



## **‘OTHER’/‘OTHERNESS’ IN A MULTICULTURAL WORLD AND THEIR DIVERSE QUALITIES AND VARIETIES IN THE CONTEXT OF AN APPLIED ‘LOGIC OF REVERSE’**

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This research seeks to introduce diverse qualities of thinking about ‘Otherness’/‘Other’ in a contemporary, multicultural and at the same time transcultural world, and also to search for and discover their origins, as well as to search for an answer to the question of what really hinders or blocks contact and communication with the Other and who, actually, the ‘Other’ is.

**Keywords:** Other, Variety, Logic of reverse, Stigma.

The main aim of this research is to introduce diverse qualities of thinking about ‘Otherness’/‘Other’ in a contemporary, multicultural and at the same time transcultural world, and also to search for and discover their origins (sources), as well as to search for an answer to the question of what really hinders or blocks contact and communication with the Other and who, actually, the ‘Other’ is. The research was carried out from the hermeneutic perspective and concerned the problem of the Other/Otherness, which refers to "the circular process of understanding" by Hans Georg Gadamer, helping to understand the phenomenon and the fact that everyone is different (the hermeneutic perspective allows emphasis on the hermeneutical measurement of the subject of ‘Otherness’/ ‘Other’ and their multidimensional nature). In order to broaden the understanding of the issue mentioned above, I will refer to number of theories, such as: Emmanuel Levinas, Paul Ricoeur, Rene Girard, Erving Goffman, and to Mikhail Bakhtin’s Theory of Carnavalesque. I have used the latter in my own research. Bakhtin’s ‘carnavalesque’ perception of the world enabled me to take advantage of the deceitful procedure of ‘reversing the world the other way round’ and, as a result, to apply ‘the logic of reverse’ which (in the process of research interpretation) has repeatedly contributed to the exposure and a masterful exemplification of viciousness of human fate. The research has shown that almost all the respondents were able to recollect events that illustrated his/her bipolar experiencing of phenomenon of ‘Otherness’ – that is the situations in which they were treated like ‘Others’, as well as the situations they treated someone else like ‘Other’. The ‘logic of reverse’, applied in this research, also allowed me to observe that each of us can unexpectedly become ‘Other’ and experience ‘reversing their own worlds upside down’. The results of the research indicate that the origins of ‘reversing’ are diverse. They can be caused by multiple factors and life circumstances, such as finding oneself in a ‘strange’, unfamiliar culture, random events, one’s or one’s relatives’ illness, job or property loss, death of relatives (and, paradoxically, as a result of achieved success). All of it can unexpectedly put us in the situation of ‘Other’ and destroy the hitherto law and order and, ipso facto, radically change the course of events in our lives. Sometimes, it is us who become the culprits of this situation. We choose to be ‘Others’ ourselves; we even maintain this state of affairs and we constantly persist in it, showing no initiative to change (we do not give it a chance) – that is why no change occurs. Because of that, it is very difficult to escape from the vicious circle of ‘Otherness’ without good will, our consent and participation.

Obtained results enable us to observe that finding ourselves in the situation of 'Other'/ 'Otherness' deprives a man of his self-confidence, sense of belonging to other people, dignity. Respondents who described their own experiences of 'Other'/'Otherness' often emphasized concurrent sense of: helplessness, weakness, defenselessness, solitude, uncertainty, lostness, alienation, strangeness, and even the sense of being 'worse', unwanted, stamped with a 'stigma'. It is worth mentioning that the exposure of this 'stigma', experienced by the respondents is not accidental. 'Stigma' shows itself not only as an attribute severely discriminating 'Other' itself, but also possessing strong features of 'infecting', spreading like a plague over the closest surrounding. As a result, those who surround 'the victim'/ 'Other' are also discriminated, rejected, and sometimes even oppressed. In extreme situations, the circle of fatal events spreads out to such an extent that it releases the mechanism of a 'scapegoat', growing out of 'a pattern of persecution' which involves a significantly larger group of oppressors in the invasive game. 'Logic of reverse', applied in my research, reminds us that each of us can be struck by a similar fate which condemns us to being persecuted and "stigmatized". The phenomenon presented is reversible, and it means that everyone can, unexpectedly, find themselves on the other side and experience the fate of the Other.

## Introduction

My thesis shall focus on the problem of *Otherness/the Other*<sup>1</sup>, which in today's globalised and multicultural world, takes on special rank and importance, because our contact with them has become a fact. We meet with *Otherness/the Other* both in the media, via the Internet, as well as in everyday life. "*Otherness*" reaches us through various and more and more diverse channels. That is why the sensitivity to their various manifestations requires development in the human being, as well as shaping skills of creating own relations with *Otherness/the Other* in the new reality. Therefore, I attempt to present the various thoughts about *Otherness/the Other* and their multidimensional nature. For example, "*Otherness*" conceived as unidentity can be viewed positively, by the indication of its distinctive features, especially if we evoke its synonyms: difference, dissimilarity, distinctness. It also gains positive meaning thanks to pointing out some specific characteristics, which are viewed as positive, at the same time features that distinguish from mediocrity, among a "ruck". Its positive connotations are particularly clearly revealed in its Anglo-American reference: diverse - diversity, in which multiple meanings have been inscribed, such as: distinctness, inconsistency, variety, manifold, multiplicity, variation, which we can interpret and read as praise and affirmation of "difference", which in such meaning, becomes an enriched part of human life, experience, and which makes every human being unique, exceptional, one of a kind. The adoption of such

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<sup>1</sup> The concept – *otherness* – is usually described as having characteristics that distinguish it from among a set of the same type. Initially, the term "otherness" was used for determining other human beings, seen as distinct, differing from each other, varied. "Otherness" can be seen in both positive and negative light. For example, in Emmanuel Lévinas, otherness (difference) is a good, a thing of value and richness. However, "the Other", constitutes a challenge for human self-confidence, pushes a person towards humility, thus respect for "the Other" (compare: footnote 2). Very often, the term "*Other*" is described as not the same, a second, farther, remaining, new, or changed (for example, a completely different person than before). It is most commonly used to distinguish between gender, generations, nationality, religion, race. In existentialism, the term *the Other* was often used to mark another (second) person – "This is the Other, that is me, which is not me" said Jean Paul Sartre. Sometimes, the term *the Other* is also used in negative contexts, for example, in the meaning *alien*, *dissimilar*, "*deviating from standards*". In this context it may refer to: enemies, intruders, foreigners, newly arrived immigrants, or visitors from "other planets". It may refer to any person, who is unknown to us, who comes from outside "our circle". Ryszard Kapuściński used the term *the Other* to distinguish between Europeans, people of West, white people, from those whom by convention he calls *the Others* – therefore, non-Europeans, non-white, non-Western people. He also notes that for the latter – the first are also *the Others*. We note here a kind of logic of reversing roles in an ongoing game that is life, as well as the consequences of the rules adopted in it – concerning meeting with *the Other*, establishing a chosen relation with them, compare: Szymczak (1978), Skorupka, Auderska, Łempicka(1968), Lévinas, (1991), Podsiad,(2001), Gudykunst, Kim,(2000), Kapuściński, (2007).

an interpretation enables to highlight a diverse, multifaceted aspect of "Otherness", which draws out colour in human life, at the same time making it more interesting, exciting, being a kind of unique adventure. In this context, every "Other" becomes someone important, unique, and consequently, they must be treated in a special way, as well as seriously, subjectively, exceptionally, carefully as a specific type (unique) of individual. We come across such an understanding of "*Otherness/the Other*", among others, in Lévinas' philosophy (compare: footnote 1 and 2). The complex nature of the discussed problem in today's world is largely due to the substantial extension of the field of searches for relations occurring in the space of Self – the Other. Thus far, such a relation was considered mainly in the context of the philosophy of meeting<sup>2</sup> (usually directly) within a specific culture (usually the same culture). Today, more and more, we deal with indirect contact, while a person of "*the Other and 'Otherness'*" is increasingly described by different race, religion, different traditions, rituals<sup>3</sup> entered into different cultural habitats. 21<sup>st</sup> century characterised by the process of globalisation and the phenomena accompanying it, such as: the phenomenon of deterritorialization, mobility, the mixing of various cultures and experiences, is increasingly contributing to a rising mass of "*Other*" people (who vary, are different, dissimilar to us) appearing in our surroundings. For global culture has effectively abolished borders of time and space resulting from the shape and distribution of territory, which separated the boundaries of countries of people from "*the Others*" and separated cultures that differed from one another. Therefore, the modern global world is increasingly forming elements consisting of distinct identities and cultures, which are designating new cultural standards, and at the same time new standards of human "existence" and mutual co-existence. Thus, in order not to remain in conflict with them, it is better to learn and understand them.

