THE SOCIOLOGICAL CONCEPT OF THE STRANGER AND ITS METHODOLOGICAL USE IN LITERATURE

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Abstract

This article aims to demonstrate the methodological approach I took on my research about the sociological term “Stranger” and its expression in literary terms. I deconstruct the term “Stranger”, since it was coined in 1950, analyzing sociological and cultural theories which address the concept: foreigner, immigrant, alien, outsider, pariah, marginal. Although all these deal with the point of view of identity, the definition of Stranger lies primarily in the difference between the “other” versus a group. This binary thinking can be conditioned by geography or bring about discomfort as the Stranger is seen by the group as someone who does not belong to their circle. I found these concepts reflected in post-colonial novels, where notions of identity and the Stranger mingle, in the struggle between the dominant outsider and the submissive colonized people. Since Stranger may be an acquired condition and its status is not rigid, for it is a given characteristic rather than a natural one, I followed a methodological cross-cultural comparison of the term Stranger in both a diachronic and synchronic perspectives. This project deals with cross-cultural identities and contributes to highlight the notion of the Stranger in literature.

Keywords: Stranger, Sociology, Post-Colonial Literature, Identity

Introduction

The Stranger Concept

There are many sociological notions of stranger, which was a concept first brought forth by Simmel in 1950. Concerned as he was with all that pertained to the metropolis and its social geometry and relationships (or lack thereof due to their impersonality), Simmel theorized about social closeness and distance thus arriving at the idea of the stranger. To define a Stranger in Simmel’s model, one needs to circumspect a certain spatial circle or think of boundaries that are analogous to spatial boundaries; the Stranger is the one who “does not belong [in that circle] initially and that brings qualities into it that are not, and cannot be, indigenous to it” (Simmel, 1950).

The notion of Stranger has evolved over time and because of it (e.g.: Park, 1950; Weber, 1970; Schutz, 1974; Durkheim, 1982; Certeau, 1987; Derrida, 1997; Elias, 2000; Sayad, 2000; Bauman, 2002; Delphy, 2007, among others). Despite their differences, all of these definitions identify the Stranger as “the other” versus “us”, “us” being a knitted group to which the Stranger does not belong to for many reasons or has been outcasted from. The notion of Stranger is, therefore, distinguished primarily through binary thinking (Jackson et al, 2017).

As mentioned before, the first idea connected to how the Stranger is constituted has been shaped by geography. At a fundamental level, space (its volume, contours, mappings, and typography) determines conditions of relationships between humans. First and foremost, the Stranger would be the one who is outside and/or doesn’t belong to “our” space(s). As such, it is quite easy to label the foreigner as a stranger, for foreigners come from the outside into a bounded notion of citizenship or
community. This type of Stranger is often associated with thoughts of discomfort and, in extremis, with danger or threat. The outsider brings unknown-ness and unpredictability because they come from a different circle (Lupton, 1999). Many narratives could be given as examples in today’s world, from the panic of the floods of immigrants (Chambers, 2012) to the fear of crime. As a rule, the Stranger is often associated with “a constant threat to the order of the world, poisoning the comfort of order with suspicion of chaos” (Jackson et al., 2017).

The several sociological notions of Stranger revolve around this idea. In the following paragraph, I will give a general view of this sociological conceptualization, in the chronological order in which the Stranger pictures came to be.

