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Introduction: From the imagined to the real Other

It is impossible to say how many books have been written not only for intellectual reasons, but also from a heartfelt need. The publication entitled *Etnografie Innego/Ethnographies of the Other*, which pays a tribute to Professor Dagnosław Demski's seventieth birthday, certainly constitutes a gift "from the heart". The presence of Professor Dagnosław Demski, whom many of us know simply as Danek, is felt throughout this book because of its authors – his long-time colleagues, co-workers and friends, representing many research institutions and numerous scholarly disciplines – as well as its main theme, which has inspired and sparked the Jubilarian's curiosity at various stages of his scholarly career, in many geographic and thematic contexts.

Dagnosław Demski's anthropological interests began with his fascination with the non-European Other. In 1984, when still a student of ethnology at the University of Warsaw, learning about Hindu rituals and traditions and attending language courses at the Faculty of Oriental Studies, Dagnosław Demski made his first three-month-long field research trip to India (Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan). That visit turned out to be the beginning of a much longer "trek" around India and Pakistan, which lasted nearly until the end of the 1990s. Core achievements from that stage of his research efforts include the book entitled *Obrazy hinduizmu. Kultura i religia oczami radźputów i pasterzy* [Images of Hinduism. Culture and religion through the eyes of rajputs and shepherds] (2007) – which was Dagnosław Demski's habilitation work – as well as an extensive collection of photographs.¹ In

¹ The collection of photographs from Dagnosław Demski's field research in India and Pakistan is available at the Digital Repository of Scientific Institutes (RCIN).

the early 1990s Dagnosław Demski continued his travels to India, but also made his first visits to Belarus, mainly to the region of the Naliboki Forest. He explored the past and present of inhabitants of Western Belarus, whose identity had been shaped by the shifting borders (see e.g. Demski 2003). His interest in broadly defined ethnic and cultural borderlands became the leading theme of several research projects conducted over many years in cooperation with local researchers in Lithuania, Latvia, Bulgaria and Romania (e.g. Hristov *et al.* 2015; Demski 2019a; see also Boldāne-Zeļenka in this volume). In 2008 Dagnosław Demski began his research on visual representations of the Other (including caricatures) in Hungary. His ability to see known sources “in a different light”, his boldness in posing innovative questions, and his talent for finding collaborators and establishing lasting interpersonal relationships ultimately transformed the modest, individual research project into a multi-faceted, original enterprise that yielded impressive results (see e.g. Demski, Baraniecka-Olszewska 2010; Demski *et al.* 2013; Demski *et al.* 2015; Demski *et al.* 2017; see also Kabzińska in this volume). Since ca. 2015 the issue of otherness has also been explored in research on former Soviet military bases, conducted first in Poland, and later in other countries of Central and Eastern Europe. This research resulted, among other things, in two special issues co-edited by Dagnosław Demski and published in the Estonian periodical *Folklore: Electronic Journal of Folklore* (Seljamaa *et al.* 2017; see also Seljamaa in this volume), as well as in the journal *Česky lid* [Czech Ethnological Journal] (Czarnecka *et al.* 2019). In 2016, parallel to the research on post-Soviet bases, Dagnosław Demski became the leader of an international team of scholars from Central and Eastern Europe, who embarked on a project focused on the ethnographic shows organised in the region. The research, which brought the Jubilarian back to his original interest in the non-European Others and their visual representations, is still ongoing. Aside from international academic conferences, numerous articles and special issues (e.g. Demski 2018a; 2018b; 2019b; Demski *et al.* 2020; see also Sz. Kristóf in this volume), as well as an edited volume that remains the most comprehensive publication on the history of human exhibitions in Central and Eastern Europe (Demski, Czarnecka 2021), the project has resulted in an online exhibition entitled *Staged otherness*. Since its launch in November 2021, the exhibition site has had over 260,000 views.² The number of visitors indicates that the results of research conducted under the supervision of Professor Dagnosław Demski resonate far beyond strictly academic circles, and have attracted the interest of the global community. The *Staged otherness* exhibition was also presented

