016, as there was a gradual change in the rhetoric about immigrants even before the referendum.[8]

Here, a brief look at data is warranted. The share of foreign-born people in the UK is about 13%, and 8.5% do not hold British citizenship. As EU citizens do not need to apply for residence or work permits, the total number is unclear. Indian citizens constitute the largest group of foreign residents, and overall, only about half of those 8.5% are from another EU country, with Polish citizens occupying the top spot (Rienzo and Vargas-Silva 2016). While the debate about immigration was taking off, the media initially distinguished at least between non-EU and EU immigrants, and within the EU immigrants, between Eastern and Western European. In fact, the debate was heavily biased towards certain EU-member states, most notably, Poland, Romania and Bulgaria which bore the brunt of the media stereotyping of immigrants. For example, going back to the European

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[5] See, for example, Hall 1978.

[6] The UK Independence Party for a long time campaigned for 'independence' from the EU, predominantly using immigration as reason for leaving.

[7] Two campaigns are noteworthy in that respect. The official 'Vote Leave' campaign, a cross-party initiative spearheaded by two conservatives, then Secretary of Justice Michael Gove and the current Foreign Minister (then Minister without Portfolio and former Mayor of London) Boris Johnson as well as Leave.eu (headed by Nigel Farage) used claims about immigration to get the electorate to vote for leave.

[8] Since the initial conception of this paper and its presentation at the conference in Bucharest, Britain has voted to leave the European Union. At the point of writing in July 2016, the status of EU citizens having come to the UK under Freedom of Movement rules, is yet to be solved. Racist incidents, however, have increased sharply since the referendum, yet the targets of such incidents are not always EU-foreigners. See, for example, Dodd 2016.

elections in 2014, which coincided with the limitations on Freedom of Movement coming to an end for Romania and Bulgaria, the then leader of the Liberal Democrats and Deputy Prime Minister, Nick Clegg, faced Nigel Farage, the UKIP leader for two televised debates.[9] Farage summoned the spectre that "29 million Romanians and Bulgarians may come to this country", upon which Clegg said "'There aren't even 29 million Romanians and Bulgarians living in Romania and Bulgaria. It's simply not true.'

"That's because two million have already left, Farage replied, and said the UK's borders are now open to 485 million people. 'We have a total open door, unconditionally'" (cited from Holehouse 2014). The *Daily Telegraph*, a national broadsheet newspaper with a conservative agenda, subsequently gave these numbers a supposed 'reality check' – and concluded, "Strictly speaking, Farage is almost right. Romania's population is 21.7 million and Bulgaria's is 6.9 million, according to the CIA world factbook." An innocent reader would thus believe the *Daily Telegraph's* 'facts', however, the EU itself gives different data, namely 19.9 million for Romania and 7.2 for Bulgaria, thus not adding up to 29 million (Eurostat 2014). Yet, numbers are drawn in to provide evidence of a threat, which is subtly furthered by the *Daily Telegraph*, as "Farage is almost right." It is all the more noteworthy that the newspaper does not even in any way question the complete lack of likelihood that every single individual (inclusive of the government and every civil servant!) in Romania and Bulgaria would even consider moving to the UK – a claim which was also not contested by Nick Clegg. The second number that Farage uses, namely that the UK has an open door to 485 million people is, crucially, not under the same supposed 'scrutiny' by the *Daily Telegraph*. Checking Farage's claim again against EU population data it also becomes clear why, the EU as a whole has 506 million inhabitants, 64 of which are British, which means that a maximum of 442 million people can theoretically come to live in the UK, not 485. Again, the fact that not every single person in every of the EU's 27 other member states would even want to emigrate, let alone to the UK, is left uncontested.[10]

The debates leading up to the elections for the European Parliament in 2014 has been well documented by previous research, and Fox, Moroşanu and Szilassy conclude, "that anti-immigrant rhetoric proffered by politicians and propagated by the media has contributed to a general climate of hostility that sanctions the moralising, differentiation of (if not actual discrimination against) East Europeans" (Spigelman 2013, Light and Young 2009, cited from Fox et al. 2015: 730). The "category conflation" also observed by Fox et al. (2012: 688) thus initially referred to only Eastern European immigrants – as they were all tarred with the same brush and the reasons for emigration (ranging from marriage to doing a degree to unskilled and skilled labour) were completely disregarded.

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[9] At the time, Nick Clegg was one of the most vocal proponents of EU membership for the UK.