Simmel (1950), who truly “coined” the concept, literally used the term Stranger (Alien, Unfamiliar to…). He talked of it as a dynamic type, that breaches with old ways of life. Since the Stranger brought innovation to a group, it can also help define the group’s boundaries and identity. Finally, Simmel emphasizes the Stranger’s impartiality regarding what the Stranger observes in this culture that is not their own. In turn, Park (also in 1950) preferred the concept of “marginal” while saying that the Stranger was often rejected by the group because of the group’s cohesion rules. Weber (1970) used the term “pariah” to talk about strangers, pointing out these individuals that bring difference, “prepare the ground for social upheaval” and “despise most societal conceptions”. Weber spoke mostly about nomadic strangers, such as Jews and Gypsies (in the French colonization space, any kind of Nomadic tribe in the North of Africa, such as Berbere, Tuaregue, Shamba, etc, can be included in this conceptualization). Schutz (1974/1976) also talked about the integration of the Stranger in a group, namely immigrants, and how certain rituals were preserved or forgotten for that to take place. In the case of this post-colonial novels, this notion is important since they deal with cultural confrontation, putting face to face two identities: the imperialist nation and the colonized countries, one trying to hegemonically rule over the others. Durkheim (1938) points out that the Stranger is really an “Atopos”, factually “a being without a place” as the name states. Certeau (1987) had quite a mystical concept of the Stranger, perceiving Christ as the ultimate “Other”. Derrida (2014) believed the Stranger provokes questionings, which can be a good thing, though more for the group than the Stranger – this is also one of my main points as I talk of the stranger’s advantage point, which is explored later in this article. Elias (2000) calls strangers’ “outsiders” by definition; the factors of exclusion of these outsiders would be dynamics of power dictated by prejudice, i.e. outsiders are stigmatized and excluded from the processes of decision-making in a society. Sayad (2014) talks about the strangers’ “double absence”, absent from where they left and absent from where they chose to be or are forced to be, because they are not included in their new society and have also ceased to be a part of where they once belonged. This “double absence” is essentially what Sayad calls “The suffering of the immigrant” — the ultimate strangeness he decided to focus on. This is quite an important point for any post-colonial work, where Sayad’s perspective can also be noted when talking of those characters who are constantly on the move between societies (notice how Mersault is immersed in Algeria but never stops being French). Bauman (2002) believes that “stranger” is a dangerous position to be in, because nationalistic crisis will always point the finger at these different beings; “if you don’t have a place, a place will be found for you, more often than not.
a place of enmity”. Finally, feminist sociologist Delphi (2007) calls them “others”, talking about societies’ oppressed ones, dominated by the mainstream; these others can be all those which fall into minority groups, from non-whites to people of non-normative sexuality to gendered outcasts – a view which is much more post-modernist and encompassing.

Whatever the notion of stranger, sociologically all concepts point out to a fear of the unknown in a normative group. If we take a psychological approach, this fear of the Stranger can, in turn, be another version of the fear humans have of not recognizing or not fully knowing their own selves. This is the core of Carl Jung’s theory of the shadow: “[Often] the individual remains undivided and does not become conscious of his inner opposite” (Jung, 2014). The shadow would, therefore, be the dark side of each person’s persona, the unknown side that the conscious self does not identify due to it being instinctive and irrational. Because it is perceived as dangerous, every individual tends to project his or her shadow unto others. As such, those immoral or repulsive characteristics are seen as being present in strangers, present in the other but never on the individuals themselves. If completely consciously assumed, the real notion that the individual carries this shadow would cause extreme conflict and the possible tearing apart of their inner world. Some would actually come in touch with their shadow, like in the famous story of Dr. Jekyll and Mr Hyde (Stevenson, 2019; first edition from 1886). In a healthy world, it would be desirable that Dr. Jekyll would be able to control Mr. Hyde and not the opposite, meaning that each person when encountering their shadow would be able to balance it and integrate it (for example in creative work), rather than letting it dominate one’s life (through addictions). This is important to the Stranger concept, because those who have not let their unconscious arise yet tend to project these fears unto the strangers they encounter, since whatever breaks the patterns of their boredom is seen as a potential projection of their shadow.

Opposed to this view of frightening or even terrorizing thoughts, the idea of “stranger” and of “foreigner” can also be romanticized (Cooper 2007). In fact, the thought of the unknown can also be mysterious, exotic, enthralling and altogether magnetic, and conducive of the desire to unveil it/them. This is particularly interesting in the case of Colonialism, for, even though it is true that imperialist countries were trying to subdue the countries they were colonizing, by means of imposing their culture, laws and customs, one cannot deny that they were also quite often particularly fascinated by them, a fact that can be observed even in biological inter-breeding between ethnicities.

No matter how the Stranger is perceived, what remains true is that the Stranger does not belong to mainstream society and, as such, they do not share many of the identifying traits of the group they approach, such as: language, cultural identity, historical background, possession of the land in which they dwell, ethnicity, values and beliefs, among other distinct marks of difference. This project puts forward cross-cultural identities and contributes to highlight the Stranger as a particular notion in literature, a topic which has not been explored in cross-cultural literary comparison.

Research Method
In my work, I explore the multidimensional approach of the Stranger in literary terms, looking through the lens of the Stranger both as an author and from the character’s
standpoint. When regarding a novel, authors can be strangers, starting by the fact they may be foreigners to the culture they are looking into and also many of the characters may assume the role of strangers: strangers as foreigners, strangers as outsiders or outcasts, strangers as immigrants, strangers to themselves from a psychological standpoint as previously explained. As such, authorial and character notions of belonging take place. Language (i.e., the use of a foreign language, which is a main factor of cultural strangeness) complexifies and exacerbates this notion of being a stranger, which is why I look at the aspect of language(s) or dialect(s) used.