2 The *Staged otherness* exhibition is available online at <https://stagedotherness.eu/#>.

in a more traditional on-site form in Riga (2022), Tartu (2022), Warsaw (2023) and Brno (2024), which must have reminded the Jubilarian of his first experiences with organising such events; his first individual exhibition, entitled *Sacred sculpture of Tamil Nadu*, was presented at the Asia and Pacific Museum in 1987; the one entitled *Paitings of the Warli tribe from Maharashtra* was opened in 1989. The project on the heritage of ethnic shows in Central and Eastern Europe (see: <https://contentiouscollections.wordpress.com/>) has been carried out under Dagnosław Demski's supervision since 2022. And since the Jubilarian is very much in shape and continues his scholarly activity, all those whom he has inspired throughout the years, and prompted to think creatively or explore less obvious mental paths, may certainly hope and crave for more!

In the early days of his professional career Dagnosław Demski was associated with the Asia and Pacific Museum in Warsaw (1987–1989) and the Institute of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology at the University of Warsaw (1989). In 1990 he joined the Institute of Archaeology and Ethnology of the Polish Academy of Sciences in Warsaw, where he obtained further academic degrees and titles. Throughout his career the Jubilarian has completed numerous research projects financed by the UNESCO, the International Visegrad Fund, the National Science Centre, the National Programme for the Development of Humanities, and others. For many years, Dagnosław Demski has led research projects conducted as part of bilateral agreements between the Institute of Archaeology and Ethnology of the Polish Academy of Sciences and its counterpart institutions from Belarus (1994–2001), Lithuania (2007–2009), Hungary (2008–2011), Bulgaria (2012–2023), Romania (2013–2025), Latvia (2004–2024), and – most recently – Mongolia (2022–2024). His academic output includes one monograph, co-editing at least seven books and three special issues, several dozen articles and chapters, published mainly in foreign periodicals and edited volumes, as well as numerous reviews and reports. In the course of his career the Jubilarian has received several research scholarships, e.g. to travel to India and Pakistan (1990 and 1994), Great Britain (1996), France (1997) and the Netherlands (2012). In 2019–2023 Dagnosław Demski was the head of the Department of Contemporary Ethnology and Anthropology at the Institute of Archaeology and Ethnology of the Polish Academy of Sciences. In recognition of his prominent academic achievements, he was awarded the Bronze (2015) and the Silver Cross of Merit (2023) by the President of the Republic of Poland.

Dagnosław Demski's many accomplishments include his teaching activity. He was a lecturer at the Institute of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology of the University of Warsaw (1999–2002), and was also affiliated with the Department of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology of the Nicolaus Copernicus University in

Toruń (2012–2014). He was the supervisor of bachelor's theses, master's theses and two doctoral dissertations.

The above-presented information, which may be found in official documents, databases and works published by the Jubilarian, testify to the fact that he is an outstanding scholar with an impressive academic output. What it fails to convey, however, is the depth of Dagnosław Demski's empathy and sensitivity, the enthusiasm, curiosity and genuine interest with which he approaches the world and the people he meets, but also – last but not least – the support and understanding he is able to offer to other people in difficult moments. Likewise, information recorded in writing gives little indication of the Jubilarian's unique sense of humour, or his gift for spotting marginalised aspects of reality and for making less-than-obvious constructs (be it mental or linguistic). The “things” obscured through the “art of leaving out” (cf. Demski 2020; 2021) “reside” in relational spaces inaccessible to the wider public – the memories of people, places and conversations, the miles travelled in the field, the (more or less digestible) meals taken together, the joys and sorrows shared, the conferences and other enterprises organised, the moments of exhaustion, tension and misunderstanding, and the later attempts at overcoming these. And it is largely due to these “lists” of ordinary things that Dagnosław has gradually become Danek to his colleagues and friends, and Danek has transformed into a real Other (cf. Handler 2004).