[10] This strategy was used again by one of the leading figures in the *Vote Leave* campaign, then Secretary of Justice Michael Gove in an article for a tabloid, the *Daily Mail*, in April of 2016, in which he claimed 88 million Turkish and Albanian people were next to come to UK (Gove 2016).

The categories collapsed even further, when in July 2015, then Prime Minister David Cameron spoke about 'migrants' in Calais as "a swarm of people" only waiting to come to the UK, drawing in severe criticism about 'dehumanising' these people, none of whom is an EU citizen (Elgot and Taylor 2015). Note, however, the use of the term 'migrants' which has become a *pars pro toto* definition for anyone foreign coming to the UK, and Cameron's choice of words, reminiscent of the 1970s and 1980s, when "[the] theme of outnumbering [was] a mainstay of white racial politics, becoming the organising principle of British post-war debate, moving from discussion of 'overcrowding' (especially in relation to housing) to the language of 'flooding' and 'swamping' used respectively by Enoch Powell and Margaret Thatcher" (Fryer 1984, Miles and Phizacklea 1984, cited from Dyer 2006 [1997]: 26).

To complicate matters, Syrian war refugees on the European continent have also come to be known as 'migrants' in the UK media,[11] blurring the boundaries between the various groups of people even further. Indeed, a former government minister, Owen Paterson, suggested that the Syrian 'migrants' would apply for German citizenship so that they could come to the UK (Khomami 2016) – thus almost necessitating the conflation of categories. The sole term in use is now migrants, completely devoid of a denotation of origin or purpose of migration. While indeed, academically, the term migrant is politically neutral and simply means someone migrating (regardless of purpose), this hiding behind a technical term and seeming 'political correctness' also has the flipside of category conflation and 'blanket Othering' of diverse groups of people with completely different aims and purposes – and thus a real debate about the various forms of migration is prevented.

Fast forward to the last example of 'Othering' of immigrants. On 12 May 2016, the Office for National Statistics, ONS, released data on how many immigrants from other EU countries had actually applied for a National Insurance Number – and it yielded, that actually about a million more EU-citizens had a National Insurance Number than previously thought. On 13 May, this topic dominated the headlines. The *Daily Telegraph* demanded an apology, the *Daily Mail* talked about a 'cover up', the *Sun* about a 'migrant swindle' and, finally, the *Daily Express* simply called those 'hidden migrants'. To be fair, the left-wing *Guardian* did use this data to run a warning by the former conservative Prime Minister John Major, namely that the *Vote Leave* campaign risked turning into UKIP. It did not feature as front page news on the *Financial Times*, the *Times*, the *Metro*, the *Daily Star*, the *Daily Mirror*, or *i*.[12]

Again, however, the categories have become even more conflated – by now, we are only talking about immigrants from other EU countries, whose "[…] shared whiteness operat[es] as a basis of inclusion, but cultural difference […] as a criterion for exclusion." (Fox et al. 2012: 691). The number of immigrants is

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[11] See, for example, Posener 2016.
[12] The BBC publishes scans of the front pages of the main national newspapers, so the papers of the 13 May 2016 may no longer be available. It nonetheless provides a good overview of what is being picked up on by both conservative and left-wing papers. See BBC 2016.

continuously used to conjure a threat, appealing to the emotions of the audiences, as if 'Britishness', so vigorously upheld by the media, is under threat by similar looking, yet culturally slightly distinct people. An imbalance of power is of course innate to these discourses – Britain becomes the land of milk and honey, sought for by the invariably poor(er) 'EU-migrants'. Yet, at the same time the media are so passionately involved in generating an 'Other' that Britishness is defined only by exclusion of the Other. It becomes everything 'non-EU' and everything 'non-foreign', making it even vaguer than it was before. Brian Massumi sums this up when looking at how 'terrorist events' are felt, and very similar processes are at play here, namely "mass affective production of felt threat-potential engulfs the (f)actuality of the comparatively small number of incidents where danger materialized. They blend together in a shared atmosphere of fear" (Massumi 2010: 61).

5. Inventing an 'Other' – Japanese imaginations of other Asian countries

By contrast, the population of Japan is by far more ethnically homogenous than the UK, as only about 2% of people in Japan are of foreign origin, most of which do come from China and Korea – and thus visibly blend in, just like most EU immigrants would simply blend in in the UK. Discourses of national homogeneity and cultural uniqueness have long been ingrained into the Japanese national identity, underpinned by countless books which highlight cultural difference to the rest of the world. In addition to that, the Japanese media are also very 'insular' and possibly among the least connected in the world. They are focused on the domestic market and matters relating to foreign countries are barely reported. If at all, US politics feature more. However, in spite of the Cool Japan soft power policy which the previous government initiated to get more tourists to come to Japan, the myth of Japanese 'uniqueness' is carefully upheld (Kirsch 2015b).