All the texts I work on are fictional novels. As such, it is important to methodologically stress which literary theoretical elements are considered for analysis. It is also vital to note that all fictional works are Post-Modernist and Postcolonial. Postmodernist texts are of complex analysis, due to their fragmentation, distortion(s), intertextuality, and general chaos, and to how much the often-alienated narrator demands from the reader (Festic, 2009). Yet, texts about French Post-Coloniality may be even a bit more difficult to engage with not only because there is not a corpus big enough written by the colonized but also because they cannot, therefore, be characterized due to experiences being so different depending on origin (notice how different the experience in Argelia would be different from Vietnam, for example). Therefore, my approach cannot help but to deal with Cross Cultural studies and with Comparative Literature. As such, I chose the perspective of Mary Louise Pratt’s “the contact zone”, that is “social spaces where cultures meet, clash and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out in many parts of the world today” (Pratt, 1991).

A few literary theoretical elements of fiction to be analytically considered are: Plot (regarding “Strangeness”, Dictatorship, Colonialism, Gender Role, etc); - Narrator (type/point of view; consider concepts of Stranger and intimate); - Setting; - Characters (consider concepts of Stranger and intimate, and most of the elements given in plot) - imagery, symbolism, foreshadowing, and other figurative language. Since novels both are and portray discourses (Griffin; 2013), they should be analyzed in both dimensions. Hence, discourse analysis becomes a process of research. It should be differentiated from textual analysis, as it presupposes that language (in this case, written text) is not a neutral tool for transmitting messages, but it rather “constitutes a particular way of talking and understanding the world” (Phillips and Jorgensen, 2002). Hence, the textual features I mentioned above, such as narrative voice, figurative language, etc., often provide insights “into the ways in which texts treat events and social relations and thereby construct particular versions of reality, social identities and social relations” (Phillips and Jorgensen, 2002 as quoted by Griffin, 2013).

Some components of discourse analysis are: - the investigation of patterns in language use, e.g. the kind of personal pronouns used by a narrator - patterns of language use as a process, e.g. how much verbal space a certain character has in a text - patterns of statements within a given context (“a regulated practice which accounts for a number of statements” - Foucault, 2018), - interdiscursivity (mixing different discourses) - systematic absences. Though more difficult to grasp than lexical or semantic patterns, it is possible to discern absences within a particular
text in the avoidance of the use of a word or a concept.

Other types of discourse analysis can be taken, such as the Foucauldian approach, which focuses on power relationships in society as they are expressed through language. This is particularly interesting in dialogues of post-Colonial novels, regarding censorship, violence, political police, hierarchies, or colonial structures. Such an approach intends to better understand the construct of a certain society in terms of politics, ideological messages, hierarchical relationships, be those personal or institutional.

"[Foucauldian discourse analysis] focuses on the power inherent in language and seeks to understand how historically and socially instituted sources of power construct the wider social world through language. The Foucauldian approach is used by researchers who are interested in how language is used by doctors, parents, the media, educators and/or governments to subordinate and marginalize the views of those who are not in power; on the other hand, this approach is also interested in the discourse of the “underdog” as a form of resistance to the hegemonic discourses of the cultural mainstream (Cook, 2008).

The purpose of discourse analysis is to give an “explanatory technique” (Fairclough, 2001), exploring connections between language, meaning and cultural practice. Discourse analysis is not a unitary research method and can take different forms, using colour-coding or computerized methods. It is not a method to be used on its own, but in conjunction with others, namely models of cultural studies or theoretical frames (in this case, I am using the “Stranger” concept), since the textual features to be analyzed will greatly depend on the perspective the researcher is trying to pay attention to (Griffin, 2013) or, in other words, to the answers posed by the research. Hence, a postcolonial perspective would pay attention to constructions of “race” whereas a feminist look would wonder about gender, etc.

Whatever the questions that are posed, it is important not to forget about linguistic relativity (Whorf, 2012): the language one speaks determines their line of thinking. Our linguistic system programs us, the grammar of each language being a kind of principle of relativity that guides the interpretation of the world, with all the partiality that comes from it. We talk about the world according to a preconceptual world made by our language. This is, in fact, a factor never to be forgotten in every cross-cultural studies work.