### **The Sources of Negative Reaction to "the Other/Otherness" and Negative Thinking About Them**

*The Other* very often appears in our imagination, thinking, feelings, as "alien", "dissimilar", "inconvenient", "undesirable", "unwanted" (which is reflected in the presented results of research). Especially in the first instance, this kind of reaction turns out to be typical and common, and is even considered normal. Usually, it is no surprise that generally we do not feel affection "at first sight" toward people we do not know, who are significantly different from us - they are "unlike" us, they seem alien to us or may somehow be a "threat" - really or only in our imagination. Such a fearful reaction to *the Other/Otherness* is a natural reaction and constitutes a natural reflex of the human being (fight – escape), which appears in situations of perceived threat and in its basis lie mistrust, restraint, reservation, and sometimes reluctance or even hostility. This reaction has its explanation in the history of mankind, in

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<sup>2</sup> Phenomenon of meeting with "*the Other*", at the heart of which a dialogue lies finds its reflection in many philosophies, among others: Emmanuel Lévinas, Martin Buber, Gabriel Marcel, Joseph Tishner and others, where the figure of the Other appears as one that is too special, one of a kind and unique, exceptional for whom one must take responsibility. Therefore, each meeting with "the Other" also becomes a unique event, and at the same time a "fundamental event", becomes mutual communication. In Lévinas, each "*the Other*" appears as radically different, different from "Self". Therefore, it cannot be reduced to it (nor to any other element of the world - the same, a whole). Lévinas sensitizes us to non-indifference, carefulness toward *the Other*, he uses concepts of ethical concerns, such as: responsibility, persecution, prosecution, obsession, see: Lévinas, (1998), Gadacz, Migasiński, (2002), Kuziak, Rzepczyński et al., (2004), compare: Kapuściński, (2007).

<sup>3</sup> Rituals help people control their own fear and changeability of fate, because through ritual behaviours (common for a given culture) a human being feels surer and better expresses and liberates fear, fear of the world, of the unknown, the passage of time, annihilation, etc. Thanks to it, the world becomes predictable, "tamed". Rituals build a mutual community, determine its identity. Each community and each group with a sense of identity, (which, among others, finds expression in the frequent use of the pronoun "we") illustrates the need to uphold and reinforce beliefs and feelings that make up its unity. In social psychology an interactive dimension of rituality is emphasized, which relates to personal experience and to the level of awareness of individuals' behaviours. Each culture has its own set of ritual behaviours, set of spells or magic steps, which allow one to feel safe and help one survive. See: Kapuściński, (2007), Maisonneuve, (1995).

mutually dealing others blows, wars, conquests, in experienced pain, which have established such attitudes. Therefore, one "Others" shun from other "Others". We see similar reactions of sensitivity to the surrounding world (and Others) in animals (although the extent of sensitivity varies in different species). Some of them, even from the far distance, sense motion, smells and sounds, and arm themselves in protective behaviours, in order to defend access to their own territory (to their own niche). People have also learned to react in a similar way, in a situation of actual or supposed threat. Sometimes, they have learned such reactions through action, through their own experiences, other times, they adopted such patterns of response from others. This happens so, because the human being, as an element of culture in which it lives, usually bases its thinking, opinions, assessments on what it is accustomed to - "what it sucked out with the mother's milk". Therefore, man usually reacts with reluctance, fear toward what is unknown, alien, and unfamiliar. Furthermore, in the course of day-to-day human interaction, people mutually confirm themselves in the appropriateness of such a response. Because of these reactions and attitudes, there are usually divisions like: mine – yours, familiar – foreign, we – them, see: Burszta, (1998), Goffman, (2007), Kapuściński, (2007). Subjecting oneself to such patterns of thinking may cause man to incessantly remain in a readiness to fight, opposition against any manifestations of variety, "Otherness", and as a result may become xenophobe<sup>4</sup> who fights, hates and discriminates "Others". Therefore, any *Other* that appears on the horizon may be perceived as a threat, as a person who is undesirable, an intruder, who threatens them, who seizes or even "steals the world"<sup>5</sup>. This state of things may sometimes lead to a struggle with "the *Other*", and sometimes even for "life or death" or the desire to exclude them from the "field of view" – it may lead to the assumption that *the Other/Otherness* is a "curse" and "hell", see: Kenny, (2001), compare: Kapuściński (2007). Such thinking sometimes entails serious consequences, leads to entering "the path of war" with "the *Other*". However, choosing war<sup>6</sup>, as a method of associating with "the *Other*" always means a failure of the human being; it uncovers their inability to agreement, dialogue and usually has a tragic course. In extreme cases, it may end with bloodshed or death. Usually, at the basis of such a choice lies the reflex of attack, which instructs to fight with "the *Other*", conquer, colonise, master, make dependent on oneself. This scenario is very well known to us all, since it has repeated itself many times throughout the history of the world. Stewart, Logan, (2000), compare: Kapuściński (2007), Strumska-Cylwik, (2009). It appears, however, that man cannot exist without "the Others" - as a social being, they live with people and among people, and they are "condemned" to people. In addition, as Jean Paul Sartre pointed out, man exists both as an existence for himself, as well as existence for the *Other*, and consequently, the need to co-exist with "Others" constitutes the main essence of life, see: Kuziak, (2004). However, in order to live in harmony with "the

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<sup>4</sup> xenophobia (according to the Greek historian Herodotus – living two and a half thousand years ago) – is a disease of the "fearful, suffering from inferiority, overpowered by the thought that they will come to look at themselves in the mirror of other cultures", see: Kapuściński, (2007).

<sup>5</sup> the perception of "the *Other*" as the one who "steals our world" was very clearly illustrated by Jean Paul Sartre – describing a situation, where the action takes place in a park. In his description, a bench appears, where one can sit and a tree hidden in the shade – claiming glances (they become the subject of the object's desire), and at the same time the subjects of a symbolic dispute, desire, struggle, internal unrest of the object. These subjects evoke a disruption between the conventional me – and *the Other*. This happens when another person appears on the horizon unexpectedly – a person seen as "the *Other*" – undesirable, who is approaching them (implicitly - a threat of appropriating them appears), see: Kenny, (2001).

<sup>6</sup> Besides war, (according to Ryszard Kapuściński) there are also other ways of associating ("coping") with "Others", which he pointed out, indicating two further possibilities that a human being has had since the dawn of history, namely: isolating oneself from "the *Other*" or making dialogue. The first shows that one can separate from "Others" in two ways: by a physical or mental wall, which, among others, is reflected in practicing the doctrine of apartheid, which simply means that "anyone can live as they want, as long as it's far away from me, if they are not part of my race, religion, culture". As Ryszard Kapuściński noticed, this concept was schematically and wrongly limited solely to the policy of the "white" regime that does not exist today in South Africa; in fact, apartheid was already practiced in immemorial times. Another possibility is establishing dialogue with "the *Other*", which turns out to be a difficult road, bumpy, requiring good will and effort of both sides; not everyone is ready and willing to choose this path, see: Kapuściński, (2007).



Other", it is worth remembering that the world of our own culture known to us usually constitutes the primary plane of reference in the assessment of other people, cultures and traditions. Therefore, the human being usually shows strong ethnocentric tendencies, due to which they "measure a foreign field with their own measure", then they usually see "Other" people, other cultures, as "alien" – the more "alien" the more strongly perceived through the prism of one's own culture - known, "familiar", foreseeable.

### **Mutual Communication with “the Other” as a Chance to Build a Community and Discover Oneself**

The colloquially used term – communication, comes from the Latin word *communico*, *communicare*, - which means not only exchange, connection, conversation, but also - to make something common, to combine, give someone a message, confer. It refers to the noun *communio* (community, a sense of connectivity). The etymology of the term *communication* can be derived from the Latin word *communicare*, meaning – to be in a relationship, to unite. While the term *communicate* from the Latin - *communis* – (*common*). *For in communicating we establish community with another person (with "the Other")*. We try to give them information, an idea, opinion, attitude, and at the same time a small part of ourselves, Łęcki, Szóstak, (1973). Communication expressed in such a way can be conceived as creating a society (a community). As such, it shows that people can belong to many different communities simultaneously; however, the method of communication can create different kinds of communities. In this, society is regarded and referred to as a community, meaning a group of people who find themselves in the same space (for example: physical, spiritual, or virtual – currently very widespread) and striving for a common purpose. Such a community (society) may be a family type group, an Internet discussion group, a sports group, or a group of friends, as well as public institutions, such as: the school, a governmental or non-governmental organization, etc. A community (society) is created in a situation where people connect with one another in some way. Unlike the previous models of communication – communication understood as the creation of societies, reconciles the meaning only as one (and not the only) of the possible results of communication. Consequently, this model of communication enables to obtain different results. Communication conceived as a society (community) is committed to the task of coordinating our activities with other people, so that we jointly achieve the objectives and at the same time realize ourselves. However, building communities tends to a wider involvement in dialogue communication, which requires openness to "Others" from participants - in return this gives a better understanding of them and a better understanding of the process of communication. It is worth stressing that understanding the process of communication sometimes requires an analysis of the past, looking toward the future, as well as focusing on the specific situation. The way in which we communicate with each other is largely responsible for the creation of our social worlds, which consist of people and the relationships between them, as well as events and objects that they create. Therefore, it can be claimed that communication with "Others" creates our social world, see: Morreale, Spitzberg, Barge, (2007) Frey, (2000).