The issue of the Other and otherness has been among Dagnosław Demski's interests since the very beginning of his academic journey and has, to a greater or lesser degree, served as the leitmotif of practically every project of his. The Jubilarian has often remarked that the only research subjects worth pursuing are the ones that “touch” us directly at some level, and whose realisation goes beyond the purely intellectual rearrangement of theories and concepts. In conversations that loosened the grip of the Self, Danek has often wondered whether it was his carrot-red hair that, since early childhood, made him stand out from – to use Erving Goffman's term – the “normals” (Goffman 1963, 4) and contributed to his sense of being a person who bears the mark of otherness. The sense of otherness was not something Dagnosław Demski has only read or talked about, but something he has frequently experienced; these experiences have made him particularly perceptive and awakened his insatiable need to understand the mechanisms of constructing otherness, the consequences of their influence and the strategies of dealing with them.

When confronting the Other, we confront our own preconceptions. And since these preconceptions pertain to the Other at least as much as to ourselves, the almost instinctive reaction to the presence of the Other is momentary anxiety. The imagined Other is the embodiment of the unpredictable, in the face of which we

lose our illusory sense of control and stability. This often results in fear, distrust and increased vigilance or attempts to shield oneself from the bothersome dissimilarities. The process of getting to know the Other/otherness is hardly straightforward or simple, but rather roundabout and often painfully ambivalent. Going the long, bumpy road from the imagined Other to the real Other requires significant effort and risk, tolerates no shortcuts, and offers no prospect of carefree moments, but only the oh-so-faint promise of coexisting and opening a dialogue. Regrettably, the most common strategies for coping with anxiety and fear when faced with otherness still include the rapid building of walls, fuelled by the deceptive temptation to separate, which – at best – only leads to the further distortion of the image of the Other (Bauman 2016). In stark contrast with the dominant tendencies, the exploration and research efforts undertaken by Dagnosław Demski over the years add to a history of building bridges that allow for the emergence of a certain space “between”. According to Byung-Chul Han,

The between is a space of friendliness-as-indifference, where “no one and nothing dominates or commands”. As the I grows smaller, the gravity of being shifts from the ego to the world (Han 2015, 31).

Indeed, it is only the between, in which the boundaries of identity are loosened, that offers a real chance for “reciprocal seeing” (Pratt 2008, 80).

The texts comprising the present volume pertain to the Jubilarian’s primary academic interests, while still representing a variety of subjects and perspectives connected with the phenomenon of the Other/otherness – an established and significant issue in ethnology, as well as in the context of the current political events and the ongoing socio-cultural processes. This focus has been reflected in the title of the monograph. The approaches and interpretations of the Other/otherness presented herein do not always correspond to the views of the Editors. Our decision to include many different texts was motivated by the wish to make this volume an inclusive platform open to a variety of voices. A number of authors contributing to this publication have emphasised the inspiring impact their “encounters” with Dagnosław Demski have had on their own research endeavours; the significance of the Jubilarian’s academic output is apparent in the fact that many researchers make references to his works. While working on this

monograph with the editorial team, we concluded that the nature of Professor Demski's academic work would be best reflected in a dual-language publication in Polish and English. Consequently, the volume is divided into two parts – the first presenting chapters in the Polish language, the second containing chapters in English. Each part is preceded by an introduction (in Polish and in English).

The Polish-language part of the volume opens with “Obrazy Innych nie tylko w karykaturach. O ewolucji pewnego projektu badawczego” [Images of Others not only in caricature. On the evolution of a certain research project], in which Iwona Kabzińska presents the summary of Dągobieg Demski's research on representations of the Other, conducted over many years. She indicates that while ethnologists have always been interested in cultural diversity and the category of Us vs. Others, the originality of Professor Demski's approach lies in turning visual material, particularly caricatures of the Other, into a source of information on the subject. With apparent fondness for the Jubilarian and with anthropological sensitivity to his chosen field of study, Kabzińska describes the intellectual journey Dągobieg Demski has taken since his first contacts with caricatures of the Other to the finalisation of complex research projects undertaken at an international scale.