Another literary research method to be considered is textual analysis. Multiple interpretations of texts may be valued thus determining what these same texts tell us about cultural phenomena occurring within the socio-political and historical time they depict and/or were created (Hawkins, 2018). This method may and often is used in conjunction with others to fully explore the cultural interactions and contexts that might be conveyed by texts. Interpretations of a certain text are, once more, subject to the personal analysis of the receiver/interpreter. The interpreter is also a product of his/her own culture and community, thus applying his/her own frame of thought while conducting the textual analysis: personal worldview; cultural, historical, social and even political understanding of the time the text portrays; personal attempt to understand the author. There are many perspectives through which textual analysis is used. According to Alan McKee, 3 major ways can be considered: the realist, the structuralist, and the post-structuralist. The post-structuralist view, more recent, understands multiple
variations, several sense makings, and a rupture of “right” and “wrong” in interpretation, rather praising relativity (McKee, 2003). Notwithstanding the reader’s role, textual analysis also rests on interpreting a text within the context it was written – time, place and cultural frame, which is essential in Cross-Cultural studies. The implicit messages of the works, particularly, can only be achieved by taking these factors into consideration. In the case of the post-colonial novels, the context is of utter importance to their understanding. Further steps may be taken in this, e.g., if the interpreter decides to analyze secondary texts that relate to the first work (Bainbridge et al; 2015) or how such novels were received by the public in general. Finally, textual analysis cannot disregard the author’s intentions. “Understanding the context regarding the conditions of the cultural, political and historical climate assists with interpreting the text from the viewpoint of its creator” (Hawkins, 2018). This is to say the text contains certain restraints, yet we, as readers are not entirely at its mercy (Belsey, 2013). For the author’s message is always distorted by the receiver’s interpretation – it will never be purely understood in its entirety. This is also what allows for several exegesis to take place.

There have been many theoretical post structuralist interpretations discussing the role of the reader and of textual analysis, in particular why is it different of simple free association, from the 50/60s onwards. For example, Barthes (1977) proclaimed The Death of the Author, saying the destination of a text was in a reader that would “hold together” all the ideal and objective traces. Such a reader would be a utopian figure with no history, biography, or psychology: in short, an impossibility. Many followed, particularly in France (Derrida, Deleuze). In the 90s, they were criticized harshly by a few American philosophers and writers, including Norman Holland and David Foster Wallace who believed they were just “de-constructing” texts without inputting any added value (Foster Wallace, 2010). Norman Holland, particularly, promoted concepts of feedback within New Criticism, and illustrated how individuals both use, and are constrained by, their bodies, their culture, and their "interpretive communities” as well as their personalities or identities (Holland, 1985). Textual analysis remains indispensable as a research method in cross-cultural and cross-literary criticism, especially where cultural criticism includes cultural history, cultural studies and any other discipline that focuses on literary texts (Belsey, 2013).

A third literary research method is close reading. Close reading reveals the detailed, often concealed, tools that give texts stylistic consistency and rhetorical effect (Ruiz de Castilla, 2018). In this sense, only the internal traits of the text are to be considered, pinpointing structures of communication, contrasting and comparing elements and recognizing tensions. Notwithstanding its association with New Criticism, close reading is assisted by other several techniques and theories. It is possible to analyze the text thoroughly without deciding on a theory and selecting one afterwards, i.e., inductive research, or rather choose a theory a priori and then analyze the text according to it, i.e., deductive reasoning. Regardless of the method, close reading implies both creative and critical thinking and the knowledge of rhetoric. I use meticulous analysis and also metacognition when attempting close readings: not only why does the text rise questions but also why does the critic answers in a particular way (Ruiz de Castilla, 2018). This is particularly valuable in the present case when a
concern for academic objectivity is of the essence.

Results and Discussion

The Advantage of the Stranger’s Gaze

In principle, because the “stranger” is not bound by roots to the partisan dispositions of the group, their gaze is more objective (Simmel, 1950). However, the degrees of objectivity and liaison to the group remain to be verified and differ quite a lot. In the novels I investigate, this works partly in terms of authorial strangeness but certainly also in terms of strangeness of characters, exploring outsidersness in relation to spaces given they are in a hostile land and in relation of their own inner turmoil.

Several thematic groupings of “strange” versus “familiar” can be put into place here, both from an authorial point of view to characters analytical concerns: language, cultural ties, ethnic ties, mobility, space, timeframe, social privilege, experience of dictatorial constraints. It can be argued that the “stranger” is physically near, but culturally distant, making the words “proximity” and “distance” acquire new possibilities.