When it came to a rapprochement of Japan and its Asian neighbours in the 1990s, the boundaries established in the cold war had begun to weaken. Immigration increased and within a short period of time the number of foreigners in Japan doubled – from 1% to 2%. The debate that the UK saw in the 1950s, 60s and 70s with regards to immigration from former colonies and is having now with regards to immigration from other EU countries thus happened in the 1990s in Japan, leaving us with a different time frame as point of comparison. The popular and populist writings on Japan that saw the country as almost irreconcilably different from the rest of the world triggered a countermovement – that of internationalization. The Japanese word, *kokusaika*, became a buzzword within society, and it was clearly the aim of the internationalists to get more foreigners into Japan to make it more diverse. Several scholarship programmes still taking students to Japan as exchange or full-time students date back to that period of economic growth and *kokusaika*. However, as the numbers of foreigners began to visibly increase, of course, the debate about those Others also began. A small, but decisive 'Asia boom' evolved in the early 1990s, when Japanese cinema took the

lead in presenting more stories about other Asian countries. This 'Asia boom' eventually came to penetrate all media and in some of its forms weakened the notion that Japanese culture is different from the rest of the world – by simply acknowledging cultural similarities with its Asian neighbours (Kirsch 2015a).

It is worthy of notice that it was fiction that picked up on the topos of immigration to Japan, which is a marked difference to the UK – where fictional genres do barely represent immigration from other EU countries. The first storylines which incorporated Asian Otherness in Japan showed other Asian characters coming to Japan to study (thus improving themselves) and return home (to improve their countries). Japan stood as a beacon of modernity within Asia, a country to which other Asians could look up to, a model to emulate (Kirsch 2015a). As the number of immigrants increased, the debate in both fiction as well as in the news media moved away from students coming to study in Japan, to criminals following in their wake[13] – which is also an undercurrent to the debate in the UK.[14]

Subsequently, the media began to highlight the supposed high number of criminals among foreigners – like in the case of the UK, using numbers to their advantage. Visa violations were included in the crime statistics, which, by nature, is a crime only a foreigner can commit, so the ratio was artificially inflated. The data was thus used to criminalize foreigners in general, but foreigners from other Asian countries in particular. Crucially, statistics were never compared (because it would have yielded the result that, visa issues set aside, foreigners do not commit more crimes than the Japanese). Yamamoto Ryoko (2004) called this a game in which media and politicians were complicit in scapegoating foreigners in order to toughen immigration laws.

This ongoing debate culminated in the publication of a magazine, called *Gaijin hanzai ura fairu* (The hidden files of foreign criminality) in 2007 in which some areas of Tokyo were designated to be 'lawless zones' and thus 'no-go areas', due to the activity of foreign gangs. On the back cover of the magazine, foreigners were rated by their 'dangerousness', creating the impression that every foreign national is by definition evil (Washinton ed. 2007, Arudou 2007, Kirsch 2015a). Reasons for migration to Japan were drowned in the debate on criminality, conflating the categories between the various groups of immigrants, students, workers, foreign spouses. However, while in the UK a tendency to cover every 'Other' with the general term of 'migrant', the Japanese debate made it clear that certain ethnicities were supposedly more dangerous than others, with the Chinese being 'most dangerous'. The few foreign criminals that ended up making headlines, were consequently always denoted by their nationality, they were not 'just criminal', but 'Chinese *and* criminal', for example. This tendency could not only be observed within the news media, but films that were produced around that time interestingly also picked up the foreign criminality tropes, furthering the fear

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[13] See, for example, Japan Times 2002. In addition, a database search on Asahi Kikuzō Visual II (the archives of the various outlets of the Asahi Group, one of the biggest newspaper/magazine publishers in Japan), set at 1989-2016 generates 897 hits (542 between 1989 and 2002), indicating how immensely important this topic continues to be.
[14] Cases of foreign criminality, particularly of one Latvian man killing a school girl were used by the campaigns for Britain to leave the European Union (Grierson 2016).

of foreigners even further. The dichotomies were clear-cut, the Japanese stayed on moral high ground, as those not committing crimes (or lesser ones) opposite extremely cruel Asian foreigners (Kirsch 2015a).