The next chapter, “Bliska egzotyka i oswajanie Innego. Ludoznawcze i etnograficzne techniki dokumentacyjne i ich wpływ na ukształtowanie wizerunku Huculów i Huculszczyzny” [Nearby exoticism and taming the Other. Documentation techniques used in folk studies and ethnography, and their impact on the image of Hutsuls and the Hutsul Region] by Joanna Bartuszek, focuses on the fascination with Hutsuls and the Hutsul Region apparent in Polish culture at the turn of the nineteenth century. She notes that the Hutsul land and people came to be perceived as pleasantly “exotic”, attracting the interest of academically minded travellers, authors, experts in folk studies, painters and illustrators, and later also photographers (working in tandem with ethnographers), as well as tourists. Bartuszek demonstrates that ethnographic material in the form of press illustrations, sketches, postcards, studio photographs, paintings, book illustrations and memorabilia, as well as the “Hutsul types” and “enchanted landscapes” “bordering between reality and metaphysics” presented therein were regarded as a legitimate source of ethnographic knowledge on a par with (similarly conventional) descriptions. However, such material shaped only a “mythicised image of reality, consistent with the views on folklore prevalent at that time”, perpetuating ethnic stereotypes. As she notes, “what most of it presented were not ‘real’ Hutsuls, but rather images that were in line with the preconceptions about them”.

Katarzyna Kość-Ryżko's chapter “Doświadczenie obcości i kryteria dystansu kulturowego w perspektywie dziewiętnastowiecznych relacji polskiego zesłańca

i podróżnika – Agatona Gillera” [The experience of otherness and the criteria of cultural distance in the perspective of nineteenth-century accounts by a Polish exile and traveller – Agaton Giller] provides an analysis of literary descriptions of personal contacts with Others, penned by the nineteenth-century national activist exiled to Siberia. Particular attention is given to Giller’s three-volume work entitled *Opisanie Zabajkalskiej Krainy w Syberyi* [Portrayal of the Trans-Baikal Country in Siberia]. Kość-Ryżko focuses primarily on descriptions of the inhabitants of Eastern Siberia. In her own words, it is an analysis of “the qualifying criteria he [Giller] adopts to describe the established degree of cultural distance, the descriptive categories used in reference to Others (as opposed to Us), as well as the linguistic literary devices employed to that purpose”. Her considerations are given a theoretical footing, presenting the complex psychological and cultural aspects of relations between the familiar and the Other.

The next two chapters revolve around the world of museum exhibitions. In her work “Emil Holub i jego wystawa afrykańska z perspektywy bliższej i dalszej. O spojrzeniu definiowanym przez różnicę” [Emil Holub and his African exhibition from closer and more remote perspectives. On seeing defined by difference], Dominika Czarnecka focuses on the dynamics of seeing defined by dissimilarity. The direct subject of her analysis is a section of the temporary exhibition entitled *Emil Holub*, presented at the Czech Museum of Asian, African and American Cultures (2023–2025), which refers to Holub’s African exhibitions in Vienna (1891) and Prague (1892). As Czarnecka notes, “In the case of the contemporary representation of a past exhibition, I rely mostly on my personal experiences of a body feeling and comprehending things in a museum space, whereas the nineteenth-century manner of perception is analysed through the lens of impressions and understanding mediated by discourse, language and visual material published in the press”. Czarnecka poses questions about the “museum effect” and the “heritage effect”, which exploit otherness and make it subordinate to the development of national identity.

In her chapter “O pożytkach z odmienności” [On the benefits of otherness] Agnieszka Pindera postulates that “collections and their presentation” in Central and Eastern Europe are “influenced by local contexts of appropriation, and by current politics of memory associated with the condition of post-Soviet space”. She discusses artists – particularly Jasmina Cibic and Luke Willis Thompson – whose creative activity focuses on working with objects and their representations (e.g. photographic). These are artists that intentionally imbue objects with new meaning, thereby subjecting them to processes of renegotiation, which – in turn – “prevents their colonial appropriation”. As noted by Pindera, it is not only the

language of art, but also the language of museum exhibitions that has become the primary form of communication for many contemporary artists.

The final two chapters in Polish tackle issues related to humour and comedy. Alicja Soćko-Mucha's work "Dziedzictwo humoru: Wąchock i Gabrowo okiem antropologa" [The heritage of humour: Wąchock and Gabrowo in an anthropological perspective] presents a comparative analysis of jokes targeting the residents of Gabrowo or Wąchock. She takes note of the similarities and differences between them, in terms of both the subject of the jokes and their stylistic form. The text illustrates how the "heritage of humour" may become a driving force and a recognisable symbol of a town. Soćko-Mucha analyses the activities undertaken in Wąchock and Gabrowo by cultural institutions and local authorities, who use the stock of popular jokes about their residents as a resource for brand-building and, in the case of Wąchock, to deconstruct and overcome its negative stereotype.