At the same time, in new situations, such as meeting with another human being, communication with him/her, awareness of ourselves, our own behaviours significantly increases.<sup>7</sup> This happens because people act according to specific sequences only if these sequences are available, that is, as long as they do not encounter such events that are not foreseen in the given script, see: Gudykunst, Kim, (2000). According to Ryszard Kapuściński, in order to understand ourselves better, we need to understand others better, create an opportunity for comparing ourselves with them, confronting, "measuring", see:

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<sup>7</sup> several factors contribute to their growth: when new situations cannot be attributed to any suitable script, when external factors do not allow the continuation of the activities according to the script, when the behaviour specified by the script becomes burdensome, because continuing it requires much more effort than usual, when the result is not as expected and when there is a clash of many competing scripts and the suspension of exercising one of them.

Kapuściński, (2007). Also Paul Ricoeur emphasizes that we discover ourselves through *others* and in *others*. Thanks to "Others", we discover ourselves, thus far unacquainted, unrevealed. Therefore, a human being is himself/herself, if he/she is different from oneself. This indicates a close association of "selfness" with "otherness" and of being oneself with being one's own *Other* and being among *Others* and for *Others*. That is why a person, in order to be "himself/herself", cannot be a closed monad, but also act - thus be in contact with the world and with "Others"; a person must establish mutual relations and dialogue with them.<sup>8</sup> Due to the fact that action means being "beyond oneself" - not only in the material world through one's own body, but also through established mutual relationships, communication with other people, see: Ricoeur, (2003). At the same time, in the process of mutual communication one cannot forget about interpersonal differences. Because a human being living in a multicultural world is "condemned" to associating with different people, different points of view, which one cannot separate or isolate from.

### The "Brand" and Stigmatization of "*the Other*" and Their Negative Consequences

The term "brand"<sup>9</sup> has its roots in ancient Greece, where specific "Others" were branded (slaves, conspirators, criminals, vectors of "evil", etc.) with body marks - stigmata (burned or cut out on the body), which was to distinguish them from the other people. Sometimes the term brand is also used as a property mark (printed or burned) on livestock, for example, through marking on the back foot of the horse, which is to specify membership to a particular owner. It was also used on people, as a type of proprietary mark (symbols were burned on the forehead, the back of slaves). Criminals, convicts sentenced to hard labour were also branded, which was a distinctive mark weighing on their crime, shame. The symbol of branding is also present in the Bible, in the parables about Cain (the first son of Adam and Eve), who killed his brother Abel. Due to the committed crime, he was marked by God. In this particular case – the brand (aside from marking the criminal) also served as protection – it was to protect the killer against human justice – he, who dared to kill him, was to be punished sevenfold. The "brand" became a kind of ritual contamination of the person, in order to mark its "otherness", guilt, asserting that it is worse, "stained", dangerous, burdened by misdemeanour, substandard, odd, not fitting in with the rest - that it is vector of evil, sin, and guilt. Therefore, one had to steer clear of such a person, avoid them, so that its brand did not stain (infect) the remainder and did not bring similar "misfortune" unto them. It was

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<sup>8</sup> By means of dialogue, the human being gains the chance to confrontation of his point of view with the point of view of "Other" people. Dialogue enables to find oneself between conflicts. While the adoption of dialogue attitudes in a relation with another human being is an expression of openness and a reflective, seeking life - which becomes a string of neverending questions and answers. That is why dialogue has been appreciated for a long time. Its invaluable role was recognized already in ancient dramas, where it was the primary method of verbal and non-verbal expression of oneself, one's dilemma in the world. It also became an expression of paradoxes of man's existence. Its heroes were usually people in quandary, with torn personalities, who remained in ongoing dialogues with themselves. At the same time, they were usually in conflict with their surrounding world (with other people, gods, with themselves). In accordance with the logic of classical tragedy, there always had to be a clash of contradictions, e.g. two truths, two opposing points of view, two contradictory reasons. The essence of such a conflict was not, however, their reconciliation, because each point of view had its arguments, as a result of which it was difficult to judge who was truly right. Therefore, it was assumed that one cannot resolve "the irresolvable and establish definitive solutions, decisions, (syntheses). As Emmanuel Lévinas stressed, mutual communication does not unequivocally uncover the truth about existence, but only brings us closer to it. However, its cessation means death, just like death closes communication and thwarts a chance for dialogue – after death only questions remain. compare: Rutkowiak, (1992), Lévinas, (1991).

<sup>9</sup> Many types of brands can be distinguished, however, in this thesis I shall assume the distinction that Erving Goffman created, differentiating three of its types, namely: 1. Brand relating to corporeality - indicating physical ugliness, physical deformations; 2. Brand relating to the mental sphere, the nature of the human being, his/her emotionality, behaviour, will, beliefs, attitudes; 3. Brand associated with membership of the human being to: race, nationality, religion (here, brand is usually passed from generation to generation, it is a flaw assigned to a particular group), see: Goffman, (2007).

not until the Christian times that the brand (stigmata)<sup>10</sup> gain additional (also positive) meaning, referring to signs of holiness or grace sustained by the person, and then it appeared on the grounds of medical terms, relating to bodily physical disorders (irregularities). However, it is worth stressing that its pejorative meaning is most strongly rooted in human thinking. Even modern times, with numerous scientific, technical and medical achievements for the 21<sup>st</sup> century failed to free humanity from its negative ideas and connotations. Therefore, the brand still and continuously categorizes people into better - worse, normal - abnormal, guilty - innocent, "stained" and "clean". That is why we usually use the term "brand" as an attribute of the negative, severely burdensome, discrediting a man. At the same time, we notice that in the modern reality that surrounds us today, in our colloquial language, we still meet with a number of examples of terms, sayings, proverbs, jokes or gags, at the heart of which lies thinking that stigmatizes "Others" or ourselves, equipping the human being with discrediting attributes - usually offensive and deeply painful. Therefore, in our everyday, common lives, the division of "the normal" and "the branded" is still present. The list that discredits people is extremely considerable. Although, in order to present them, I have chosen only a few examples (which have strongly grown into our colloquial language), such as: "victim of fate", "life cripple", "manta", "cretin", "failure", "milksop", "idiot", and which are a negative description of a human being and are highly offensive and discriminating. I also cite a few characteristic sayings, consolidated in everyday language (which simultaneously represent an attempt to justify the situation of *"the Other"*), for example: "poor 'cos dumb", "punishment for sins", "harvests what he sown", "tall as a birch, dumb as a goat", "justice has caught up to him", "he got what he deserved", and many others. Often, it appears that both individual people, as well as groups, and even whole nations, become branded, stigmatized. Stigmatizing, "branding" can be done for various reasons: race, ethnicity, skin colour, hair colour, sex, religion, profession, education, way of earning, social status, material status, etc. Each society (and sometimes social group) imposes its own stigmata and categorizes people in their own way, at the same time deciding who will be found in the group of the typical or atypical, guilty or innocent, desirable or undesirable, "normal" or abnormal - who will be seen as "normal" - and who as "a deviant".<sup>11</sup> At the same time, it appears that something that has been categorized negatively by some, with others can be seen as normal, or even as an asset, compare: Goffman, (2007), Kopaliński, (1985). That is why people marked by a brand in a specific environment sometimes leave them; they abandon their lives in order to search for "happiness", acceptance elsewhere. It also happens that a stigmatized person is abandoned by others, its surroundings - sometimes even those closest, which does not want to take on the weight of its "brand". This is because we believe the strong properties of "infection", the spread of a "plague" onto the closest surroundings of the branded, i.e. the victim of stigmatizing, which finds a strong reflection in the collected research material. For it appears that often the surroundings of the "victim" (the stigmatized person) is discriminated, rejected, branded with specific stigmata and persecuted in the same way. In extreme cases, the circle of ill-fated events may extend even more and thus trigger a mechanism of the "scapegoat"<sup>12</sup>, which derives from the

<sup>10</sup> Saint Francis of Assisi and Saint Catherine of Siena are considered to be particularly well-known stigmatics, see: Kopaliński, (1985).

<sup>11</sup> Deviation (as Howard S. Becker highlights) is created by social groups through established rules ("putting labels on people"), which if violated constitutes a type of deviation, and which application toward specific people, inclines us to perceive them and call them outsiders, see: Becker, (2009).