As the political relationship between Japan and China worsened, the foreigners most often shown as criminal were the Chinese. As Chinese gangs supposedly took hold of one particular area of Tokyo, called Kabukichō, fiction picked up on that too, by representing the Chinese as members of gangs, aiming to take over Japan. Nationalist slogans, namely, that Japan would be protected and the foreigners expelled were put into the mouths of Japanese characters (Kirsch 2015a). Unlike news media, fiction could and did take the liberty of making politically not so correct statements, adding a second layer to the debate by openly voicing slogans that news media would refrain from using.

Isolated incidents in which foreigners did indeed commit a crime, were exaggerated, and the media stoked the fire. Fear of foreigners in general rose,[15] so Brian Massumi's above quote also applies in the case of Japan. But, unlike the UK which has a fairly stable birth rate, Japan has one of the lowest in the world, and its workforce is shrinking. At around the time that Japan began to feel the bite of the second decade of economic slowdown, the dawn of the new millennium, immigration, particularly from low-income countries in the rest of Asia, came to be discussed as a necessity to reinvigorate the economy. The current government has reacted by creating a new visa category in 2015, namely for foreign nurses and caregivers to come to Japan temporarily – yet at the same time, the language barrier is so high that few qualify (Osaki 2015a).

The debate on immigration has more or less vanished out of the mainstream media, but a positive counter-narrative has yet to kick off.[16] It almost seems as if after a long period of struggle and scapegoating, and feeling superior to the rest of the continent, Japan seems to have accepted that immigration is to some extent needed to maintain its economic prowess. However, the debate about foreign criminality has not subsided and immigration is still looked at askance, but it has moved away from the mainstream media to the internet. Hateful and racist tweets, online blogs and bulletin boards have become the main problem, stereotypes about foreigners from Korea and China are perpetuated online.[17] In Japan, too, categories are being conflated, as China and Korea are singled out as countries – with the various immigrants coming from those countries simply being labelled 'Korean' or 'Chinese' regardless of their purpose of stay. This is particularly an issue as Japan has a large Korean minority – which has been completely socialized in Japan. The scapegoating of foreigners has thus not ended, but the outlets have changed. In sum, Japan has thus very similar problems in representing its close Others – cultural proximity was only initially acknowledged, in the rest of the debate, foreigners remained a pale sphere of projection of everything the Self was not, appropriated to highlight the moral superiority of the

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[15] A survey on public safety conducted in 2007 yielded that 55.1% of respondents listed foreign criminality as a reason for not feeling 'safe' anymore (Cabinet Office Japan 2007).

[16] Most recently in 2015, the government is again seeking to limit immigration. See Osaki 2015b.

[17] See, for example, Iwabuchi and Takezawa 2015.

Japanese. Nationalistic views of not wanting foreigners in the country drowned out the debate on the benefits of immigration.

6. Conclusion – Who are 'we'?

So, who are 'we'? What has become clear throughout is that the 'Other' remains a construct of 'Ourselves' and every dialogue about, and with, the Other is always first and foremost also about and with 'Ourselves'. The target may change, as is the case in Britain, in which the scapegoating of foreigners shifted from immigrants of its former colonies to include immigrants from other EU-countries. Although written for a very different context, namely Britain in the 1970s, Stuart Hall's (1978) work on 'racism' still has validity yet the boundaries of what constitutes racism have shifted. It is no longer simply defined by a different skin colour, but by culture and language. Who is Self and who is Other heavily depends on the situation and categories collapse on both sides. That the Self can be as heterogeneous as the Other, can harbour very different beliefs and have very different needs goes without saying, yet homogenization happens on both sides, and two groups of people simply oppose each other.

Japan and the UK are merely two examples of how 'migrants' are being dealt with in the media. Each and every single country in the world has had, or still has, similar problems and the appropriation of immigration within the media certainly warrants for a wider study, particularly since nationalist movements continue to be on the rise throughout the world – and in many cases, a fear of strangers and their purposes, regardless of origin, will help to define 'who we are'. The media and their role in shaping identities in opposition to Others can thus not be ignored, because this is where the debates are played out and identities are negotiated.

But in all cases, emotions always matter, be it by feeling different to an 'Other', or by a sense of belonging to a certain group of people. If an affective response can be created, by generating fear or threat, or by making people 'feel good' about themselves, then the Other has served its purpose. It may thus be fitting to leave the last words to John Cleese, explaining extremism: "What we never hear about extremism is its advantages. Well, the biggest advantage of extremism is that it makes you feel good, because it provides you with enemies" (Cleese n.d.).

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