The vantage point of the “stranger’s” gaze mentioned above is all the more important in cases where memory is fragmented, unstable or contradictory (Spuznar, 2012).

Strangers are not unfamiliar to society; rather they cross that dividing line of dualism but are difficult to pinpoint: “There are friends and there are enemies. And there are strangers” (Bauman, 1993). The Stranger is (an)Other but lives around us in the same community. This Other symbol stands for “what we believe we are not, what we once were or what we even long to be” (Clarke, 2002). Nevertheless, as a whole, people always discriminate based on difference, for difference is not celebrated in society; rather it is negated when evaluated. It is important to realize this factor because difference is the one characteristic that identifies the stranger. Whether we are talking about race, religion, culture, nationality, sexuality, language or opinion, a Stranger is always identified by difference.

Identity and the Stranger

In many Ancient Languages the word to signify “foreigner” was the same that meant “stranger” and also had other interesting connotations. For example, in Ancient Greek, ξένος (Xenos) meant both “foreigner”, “stranger” and, depending on the context, “guest”, “friend” or “enemy” which are contradictory terms. In Latin, several words that mean “foreigner” are the equivalent to “stranger”: alienigena, peregrinus, hospes. However, hospes also means “guest” (and we must consider it was Roman mores to treat guests with utter devotion) - the word comes from hostis, meaning “hostile”, in itself a paradox. In Ancient Hebrew, זָר (zar) meant “stranger” (literally outsider of the tribe), “foreigner” and also “strange”, which was sometimes used with the meaning of “loathsome”.

In modern languages, the word is not as prolific. Nevertheless, the Spanish and French equivalents of what in English is the word “stranger” are quite ambivalent, capable of being translated both into “strange” and “alien”. This polysemic meaning is lost in English, but it would serve me well to illustrate how the Stranger can be seen.

For the purpose of illustration in this article, we take Albert Camus novel L’étranger as an example – translated in English to The Stranger, though in fact it would be much more accurately described as “The foreigner”, as it tells about the conflicts of a French man residing in Algeria and his impossibility
or inability to deal with the surrounding Middle Eastern culture. Though it can be argued that the protagonist (Mersault) is also “a Stranger to himself” (Sartre, 1946) since he has trouble with his own memories and present emotions. Mersault’s main issue is that of a permanent conflict between his inner world with the outer world, constantly causing him to justify his actions (Kaya, 2015). Mersault is condemned by his differences – as well as his indifference, for he looks quite absent minded, a true Stranger to the whole societal system and its rules, its values, its traditions as well as its laws. In this case, the “productive estrangement” I have talked about before is not present. Rather we see a very evident fracture that will lead to the Stranger’s doom.

Quite often, Mersault has the impression that others judge him because he says and does things differently from those who surround him (Camus, 1942). This instills in him a notion of being almost permanently “ridiculous” (Barbotin, 2001). The scene where he is imprisoned is a good example of this. Being the only Western man in prison was a tragic-comical moment for the other prisoners, all of them local men, who started to laugh as they see a clearly non-Middle Eastern foreigner sharing their cell. For his part, Mersault is not capable of analyzing the world around him. Camus’ novel is quite unlike other novels I researched which feature strangers who analyze their environments whilst observing the status quo. While analyzing such characters it is always essential to distinguish between the social constructs of the “stranger” of prestige versus the “stranger” marked by prejudice.

The above example shows us how the perception of difference and/or similarity is deeply connected to the construction of identity itself and even to processes of hierarchical categorization. This is exemplified by the capacity of a dominant societal group to classify and place all others that do not belong to it within a scale that represents and expresses cultural distance. This scale is what Guillaume and Baudrillard (1994) call “Stranger metrics” – a special look that will approach or distance the Stranger to the ethics which frame their relationship to the group.

This approach makes the figure of the Stranger appear symbolically quite “loose” and independent from the mainstream glance. The word “stranger” carries connotations of displacement, wandering, loss of doxa and multiple possibilities, a shape from far away or one that is far away (Pontalis, 1990). Its persona often comes up in studies and in novels as a mysterious subject that brings revolution, allowing the collective “We” to better define its frontiers when shaken by it (Khatibi, 1987). Therefore, the concept of identity is not only crucial for the Stranger. It is the Stranger that (re)defines the identity of its surroundings, of the societies that it touches, even if the Stranger does it merely en passant.