<sup>12</sup> A "scapegoat" describes a person who has been unfairly blamed for something. It has its sources in the parables of the Bible (Lev, 16.8). It refers to the Hebrew name Azazel, (symbolising an evil spirit, who lived in the desert) and the so-called Judgement Day (Appeasement Day - cleansing), on which two goats were drawn to be sacrificed. The first in sacrifice to God, while the second for Azazel. The first goat was killed in the name of redeeming the sins of the people, while the second became the "scapegoat" - unto which the priest placed all misconduct and which was driven out to the desert. The phenomenon of the "scapegoat" is illustrated by Rene Girard, who describes the mechanism creating mythology and the Sacrum, which is about sacrificing a specific "scapegoat". This mechanism comes from a typical scheme - called the "persecution scheme", where a specific community in response to the existing crisis - searches for the "guilty" in order to commit rape or a crime on them (expulsion, murder) - and then sanctifies them. Such an act of violence (for example murder) additionally becomes a spectacular act of "the psychology of crowd", in which the entire community participates. Therefore, the guilt for the massacre gains a

"persecution scheme", bringing in a significantly wider crowd of perpetrators into the aggressive (oppressive) game. It is worth stressing that being in close contact with the "victim" (the branded person), may sometimes have a number of negative consequences for people related with them. It may cause them to be "pulled in" to the series of non-constructive and toxic life games. Therefore, when being in the close circle, or taking care of someone who has been stigmatized, helping this person, or fulfilling various obligations for him/her and rescuing from problems, one must be careful in order not to inadvertently become his/her victim or a victim of those who are stigmatizing him/her. Identifying very subtle boundaries in the scope of rational, love giving and helping the "victim", and being used by them - proves very difficult. Therefore, as a result, it may mean entering into toxic relations with the "victim", which shall lead to a sense of loss, anger, hatred, and aggressive behaviour, and sometimes hostile toward them. The scenario of the "dramatic triangle" is completed here, which entails the mechanism of switching roles: the Victim, the Saviour and the Persecutor. The "dramatic triangle" illustrates the disturbed, and miserable, interpersonal relationships, in which the appropriate proportions in the scope of giving and taking, have been disturbed. Consequently, each role in the "dramatic triangle" proves to be toxic, irrational, unsatisfactory. Each of them condemns man to participate in a scenario that is "violent", as well as strongly addictive, triggering symptoms of co-dependency on such a "hopeless" game. That is why its "players" very often reside in a trap and cannot free themselves from toxic complications - sometimes they reside in such a scenario for many years, and in extreme cases, even for life. It turns out that in practice, freeing oneself from the "persecution" – "violent" scheme is not an easy venture. It requires great force and determination on the part of people involved in such a scheme. Sometimes, the "helpers" themselves need and require assistance and support from the outside (which is clearly indicated by the results of studies conducted). Paradoxically, it appears that the "helpers", "saviours" have gone so far in the "helping game" that, as a result, they require help themselves, because they cannot help themselves any longer. Therefore, outside assistance becomes a necessity (from outside the toxic triangle), as does the support of other "helpers", who shall help a person free from the toxic relations and contribute to recovering the autonomy lost by him/her. It appears that the only rational solution (rescue) from such a situation, is the ability of a human being to exit the "dramatic triangle" (free from its toxic influences), which is only possible if the person is ready to take full responsibility for his/her own life and for himself/herself, and at the same time will allow other people to do the same, Compare: Berne, (1998), Jedynak, (1992).

### Characteristics of Results of the Studies Conducted

The subject of the studies carried out<sup>13</sup> is the issue of the Other/Otherness in a multicultural world and their different qualities and varieties. However, their main purpose is to discover the factors hindering and

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collective dimension, and this means that the responsibility is distributed among a wider mass of people – crowd. Such a phenomenon (collective responsibility), in which the guilt of an individual is dissolved in a crowd, is identified by Rene Girard as a "scandal" or mimetism, see: Kopaliński, (1985), Girard, (1991), compare: Strumska – Cylwik, (2010).

<sup>13</sup> The studies were carried out in 2009/2011. 18 people participated in the study (of which as many as 6 interviews were rejected, because they did not fulfil the specific test requirements). The studied people were aged from 26 to 67 years old; they came from diverse backgrounds. In the selection of people for the study, the "snowball" method was used (omitted only in the study of the homeless people, which proved the most difficult venture - to obtain them for the study project - as a result, only one homeless person was studied). In the studies, an in-depth narrative interview was applied, complying with its requirements and procedures. The necessary stages were included, used in the course of such an interview (the phase of explanations, the introduction phase, the phase of the main story, as well as the complementary phase and balancing phase). It is worth stressing that the main phase of the studies (and the most important), was a space intended mainly for Respondents, reserved for their story. The investigator's primary task, as an active listener and careful observer, was to listen actively. Therefore, the activity of the Investigator had to be



greatly limited, also in the scope of questions posed. The nature of the interviews conducted was open, which means that the Respondents were informed both about their real purpose and subject matter of the studies. The interview was based on a conversation between the Investigator and the Respondents, which was based on three main questions and on accompanying auxiliary questions (which were placed in brackets). It should be noted that the auxiliary questions aimed to help in the research process, which at the same time meant that the Investigator should not have misused them groundlessly. He/She was to use them in specific situations, for example: if there was a presumption that the respondent did not understand the main question (or its intention), consequently, the situation required apposition, in a situation when the respondent was "stuck", suspended his/her narration and was silent for too long, etc. Sometimes, the activity of the Investigator, in the scope of asking the questions, turned out to be necessary due to maintaining discipline of the utterance or to inspire the Respondent to continue the narration. The Investigator could not only use internal questions (directly relating to the narrator's story), but also extend to external questions, concerning absent (new) plots in the narration, which, for example, occurred to the Investigator while listening to the story, which if included, could turn out to be significant in the research process conducted. They were to provide adequate space for expression, so that the Respondent could freely and without limitations tell his/her story, and that nobody interfered. A very important tendency of the narrator had to be kept in mind, namely the tendency to narrate with details, which typically calls for the extension of time (this tendency additionally increases the credibility of the narration). The atmosphere of the conducted interview was also important (which in its foundation should be opening, encouraging spontaneous utterances, and as comfortable as possible for the narrator), as well as the place - the environment - in which the study was carried out. Usually, the Respondents themselves indicated the place that they found adequate, where they felt good, safe and which enabled to generate an aura (atmosphere) that favoured the interview. In this case, studying the homeless proved the most difficult (because it was difficult to find an appropriate place). It is worth noting that the idea of studies carried out in the form of a narrative in-depth interview was the desire to better understand human experience, which has its source in the foundations of hermeneutics. This assumes that a better understanding of the human experience becomes possible through the processes of interpretation, which the Respondents make themselves during their narration, as by interpreting their actions, experiences (from the perspective of their own experiences - previous and current), they equip them in their own meanings. Therefore, the narration becomes their way of exploring and understanding the world. By reconstructing experiences in the stories, both intellectual processes and emotions are set in motion, which participate in organizing their relations with the world and in getting to know themselves. In the study conducted, questions were asked which were oriented at extracting experiences in the scope of the Respondents' contacts with "Otherness"/"Others". After a thorough explanation of the purpose and intentions of the studies, the Respondents were introduced to the study by citing a short story, enlightening the nature of the problem and the validity of each story told. The introductory phase was extremely important for proper understanding of the questions and their intentions, which gave a result during the study (thanks to this, Respondents generally did not need additional questions and told an animated story without any problems). The Respondents were asked the following questions: 1. How do you understand "Otherness"/"Others" and what do these terms mean to you – (What do they mean? What associations do they evoke? How are they expressed, manifested? What do they mean to you? Who can we call "Other"? What does it mean that someone is "Other"? – Tell me about a chosen experience 2. Do you have any specific experiences with Others/"Otherness"? - Have you ever met (lived near) somebody, who was (or seemed) "Other" to you? (Who? How was this person different from you and others? What circumstances accompanied it? What did you do then? How did you behave? How did you treat such a person? Did you make this person feel like an "Other", and how? Was there anything particular that made your contact (communication) with such a person difficult, if so, what was it? Were there any consequences, repercussions? What kind? – Tell me about an experience); 3. Have you ever experienced the fate of an "Other"? (has it ever happened to you that someone treated you as an "Other"? Who? Why? In what circumstances did this take place? How did this person behave toward you? What did he/she do, and what didn't he/she do? How did he/she make you feel this? How did you feel then? What made you feel like an "Other"? How, according to you, did your "Otherness" show, manifest? – Tell me about a chosen experience). The task of the investigator during the interview was to maintain the conversation by asking (previously prepared) questions, which were aimed at obtaining responses relating to the set study issue. The interviews were recorded in electronic form, and then subjected to transcription and analysis of the data obtained

blocking our mutual co-existence and communication with "Others"/"Otherness". In the process of analysis and interpretation of the accumulated research material, in order to describe it better, I also used the phenomenographic strategy. The primary category here is the phenomenon, understood as something that appears in human consciousness and experience, which is conceived as the effect of personal participation in something, thus taking a specific road. Since in accordance with the epistemological assumptions of phenomenography, there is no other world beyond the world of our experiences. Phenomenography specialists sometimes use the following words interchangeably: experience, understanding, perception, through which they note that different people may understand (interpret) a specific phenomenon differently, whose main aim is describing the bases of human experience, on assumption that people share their personal experiences of the world and the experiences of other people. Phenomenography applies to describing things, phenomena, which reveal themselves in the direct experience of the world. It is worth noting that at its basis lies the assumption that there are as many interpretations of the surrounding world as there are people on Earth. So the application of the phenomenographic strategy to the analysis of the studies<sup>14</sup> has allowed me to discover multiple ways of perceiving and interpreting phenomena of "Otherness"/"the Other", expressed by people in certain concepts and their meanings, see: Pilch, Bauman, (2007), Jurgiel, (2009). Such a possibility of looking at the plurality of ways of perceiving has proven invaluable in the context of the described issues of "Otherness"/"the Other". It is worth noting that the adoption of the phenomenographic approach to the description of the studies conducted, impels the Investigator toward a specific presentation of the world, which is presented not in the way it exists "objectively", but as a world experienced and described through the prism of sensitivity of the respondents, their experiences and understandings filtered by their

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(sorting, text analysis, extracting categories, searching for similarities and differences in the utterances in the scope of perceiving and interpreting a specific phenomenon, and then making conclusions). It is assumed that the Investigator is oriented in the scope of the required procedures of conducting a narrative interview. One of the major elements accompanying such a study is assuming that the person, who is conducting the interview, is interested in obtaining specific information in the interview, one who arouses trust, is discrete, and a good (active) listener, and if necessary, can support the Respondent with adequate auxiliary questions (which I mentioned above). The investigator should encourage the respondent to provide in-depth answers, using the strategy of "deepening" (for example, by asking the respondent to repeat the utterance, encouraging to express one's own opinions, feelings, conclusions, summaries, etc.). It is worth noting that in this thesis I am presenting only selected aspects of the studies from a broader presentation, which directly correspond with the topic taken up by me, and which additionally constitute the most representative part of the studies conducted, see: Dryll, (2004), Pilch, Bauman, (2007), Trzebiński, (2002), Rubacha (2008).