Władysław Chłopicki and Liisi Laineste's chapter entitled "Żartobliwe metafory jako sposoby złagodzenia mowy nienawiści w dyskursie religijnym" [Humorous metaphors as ways to mitigate hate speech in religious discourse] explores the relationship between hate speech, metaphor, and humour. The authors analyse examples of Internet user statements that meet the criteria of hate speech, selected from the comment section under the debate on the crisis of trust in the Church organised by the Institute of Józef Tischner's Thought and made available on the YouTube platform. Step by step, the text reveals that deliberative metaphors – especially when coupled with humour understood as exaggeration or amusing imagery – "often weaken the power of hate speech". Meanwhile, hate speech with the highest degree of hostility usually involves conventional metaphors and lacks humour.

The English-language part of the volume opens with general, theoretical accounts of the ethnographies of the Other, illustrated with case studies on Dr. Jonas Basanavičius (by Anelia Kassabova) and the *Wild West Show* in Hungary (by Ildikó Sz. Kristóf). The seven chapters that follow offer more specific insights into the discourse of the Other/otherness in varied cultures, eras, and spaces. The final English-language chapter (by Ilze Boldāne-Zeļenka) reflects on the waves of knowledge in academic friendships.

Anelia Kassabova presents a historical figure whose life and work epitomise the tangled history of Europe at the turn of the nineteenth century: Dr. Jonas Basanavičius (also known as Ivan Basanovich or Jan Basanowicz). During his long and prolific career across Eastern Europe, he came to be known as a physician, folklorist, journalist, and politician. He played a significant role in establishing the Bulgarian healthcare system. Kassabova's chapter reflects on how Dr. Basanavičius described various (mostly gendered, but also ethnic) Others in the Bulgar-

ian nation-state, touching upon topics such as sexuality, abortion, childbirth and contraception.

Ildikó Sz. Kristóf's chapter "Show, science or discursive register(s) of alterity? How to interpret Buffalo Bill's *Wild West Show* in Hungary?" is based on ideas developed in a joint research project with Professor Demski. It explores the forms of ethnographic shows in Central and Eastern Europe in the late nineteenth to early twentieth century. She uses ethnographic tools developed in the framework of the interpretive/hermeneutic turn in socio-cultural anthropology. These approaches provide, as she argues, the deepest insight into nineteenth-century ethnographic shows. They allow, above all, to make a much-needed difference between the "sensational discourse" reflected in the newspapers and ads, and the "scholarly discourse" that existed at that time.

Markéta Křížová presents a case study about E.St. Vráz (ca. 1860–1932) and his travels in Africa, South America and South-Eastern Asia. Vráz was an influential and authoritative author of books and lectures on non-European regions, whose popular events were a sensation among Czechs at the turn of the century. Given the great popularity Vráz enjoyed in his lifetime, and his enduring fame, many of the stereotypes he cultivated and the motifs he established in his presentations of the non-European Other remain present in Czech discourses even today. The stereotypes and beliefs have been reinforced even further by the politics and national discourse in Central Europe, but also in the more general colonialist and racist discourse legitimising the expansion of European power to other continents.

Petko Hristov writes about the case of Bulgarians and Serbs as Others and brothers at the same time: for centuries, these countries and nations have been connected by culturo-historical universalism, almost unprecedented in the world. At the same time, however, the region has witnessed many conflicts. The paper ponders the question of how Bulgarians have constructed the image of the Other – the Serb – in the long period after the birth and establishment of modern Balkan states in the nineteenth century. It presents the dual attitude displayed predominantly by Bulgarian intellectuals, writers, historians, scientists and journalists within the last 150 years. The construction of this image and the attitude towards the neighbouring peoples, who are close in terms of language, culture and mentality, often follows the currents of Slavophile politics in the Balkans, liberating between complete neglect and unconditional sympathy. Periods of warmer political relations and brutal fratricidal wars have alternated, perpetuating a number of clichés in both science and journalism, often used for propagandistic purposes. A number of these clichés were revived in the early 1990s, associated with the bloody breakup of the former Yugoslavia. The chapter presents some of

these stereotypes and prejudices based on media reports throughout the period.