In his essay “Rethinking Strangeness” (2004), Jeffrey Alexander suggests a new socio-conceptual alternative to the Western concept of the identity of the stranger, expanding the models put in place in the mid-20th century. His main critique of Simmel’s initial concept is that it did not sufficiently analyze “cultural structures”, i.e., the codes, narratives, and tropes which create a background understanding from which the idea of strangeness emerges and within which it continues to be reproduced (Alexander, 2004). Alexander believes the focal point for identifying strangeness rests on the cultural interpretations of social structures and the categories within which these are made. Upon doing so, it’s possible to realize that it is the
construction of difference that brings up potentially marginal individuals into groups seen as strange and – quite often – labelled as dangerous due to being different.

**Stranger as the Best Nomenclature**

Talking about the figure of the Stranger in the juridical-political world in the 21st century, Castro (2013) explains why it is preferable to use the term “stranger” rather than other words, for it can encompass the notions of “foreigner”, “outsider”, “stateless”, “alien”, “refugee” or the broader one of “noncitizen”. Its linguistic polyvalence theorizes the ontological condition that those who live at the margins experience today. The Stranger is the one who tries to reinvent the civilization(s) they are in and whose arbitrary divisions have left no space for them to fit in (Castro, 2013).

Though Castro’s use of the word “stranger” as an umbrella term for all of the mentioned above can certainly be contested, I agree with his position as to why “stranger” is the best term to be used interchangeably. There is certainly a complex set of categories for those who do not fit or do not belong to mainstream society, and many nuances for each of the linguistic terms applied to refer to them. Nevertheless, as mentioned earlier, though in the English language the word “stranger” doesn’t allow for much polysemy, it is still the closest etymologically derived word from other Indo-European languages whose equivalent words are translated as “stranger” in English but whose meanings can be very ambivalent in their original languages (as in Spanish, extraño, and in French étranger – alien, foreigner, stranger, strange, odd, outcast, unfamiliar, etc). In sum, my preference for the use of “stranger” over the other current modern terms explored earlier in this chapter is the complexity and width of its significance, which Castro also alludes to and that many languages have showed us, both diachronically and synchronically.

**The Psychological Approach**

Finally, it is important not to forget “the Stranger within” (Klein, 2017), which is another conceptualization of how our imagination constructs strangeness in fueling a dichotomous split (or even more than one split) between good and bad, right and wrong, similar and opposite. In short, all that differentiates the Stranger are purely human cultural constructs. For example, there is no such thing as “races”, there is only the human race; “races” is a pseudo-concept fueled by human phantasies, even though the concepts produce very real and profound effects on people’s lives. These differentiations are forms of internal “othering” (resonating with Jung discussed earlier) by which we define the Other (i.e. the Stranger) in the way in which we are not. Psychologically as well as sociologically, these constructs of identity represent mechanisms of defense (Segal, 1992). Even though I stated such identities are based on phantasies, we cannot dismiss that everyday life is built on such human representations (Klein, 2017) or mental forms (Ogden, 2018). Our inner world is shaped by unconscious mise-en-scène constructed both from internal and external molds and realities. As such, “phantasy becomes a hard fact” (Guntrip, 2018) in the process of identity formation, not only our own identity but also the identity of the other – necessarily opposed to our own, and all the more opposed as it is distanced from our own. This is why the “human phantasies” I alluded to above become crystallized in shapes, thus producing realities that come into effect in the space-time continuum of our historical world, such as the “races” concept.

In short, though many terms can be encompassed by the word Stranger, as
well as Stranger can also be an umbrella to express many identities, it is still the best term to refer to the several literary polysemic notions that sociologically and culturally refer to the Other.

**Conclusion**

In this methodological analysis, several synergies are at stake, as it would be expected when dealing with Cross-Cultural studies. The Stranger is the sociological concept and main core analyzed here, around which everything revolves. Its socio-cultural identity is defined by its opposition to a mainstream group; this opposition can be ingrained or constructed, and it is of a multiple nature, bearing also several effects into place. The Stranger is a polysemic concept that has been questioned but, in our opinion and as a result of our analysis, it is still the best term to be used when analyzing fictional novels, particularly post-colonial works where the clash of different cultures, languages and customs takes place, thus enhancing the importance of the Stranger’s perspective and its outlook. Stranger is an umbrella term but, according to my research findings, is the best term to describe otherness. Its importance in cross-cultural literature can be revealing.

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