<sup>14</sup> In the process of analyzing the studies, in the first instance I separated the most relevant (in my opinion) observations from the gathered utterances, which described the phenomenon of "Otherness"/"the Other". Then I segregated them into two groups by extracting similar (sometimes identical) ways of perceiving and experiencing them, as well as the different ways. The similarities found enabled to reveal the phrases that describe the same content, while the separated contrasts in perceiving a specific phenomenon, enabled to note that sometimes there are various meanings (understanding) under the same terms. This was about capturing in the first instance fields (ranges) of meanings close to each other, and then extracting different fields of meanings. Applying such procedure contributed to extracting context of a dual nature, in which what is individual, refers both to the general understandings and thus creates a fragment of hermeneutic analysis. It is worth noting here that the procedure of phenomenographic conduct assumes that the concept of the described phenomenon (in this case, based on mutual contact of a human being with "the Other"/"Otherness") is constructed as a result of satisfying a specific category with fragments of utterances of different respondents. Elsewhere, however, the response of one person may be torn into fragments, in order to reach a few categories of description that are different in meaning. This means that the investigator must decide alone (at the level of searching for similarities and differences in the positions of respondents in a particular matter) whether a given fragment is a reflection of the various expressions of the same concept, or different concepts. This means that the analysis of research material performed thus by the investigator inevitably links to the procedure of filtering someone else's understanding through the prism of his/her understanding, compare: Pilch, Bauman, (2007), Jurgiel Alicja, (2009).

individual minds.<sup>15</sup> The results of the studies conducted enabled to extract a few representative (and also the most rich) categories of meanings describing "Otherness"/"the Other". Already in responses to (question no. 1) posed in the interview (see: footnote no. 1 and 2), concerning their understanding, we note that otherness is described as a characteristic differentiating some people from others. At the same time it is very often seen as "something" that does not cohere to the world image carried by a given human being (belonging to a given community). Very interesting seems to be the tendency that in the initial phase of the utterance, i.e. the first reflex, Respondents usually reiterate negative associations with phenomena of "Otherness"/"the Other", only later, after deeper reflection, in their further reasoning - they extract (discover) other aspects of it - also positive. Sometimes this way of thinking may arise from strongly culturally (non-constructive) rooted life attitudes, rejecting the scheme: "I" am OK - "You" are OK, referring to non-constructive interpersonal games and unreliable schemes,<sup>16</sup> which strengthen mutual divisions and distance between people, as a result making it impossible for them to come to an agreement. They also cause the consolidation of existing divisions, like: I - "the Other", We - Them, "good" - "bad", etc., thus dividing people into typical and untypical, "one of us" and foreign, desirable and undesirable, normal and "abnormal", etc. Therefore, it comes to no surprise that in many of the Respondents' utterances, the tendency to segregate people into specific categories is clearly drawn. Most often, people are segregated due to: behaviour (where the behaviour of "the Other" is described above all as - untypical, bizarre, abnormal, unfit, wrong, rude, arrogant, obscene, ostentatious, excessive, unexpected, unpredictable. However, in further reflection positive aspects of behaviours appear, distinguishing "the Other" positively. For example, unprecedented, supporting, exceptional behaviours are recalled (exceptionally polite, thoughtful, cultural), and others. However, there is a domination of examples of negative behaviours of "the Other" which usually trigger strong conflicts, and even become the cause of breaking mutual relations with them. Consequently, the tendency strengthening the thought about "the other's" fault dominates, where it is "the Other", not "I" who is burdened with responsibility for the lack of agreement, "difficult contact" or breaking contacts. Examples are also present that illustrate experiences in which "the Other's" fault has been transferred onto someone else like a brand, making someone feel guilty, and sometimes even making a "scapegoat" out of them. Outer appearance was next, characterizing "the Other", who was usually described by a bizarre way of dressing, a sloppy appearance, an unattractive shape/figure - usually obesity was indicated, an "untypical" appearance was also highlighted - ugliness, physical defects, and even skin colour or hair colour - which appeared in the form of discriminating stereotypes, like - "redheads are false". In the exposure of positive characteristics of outer appearance, respondents mainly concentrated on: beauty (beautiful, handsome, nice), and then on clothes (stylish, trendy, brand name, neat, tasteful, "sensational"). The next position was lifestyle and the fancies of "the Other", where in the first instance, the following was paid attention to: annoying customs and habits of "Others", their bizarre interests, hobbies and ways of spending leisure time - e.g. boring, monotonous, strange, sometimes - "unable to endure" and others). Positive examples were much less frequently provided, in which positive tastes and lifestyle of "the Other" were referred to. Among positive indications, the following appeared: "she skis very well and is very athletic"; "I was impressed by his

<sup>15</sup> As Kant stressed, the human mind is not a passive, but an active recipient of information. Therefore, by looking at the world that surrounds them, people "arrange" it in such a way, so that it makes sense to them. This means that the mind of the human being arranges and systematizes information coming from the world and experiences in accordance with their own programmed forms and categories, by means of which senses are attributed to all data transmitted to the human being by the senses.

<sup>16</sup> I refer here to the life attitudes that Eric Berne wrote about. According to him, they determine the way the human being is perceived, both in the scope of seeing oneself, as well as other people and the surrounding world. This is a way of perceiving in which we are inclined to dividing people into our friends and enemies. They refer to four different situations in which the human being plays specific games, and at the same time plays his/her own life scripts, the first of them is the "I" am okay - "You" are okay attitude, another is - "I" am okay - "You" are not okay, then "I" am not okay - "You" are okay, and the last - "I" am not okay and "You" are not okay. Note that only the first attitude is a healthy attitude, constructive, permitting the development of fruitful mutual contacts and fruitful communication, see: Berne, (1998).

broad interests, that he was well-read"; "I was always intimidated by her knowledge and I felt uneasy in her company". In the next group, the following was pointed out: aspects of the language of speaking observed in "the Other" - (usually indicating at an inadequate or disturbed method of communication: verbal aggression, obscene words, incomprehensible messages, annoying habits, as well as defects and disorders of pronunciation making mutual communication difficult, and others). In order to illustrate examples of the positive aspects of communication, I quote fragments of utterances, in which mild and friendly communication was usually stressed: "(...) Conversing with her suppressed fear in me, it gave me support, which I really needed then (...) she spoke calmly to me, concentrated only on facts (...)"; "(...) I needed such words, full of understanding (...)", I liked it when she spoke to me affectionately and comforted me (...) she always said that we would get through all the adversities of life together". In the last group I cited *disease and disability of "the Other"* appeared, which were generally described as a type of barrier, nuisance, hindrance, ballast, which typically must be carried together with the closest people from one's surroundings - usually the family. Disease and disability also appear to be a type of "brand" transferred onto close surroundings. It quite often becomes a synonym of dependence, "inferiority", "unhappiness" for both the person burdened by it and people in closer circles. Narrations - responses to the next questions posed (question no. 2) provide very interesting observations, relating to the experiences gained from meeting with "the Other", which describe the reactions of the respondents toward "the Other". It can be observed that often the underlying bases are the fear of "Others", aversion to them and very often "ignorance" about "Others", which generally reinforces distance, and also promotes the mutual sense of foreignness, when it is accompanied by a reluctance to get to know the world of "the Other", or even striving to isolate oneself from them (see the next subsection: "the Other" in the context of applied "reverse logic"). Narrations and responses to question no. 3 posed in the interview were particularly interesting, illustrating experiences of being "the Other". It appears that from such a perspective, the world seems to be seen completely differently. It shows that usually we do not like to feel like "Others", and generally we feel uncomfortable "entering the skin" of "the Other". As some respondents emphasized: *"we do not like to deviate too much from what is standard", we want to be like others. Like our relatives, friends, acquaintances. That is why we care about their good opinion and acceptance, without this we do not feel valuable"*. In the context of the cited statements, we can see clearly that people in our surroundings often become a type of mirror, which we look at ourselves in and check how others see us (whether we really appeal to them).<sup>17</sup> Of course, striving to be the same as others is not an absolute rule, which the cited responses below show (see below: Robert's and Svieta's story). It is also found that people themselves strive to be "Others", especially if in this way they can emphasize their "rank", "position", emphasize that they are "more important" than the rest. At the same time it appears that such a "higher position", apparently worthy of desire, does not always guarantee one the recognition of the environment and good relations with others. In specific cases, it may even be the "bone" of discord, which destroys unity and impedes mutual contact with others. Especially when the obtained "higher rank", or position triggers envy or distaste in the environment (as was the case for Karol, about whom I write below). At this point, it is worth recalling that people generally tend to (need to) compare themselves with "Others", which is explained in the theory of social comparison, from which it appears that people determine their position among other people in this way. Having a "good" position generally becomes the source of satisfaction, while finding oneself in a "worse" position from "Others" can cause a sense of lower value.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Such exploration of reflecting ourselves in the reactions of other people is referred to as "I the reflection", by means of which we can help learn more about ourselves. The human being gets to know oneself through social interactions, from which he/she draws knowledge about himself/herself from other people (when others communicate their opinions about us - what they think about us, or when we independently make conclusions from such interactions), see: Argyle (2001), Aronson, Wilson, Akert, (1997).