Elo-Hanna Seljamaa writes about the past and present of Bashkirs in the small Estonian coastal town of Paldiski, illustrated through the stories and actions focused on the bust of the Bashkir national hero Salavat Yulaev (1754–1800). It has become a sacred place both to (the few) Bashkirs living in Estonia and to delegations from Bashkiria. The author claims that the Bashkir minority in Estonia are using Yulaev to establish their presence in and their sense of belonging to Estonia. Through various actions and statements, the wider public is invited to see and understand that the Bashkir presence in Estonia goes back several centuries and that it does not depend on any particular state policies. Paldiski and the monument provides an excellent case for exploring questions of Others and otherness, as both carry the label of marginality and liminality.

Larysa Vakhnina's chapter tackles the atrocities of the Russian war in Ukraine and its influence on the cultural heritage of Ukrainians and the minorities living in Ukraine (such as Bulgarians, Greeks, Albanians and Crimean Tatars). The UNESCO convention "On the protection of intangible cultural heritage" (2003) provides a firm basis which helps fight against the devastating impact the war has had on the ethno-cultural situation and the rich local cultural traditions. There is no need to invent anything new, as the UNESCO convention has already provided the appropriate mechanisms applicable in the conditions of military aggression. The author stresses the need to record testimonies of the war among different target groups. This should be done through engaging Ukrainian scientists and their international academic networks, as well as creating a powerful digital database of field materials.

Anssi Halmesvirta contributes a chapter entitled "Jokes from the socialist countries in Finland in the 1960s", where he discusses the jokes found in a printed joke collection edited by Harri Kaasalainen and Pekka Lounela in 1965. He notes that censorship was not particularly thorough or strict, even though Finland officially maintained "most friendly" relations with the Soviet Union, and thus anti-Soviet jokes could have been perceived as wrong or dangerous. He stresses that jokes about the Soviet system tended to reflect an estrangement from the society and the official discourse, materialising through surrealism and absurdity. The jokes represented the other point of view and opened the eyes of the Finnish readers to alternative realities apart from the totalitarian regime.

Andrea Zittlau in her contribution about prison food culture shares three original recipes that come from prison inmates from Pennsylvania. The recipes reflect a lesser-known branch of the American cuisine, but also embody the type of comfort food that is created despite all the constraints – the lack of ingredients, cooking

utensils and appliances. Apart from imagining the process and results, the author encourages the readers to try the recipes out and thus interact with the inmates who submitted the instructions during creative writing courses at the prison.

Stelu Șerban describes a recent project that studied life on the islands in the Danube delta. Besides human interviewees, non-human “interlocutors” were also “addressed”: plant species, animals, geo- and hydro-morphological phenomena typical to the region. This brings to the table a novel approach to the identity of places. An environment anthropologist needs to take into account how this identity embeds human relations and practices, as well as geography, space and biology. In his eye-opening research, Șerban emphasises that reflexivity, critical anthropology, and authentic serendipity constitute the lines of force of a pluri-local ethnographic methodology, which provides a strong alternative to the classically grounded methodology of Malinowskian origin.

Ilze Boldāne-Zeļenka concludes the English section of the Festschrift by a metaphorical and personal insight into the joint fieldwork projects in which she participated alongside Professor Demski. She shows how these encounters with the Professor widened her horizons and shaped her scientific career, but also brought a lot of joy and a profound sense of collegiality.

Their desire to explore the phenomenon of otherness notwithstanding, the authors contributing to this monograph were united in their wish to bring joy to the Jubilarian. We hope that reading the publication will cause him to think fondly of the people, places and events that he considers important. From the bottom of our hearts, we wish Professor Danek Demski many more jubilees, ideas, publications and opportunities for further meetings. We hope the book will please our esteemed Jubilarian, and prove interesting and inspiring to the Reader.

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