<sup>18</sup> One can compare oneself with others in two ways: *"comparing upward"*, when we compare ourselves with people, who locate themselves higher than us (e.g. in the scope of a specific feature, ability) – such a comparison serves as a standard of excellence and *"comparing downward"*, when we compare ourselves with people, who locate themselves lower than us in the scope of a specific feature or ability – such a comparison aims to obtain the feeling of greater self-satisfaction, see: Aronson, Wilson, Akert, (1997).



The obtained results of the studies show that finding oneself in the situation of "the Other"/"Otherness" is usually a difficult experience for a person, and generally unpleasant, similarly to contacts with some "Others", who do not show good will for co-existence. The respondents clearly emphasized that such experiences strip a human being from his/her sense of self-confidence, of belonging to others, and personal dignity. They strongly addressed the negative aspects of such experiences, which also entail a sense of helplessness, vulnerability, isolation, uncertainty, lostness, "weakness", alienation, foreignness, otherness, and even a sense of being "worse", unnecessary, unwanted, "branded".

### **"The Other" in the Context of Applied "Reverse Logic"**

In the context of the cited study results, it can be observed that every human being, depending on their life situation and contexts accompanying it, may unexpectedly experience the fate of "the Other". The "reverse logic" applied in the paper, referring to the Bakhtin "carnival" view of the world, repeatedly shields such events, in the meantime enlightening us of the perversity of human fate, and uncovering sometimes painful truth to the human being that nothing in this world is a constant, unchanging value. The gathered research material enables to look at the bipolar experiences of a human being (friendly and unfriendly, desirable and undesirable, reinforcing and weakening experiences). The cited "reverse logic" derives from perceiving and seeing the world through the prism of the carnival. The clownish coronation inscribed in the carnival, and the following dethronement of the carnival king (as a bipolar rite, ambivalent, as well as imminent) clearly exposes the right of "changeability", which can turn the world upside down in one moment, destroying its existing logic and order. Therefore, the carnival becomes a symbol of relativity of any order. Its tools become laughter, irony, clowniness inscribed in the "carnival logic", and at the same time being the vent for human frustration, dissatisfaction, or revolt against the need to comply with applicable norms and standards. Their task is to hit our sense of confidence – in the self-opinionated spirit of seriousness. "Carnival logic" shows that the existing order, set of social agenda or binding hierarchies may fall into ruin at any moment. Due to the fact that for the duration of the "carnival" all laws, prohibitions, restrictions, constraints that are in force outside the carnival world are suspended. The carnival uses characteristic tools: costumes, masks, which allow one to hide one's identity and take on the roles assigned to others - it enables to temporarily suspend one's own life and "enter the skin" of "the Other". In this way, it invalidates any distances between people, encourages freedom, subjecting to a familiar atmosphere. At the same time, the carnival, as the show "without ramps" does not make any divisions into performers and spectators – due to the fact that everyone should simply experience it. The symbolic act of coronation (which I mentioned above) becomes a symbol of both a destructive and regenerative energy. Because on the one hand, something at one moment is demolished, on the other hand, this destruction becomes a precursor to a new, and perhaps better, world, see: Bakhtin, (1970). This logic was reflected in the utterances of the respondents, who described their binary (bipolar) experiencing of the phenomenon of "Otherness" and "the Other". They cited both situations in which they themselves were treated as *"Others"*, as well as reversed situations. They evoked situations in which they felt like a part of a greater whole, because they belonged to others (who supported and loved them) – to a specific community, and situations in which they felt alienated, alone, pushed away or humiliated. In my thesis I show only a few chosen examples relating to such events, which were told by their main characters in the conducted interview. I chose only those, which best illustrate the applied "reverse logic". I concentrated on the narrations that grew from questions (2 and 3), relating solely to experiences resulting from relations "I" – "the Other". I also used the selected narratives for creating schemes illustrating bipolarity of such experiences of the human being in the scope of contacts with "Otherness"/"the Other". It is worth stressing that the schemes of people and events created thus - subject to the "bipolar tension", may seem somewhat simplified. Especially that they are rooted in "segregating" both the same events, as well as the people participating in them, and squeezing them into rather rigid frames in order to give them specific properties and senses. However, such a procedure has its logic and explanation. It was drawn up solely for the purpose of this presentation; therefore, it has a temporary

dimension, just as turning the world upside down during the carnival is temporary. It was applied in order to better exhibit the varieties and qualities of thinking about "Otherness"/"Others" and exhibiting the most representative examples illustrating binary experiences of the Respondents. In view of the characteristics of people and their stories cited below, we can observe that each of them is different and unique, as a result of which not one of them can be fully reduced or assigned to another. Therefore, I present each one separately, as a distinct story. It is worth highlighting that each narration brings something new and unique into the area of knowledge about "Otherness"/"the Other", meanwhile emphasizing their hermeneutic dimension and nature. Although each told story and experiences of people entered into it expand our understanding of the issues discussed, then at the same time, they make one aware that they cannot be completely understood (it is worth paying attention to the differences in the field: understanding - understood, which cannot be treated as identical concepts). Therefore, it is a good idea to learn a variety of perspectives and points of view, as well as consider them in various situations and contexts, so that in the process of their mutual mediation we increasingly expand our field of understanding.<sup>19</sup> Such an approach allows one to notice that we shall never fully understand these phenomena, therefore, talking about *"the Other"/"Otherness"* can be treated as a kind of never ending story. As the first story, I present a tale about Alice, who as *a victim of violence, as well as a "scapegoat"*, experienced the "bipolar" nature of *"Otherness"*. "Alice's" example<sup>20</sup> is based on the life of a young woman, a mother of little "Ola" and the wife of an alcoholic, who uses violence against women. Her story is an excellent illustration of the dramatic complication of a human being in toxic interpersonal relations, in which the woman imperceptibly becomes a "victim" and enters the destructive scenario of a "dramatic triangle". Her story begins on her wedding day, when the woman's nightmare began. This is a story, in which the role of "the Other" is played by the woman's husband - "Andrzej": *"(...) It was already at this time that I noticed something was wrong. (...) when at the wedding reception I was hit for the first time, I felt 'the world fall in ruin at my feet'; it was then that I met Andrzej's 'second face' for the first time, I saw that he was 'other' than I had known him until now. However, he apologized convincingly, he explained that it was strong passion combined with alcohol, which he doesn't usually drink - hence the unexpected reaction. I believed him (...) However, this was not the only incident, there were other, similar incidents later, and additionally, they were happening more and more often. Moreover, my husband claimed that I was at fault for everything, that I provoked his aggression. My husband started to come home from work drunk more and more often, he started kicking up rows, then apologized, and I kept giving him a chance. It was then that I realized that we are very different, that Andrzej is a completely 'other' person than I expected and in whom I believed. Finally, I discovered that I was expecting a child. Then I made an effort to save our relationship, and Andrzej did, too. I wanted to have a normal home and a healthy child. But even my pregnancy did not heal the situation, at least not for long (...) After another (very severe) beating (when I was in the second month of pregnancy), I decided to move out to my mum's. (...) However, after giving birth to my daughter, after many requests and promises, I decided to give Andrzej a chance once again, all the more that he had treatment (...) This time actually something changed. For three years, Andrzej did not drink at all. Although he often became nervous and irritated - I was happy anyway that the former nightmare had ended. I knew that such behaviours could be the result of alcoholic disease (...) Everything began anew, on the day of 'Andrzej's' next birthday, when he came home drunk again. There was a row again and he beat me severely again. Our daughter awoke and*

<sup>19</sup> Here, I refer to the "circular process of understanding", which is created by Hans Georg Gadamer, and which means an incessant mediation of the past and present. The condition of understanding is being inside the wheel, enabling participation in a mutually created sense. Participating in the mutual sense allows a person to free oneself from the attitudes and prejudices felt, which are revealed thanks to the reflection set in motion, being an infinite process, bringing that what was thus far hidden into the "daylight". At the same time understanding reflection as an infinite process means that we can never reach (achieve) total (complete) understanding. However, any new, subsequent experience, allows one to open a new (additional) horizon, which deepens this understanding, compare: Michalski, (1978).

<sup>20</sup> In order to "blur" the true identity of the respondents, all their names have been changed, I also do not reveal their exact age

started crying terribly. I felt depressed, humiliated and helpless. All the more that my friends and family suspected everything at this point. Some friends were even laughing at me and were making unrefined allusions addressed at me. Many people turned away from us, as if we were infecting others with a grave disease. I felt worse than them, guilty, as well as neglected, uncertain, focused on continually saving my family. I felt like "the Other". I didn't have time, like them, for meetings and chats with friends. Almost everyone tried to persuade me to do something about this. However, I didn't want to move out to my mum's again (this time with my daughter), a pensioner, who could barely make ends meet. I was making too little money to provide for myself and the little one (...) I finally left "Andrzej" after what happened one particular New Year's Eve, when he raised his hand not only at me, but on Ola. Although I tried to defend her, she was all bruised and hurting, and a terrible haematoma came out on her left hand. This was a horrible blow, but I knew (this time for sure), that this was definitely the end (...) My closest family helped me the most, particularly my sister, brother-in-law and my mum. Also my friend, a psychologist, with whom I had not been in touch for a long time, but when she found out about our situation, she helped out a lot (...) Now I am a free woman. I could finally take a sigh of relief. I'm proud of myself, because I made it and I was able to free myself and my daughter from hell. Before, I felt guilty and responsible for what happened to me. Today, I am again the old, strong Alicja - I have a normal house, I meet with my old friends - I don't have to hide from anyone. Recently, I got promoted, I am paying off a loan for my flat and managing really well (...)" Of course, Alicja's story is much longer than the cited fragments. However, it enables to see the painful complication of a woman in a toxic relationship with "the Other", who was her own husband. In this case, being with him caused that the main character herself became "the Other" for her surroundings (which avoided contacts with her, made fun of her situation). The "brand" of the alcoholic transferred onto the entire family, like a contagious disease. At the same time, "Alicja's" story also shows optimistic accents. Paradoxically, they appear simultaneously with the "critical" and dramatic event - Andrzej's beating of the child - which caused a diametrical (positive) change in the life of the main character (it contributed to her decision to finally leave her husband). Due to such a development of the situation, the thus far unfavourable fate "turned around", causing the main character to free herself from the toxic relationship and complications. The support obtained from family and friends proved invaluable in the process of "freeing" from the violent pattern. Particularly interesting seems to be the woman's final response: "Now I am the old, strong Alicja... (...)", which allows us to note that the woman freed herself from the feeling of being "the Other", "guilty", she ceased being a "scapegoat". Additionally, she takes note that such a fate may affect not only "weak" people, but sometimes also the "strong". However, the woman regained her former strength and self-confidence. She can confidently meet with old friends, for whom just recently she was still "the Other", who should have been avoided. They also ceased to be "the Others" and strangers to her, previously perceived as "better" than her. Another story describes the *closeness of "the Other" in the context of their feeling of estrangement among "their own"*. The story is based on the experiences of a man named "Robert", who many years ago met "an Other" (coming from a different culture, a different country - though not very distant geographically). The story begins in the third year of studies, when they both meet at work experience and shortly afterwards fall in love with one another. Common interests and the strong feeling muffled cultural differences so effectively that they did not feel mutual foreignness, on the contrary - they understood each other perfectly. However, this idyll did not last very long. When the boy's parents (and shortly thereafter the girl's) had discovered their relationship - "hell" began. The young couple quickly learned that their immediate environment is unable to accept their relationship. Especially the boy's parents, who strongly intervened in their feelings, tried various, sometimes unrefined methods: "(...) I constantly heard that our relationship had no chance of survival, because I was making a fool of our family, that I deserved someone better. No arguments helped: that we love each other, that we have common interests and (positive) goals, that we would soon complete our studies. Many times I tried to make them see that we have pretty good prospects for the future, that we are both ambitious and we have a real chance to become independent quickly. However, they did not accept any of my arguments, while their arguments were pitiful - no 'cos no, out of the question, we'll never accept her. (...) I felt terrible, especially that my parents repeatedly acted behind my back. They called Svieta without my knowledge,

and even tried to intimidate her and persuade her to break up with me. They often used unrefined nicknames, insulted my girlfriend and the country she came from, they told her to return from whence she came. They also tried to discourage me, often reiterated that since she was a redhead, she must be false - though Svieta was really dark-haired with a hint of copper, not a redhead. They also called upon various historical "facts" in order to emphasize the cultural divide between us. We felt humiliated by this situation, tired, we were afraid that we wouldn't survive this much longer (...). I was lacking the strength for this continuous and furious struggle. I could not understand that my parents, otherwise educated people, having good positions, could behave so fiercely. They were becoming more and more strangers to me, I had not known them like this before, especially that once we had been so close, we were a true family (...) At home I was feeling more and more alienated, I felt helpless and lost in this situation. It was out of the question for me to meet with "Svieta" at home; at the dorms, where "Svieta" lived chances were also poor. So, like "thieves" we met in secret in cafés, clubs, on in the corridors of our university. Especially, that at this stage, we could not afford to rent even the simplest place. I came to hate my parents, I felt like running away from home as far as possible, but there was nowhere to go (...) One day, my grandmother called me (...) She transformed her flat into two fairly large apartments. I was truly shocked; I knew how much that flat meant to grandma (...) Now we were living on our own. It was not easy at the beginning, we had to reconcile our studies with work in the evenings, but somehow we managed it. Our parents could not do anything to us anymore, we were independent, we had our own place. They were furious with grandma. However, we managed to make contact with "Svieta's" parents, actually it was they who contacted us, when they learned that "Svieta" was pregnant; however, it turned out that they also had many prejudices toward Poles (...) Our first child was born in this apartment. After "Piotr" was born, my parents wanted to contact us at any cost, they suddenly felt like grandparents and very much wanted to see us and their grandson, they persuaded us in different ways to try to fix our relations. However, it was already too late; they were already complete strangers to me, so I didn't want any contacts with them. I cannot forgive them, what they did to me once – especially that I am their only son". In the story above one can see a number of paradoxes and absurdities, namely: the "I" - "the Other" conflict is born not in the fields of two separate, "foreign" cultures, but within the same culture. In addition, it touches people closest to one another: parents - and their child. In trying to "save" their son, "protect" him (or rather themselves) against "a foreigner", "a redhead", "worse", "undeserving", the parents consequently push away their own son as "an Other" disjunctive to them, who humiliates their family. Caused by their own imaginary prejudices, they demand him to be as they would like to see him - so he fits into their "community", which as a result ceased to be a community. They do not allow their son to interpret the world and people in his own way, and at the same time, they do not show the least desire to learn his world - (they remain "deaf" to all arguments that he presents them with, they don't accept them). In their actions we see a hidden assumption, and a conviction, that only their image of the world is correct and true, and only they are right, which coincides with the attitude "We" are okay - "You" are not okay. As a result, they separate themselves from their son and nullify the opportunity for constructive agreement with the family. Only the grandmother tries to rescue her relationship with her grandson, but also exposes herself to the wrath of her children. The reversibility of human fate additionally shows that after some time, the parents attempt to establish contact with their son, and their new-born grandson. However, this time they experience rejection. The son pushes his parents away and refuses interactions, because, as he stresses - they are "complete strangers" to him and he cannot forgive them. This time we notice that the parents become "the Others", who do not fit into the son's world. In a story told in such a way, it is difficult to see any positive, building point. Especially, that the family breaks up and contacts between people who seemed the closest: parents and their only son, were (probably permanently) destroyed. What is more, the grandmother comes into the group of the conflicted family. The dramatic development (of foolish) events causes that the love and closeness that was once shown to one another, become dominated by stubbornness, mutual prejudices, and even feelings of hatred (felt by the son). At the same time, we see that in this story, nobody gained (won) anything – all turn out to be losers, because in the unconstructive game of life being played, they lost their greatest treasure – their bonds and family relations. As the next and last story, I present one spun on the experiences of Karol, in which *"the*



*Other"/"Otherness" manifests in various (also extremely surprising) scenes – indicating at the very unpredictable nature of "reverse logic". Karol's story dates back to experiences from about a decade ago, when his wife, "Małgosia" got ill. It all began when we learned from the doctors that "Małgosia" has a malicious cancer. Our whole world fell in ruins (our sons experienced this harshly, and the eldest even fell into severe depression), all the more that it was a severe case of Hodgkin's lymphoma, and the prognosis was very poor. Our sons went through an express course in maturing. They helped me a lot, looked after Małgosia as much as they could. (...) Although Małgosia protested, I decided to sell our house to save her. We moved into a two-room apartment (...) We bought medicines of the latest generation from all over the world. We used conventional and unconventional medicine, practically everything that was available (...) During this time, it turned out that we have many friends whom we can count on in these difficult times, and a wonderful family, who supported us with all their might. (...) Of course, not all were like this. Some even started to avoid us. I was most disappointed with my "friend", also our family's "friend", whom I've known since the early school years. We went to the same school with Michał; we studied together and then worked at the same construction company. "Michał" proved to be a complete bastard. He used my difficult situation and a weaker period at work to oust me from the position of "surveillance inspector", and soon took over it himself. What's true is I had already for some time felt that something was up – when he said that I should give Małgosia away to the hospice, I knew that we were from "different worlds". But I didn't expect that in this difficult situation he would fail us so very much. Not only did he turn away from us, but also "kicked us down". This was a huge blow for me. I felt cheated, invaluable, weak (...) Most importantly, on the contrary to the blackest scenarios, "Małgosia" got healthy (...) Then I decided to establish my own construction company. (...) In the beginning there was fear, whether I would cope, whether I would be able to support the house and two adolescent sons. Although my wife's earnings were not the lowest, it would be difficult to pay off the loans from them, which we took out to start up the company, and at the same time ensure supporting the family. However, I decided to give myself a chance. I believed in my professional experience and skills in working with people that I had obtained over the years (...) It turned out that demand on the building market was quite high. And because I conducted my work reliably and cared about good quality, I was getting more and more orders. My company was developing more and more, we obtained a name that counted on the market. So I could now afford to build my own home for my family and a pretty prosperous life. (...) Then it turned out that some people envy us, (...) Especially our friends, particularly those of many years, and who called us "nouveau riche", they repeatedly made us feel as if we didn't belong to them, as if they wanted to stress that poor people are better. I don't really understand this situation. In particular, that when "Małgosia" was sick, we could count on them. This time, however, I didn't concern myself with it so much, though I knew that it meant deleting more friends from the list. I knew, however, that I have a loving family and trusted friends (...)*

The above story is abound in both dramatic and sad plots, (ruining faith in another human being) as well as optimistic ones, showing solidarity among people. Unlike the previous history (Robert and Svieta), it illustrates mutual closeness and devotion of a family, its enormous Faith and Love, which give support to its members, even in the toughest moments of life. Also, a group of friends proves helpful in the difficult times experienced by Karol's family. Unfortunately, some relationships do not withstand such a test - which is proven by the relationship with Michał, which did not survive it. We discover the sad truth about a person, who was thus far regarded as a family friend, however, in reality turned out to be a complete stranger, alien, "the Other" - something one could not have expected. His character seems not only to be a great disappointment in personal terms, but also in human terms - here Michał disappointed not only as a person, but mostly as a human being and his human dimension. The further part of Karol's story, however, illustrates, and in a very spectacular way, the positive "reversal of fate" of the main character: Małgosia's return to health, professional success, building one's own house, a prosperous life for the family. However, again, the story told is not entirely free from pessimistic plots. It appears that subsequent people "close" to them drop out from the circle of their friends, despite them having proved themselves in a crisis situation. However, they could not find themselves in a reversed situation (achieved success). Therefore, once again the divisions appeared: "We" - "Them", "better" - "worse", worse - because wealthy (it could have just as well been the other way

round: "worse" - because poor). They can be many reasons for rejecting, discriminating, branding another human being. As many as there are people's stories. In this thesis, I highlight only a few of the stories heard, although there are of course many more of them. Among the many stories, for example, there is Ewa's story, who tries to become "the Other" at any cost - better than the rest. Although, as a result, it turned out that the promotion achieved by her with difficulty did not bring her expected fulfilment and happiness - when fate "turned away" from the woman, it turned out that only resentment and loneliness remained. There is also Edward's story, a homeless "Other" who proved to be extremely unwilling, "resistant" toward help offered to him - which acceptance required compliance to specific conditions (e.g. resigning from drinking alcohol). Edward, however, preferred to remain "a man of the street" - living his own way. It is worth stressing that each of these stories is different, unique, and exceptional, just like their main characters are different, unique and exceptional.

## Summary

"Others" present themselves in this thesis as an integral part of ourselves and our everyday experiences, which we mutually exchange among one another and share in our everyday lives. Thanks to "Others", we create mutual relationships and bonds that build a community. All the more, it is worth caring for good contacts with "Them" and fruitful and satisfactory communication, in order to create conditions for better mutual understanding and getting to know one another. Especially, since we live in a multicultural reality, manifesting multiplicity and a variety of cultures, languages, beliefs, ideas, traditions, ways of life, which justify such care. Care directed at the inviolability of otherness in "the Other".<sup>21</sup> The multicultural reality has become a fact, which cannot be ignored. Certainly, it cannot ever be understood fully, but one can at least try to get closer to it. All the more that "Otherness" (thanks to advanced technologies, modern media) reaches us via newer and more diverse channels – and this means that there is no way to "protect" oneself or separate from it. Therefore, a permanent expansion of knowledge about "the Other"/"Otherness" and building tolerance for differences in a human being becomes a significant challenge in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. As Stephen R. Covey highlights: "Until we appreciate the differences in our perceptions, until we appreciate ourselves and don't allow the possibility that we are both right, that the world is not always a dichotomic either/or, that there is almost always a third way out, we won't be able to exceed the limits of our own circumstances", see: Covey, (2000). As the results of the conducted studies show, we are not always willing to look for a "third way out", sometimes we try to force through our own scenario at any cost, our own point of view, consequently, we put ourselves up for failure in mutual bonds and a community with "Others". Because we assume in advance that a specific "Otherness" does not match a specific (carried by us) image of the world, thus we make a schematic division into "We" - "You", "Mine" - "Yours", better - worse; we then usually escape to the negative valuing of "Otherness", and what follows, we strengthen the existing feeling of mutual strangeness and distance. Ironically, it appears that the strangeness felt by people does not necessarily manifest in the conditions of two separate, "distant" and "foreign" cultures coming into contact, but quite often manifests within the same culture - within the same country and nationality, the same work environment and even the same family, hence in "one's own backyard" - (see study results: "the Other" in the context of applied "reverse logic"). The analysis of the gathered research material additionally shows that people quite often defend

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<sup>21</sup> The inviolability of otherness in "the Other" becomes an ideal here, which we should strive towards, which we should seek out, which does not mean that it can always be achieved. Here, I refer to Bakhtin and his dialogic, which grows from the care for the inviolability of otherness and recognition for otherness in "the Other". This means somewhat transcending outside the values shared by the community, which at the same time will not violate them. They are connected with the ability of conducting such a dialogue, in which one's authority is not imposed on the partner (listener), in order not to baffle his/her utterances and respect the freedom of this person. Due to the fact that dialogics (in Bakhtin's concept) is based on individual consciousness, however, filled with the voices of interlocutors. Therefore, it becomes unique, because it creates utterances, which are polyphonic and socialized, as well as intentional and single, see: Loriggio, Ulicka, (2009).

themselves from "Otherness", they fight it off, push it away, and sometimes pretend that it is "invisible", therefore, it becomes a kind of absent discourse in their lives. At the same time, we see that the majority of Respondents can without great problems recognize and distinguish "the Other" in their surroundings. They know how this person differs from them; they do not have difficulties in describing the figure of "the Other" or defining the phenomenon of "Otherness". Respondents could easily equip "the Other"/"Otherness" in specified attributes. Quite often, however, these attributes were negative (sometimes stigmatizing), showing "the Other" in an unfavourable light (although "the Other" was not necessarily another person - often attention was paid to oneself as "the Other"): "worse" or "better", "smarter" or "dumber", "stronger" or "weaker", "more resourceful" or "less resourceful", as a victim of circumstances, or victims of other people. Respondents also referred to the many experiences that illustrate the complexity of human fate and its complication in (often uneasy) contacts with "the Other". They also drew attention to factors causing "the reversal of fate" "upside down", often indicating at "critical" events, in which "Others" participated, and which prejudged radical (sometimes spectacular) change, becoming "turning points" in the lives of the Characters. The narratives of the Respondents oriented at exhibiting their binary experiences of "Otherness", (that is, experiencing oneself as "the Other" or experiencing another human being as "the Other") made it possible to emphasise the existence of intermediate space between them. It is worth noting that such a space can be filled with various values: dialogue, learning about each other, mutual interest, love, friendship, respect, trust, truth, or reluctance, hostility, lack of interest in one another, ignorance, hatred, struggle, lies, suspicion, etc.). It is people themselves who decide what is found in it - whether it will be content muffling out mutual tension or strengthening it. Since this is a space created between entities that have free choice and the decision-making power, a personalized space, describing interpersonal relationships. This also means that the quality of interpersonal relationships and the quality of experiences shared with "Others" depends only on the people who create them themselves. It is worth stressing here that for creating them, mutual commitment of both parties is necessary, they both decide about consenting mutual contact, as well as determine the quality of this contact - the final decision is always reached on two binary located poles - "Me" "You" "We" – "Them. It is worth noting that the experiences described by Respondents, emerging in this space, are not homogeneous. Sometimes, they are a testimony of human solidarity, love, friendship, mutual support - ipso facto becoming experiences strongly strengthening faith in another human being, at other times, they are testimony to the prejudices, superstitions, unfounded fears felt by people - which destroy such faith and human solidarity. However, these experiences are always based on the presence and contacts with "Other" people, on their participation. Without the participation of "Others", there would not be any experiences, or human stories and narratives made on their basis, sometimes optimistic and bracing, other times saddening and pessimistic. One way or the other, it is difficult to image our lives without "Others".

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