



Discourses of Exclusion: Theories and Practices  
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# Discourses of Exclusion: Suppression, Silencing, and Inclusion

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## Abstract

The article provides an introduction to the anthology devoted to studying theories and practices of discourses of exclusion. Framing the discussion by references to Kimberlé Crenshaw's notion of intersectionality and Michel Foucault's conceptualization of the relations between discourse and power, the essay stresses the multiple forms of exclusion and entangled power differentials that determine a person's identity and social status and argues for the need to employ an interdisciplinary perspective. The overview of the issues analyzed in the anthology is guided by the recognition of the complex links between theory and practice and the awareness that exclusions reinforce precarity and dismantle networks of support.

**Keywords:** social exclusion, marginalization, normativity, discourse, inclusion, othering

The way we imagine discrimination or disempowerment often is more complicated for people who are subjected to multiple forms of exclusion (Crenshaw quoted in Sicenica, 2023, p. 341).

[W]e must not imagine a world of discourse divided between accepted discourse and excluded discourse, or between the dominant discourse and the dominated one [...]. We must make allowance for the complex and unstable process by which discourse can be both an instrument [...] of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy (Foucault, 1978, pp. 100-101).

Exclusion, as Kimberlé Crenshaw claims, can take multiple forms and can intersect with other kinds of disempowerment; discourses of exclusion, according to Michel Foucault, are unstable instruments of power that can give rise to strategies of resistance and opposition. Crenshaw's and Foucault's ideas illustrate

the fact that discourses and practices of exclusion comprise manifold “sociocultural power differentials and normativities” that determine “the construction of subjectivities” (Lykke, 2010, p. 71) and that they change in reaction to the transforming historical conditions. Recent debates on social exclusion have stressed the link between exclusion and various crises—social, political, health, financial, and military—that strongly affect individuals and communities and are simultaneously local and global. They have also shown that the excluded is an unstable category, prone to constant changes and re-definitions, differently re-constituted in varying social, political, and cultural contexts. Ultimately, discourses of exclusion establish “the normative conditions for the production of the subject” (Butler, 2009, p. 4) and determine not only who is recognized as human but also who deserves humane treatment.

The articles collected in this anthology explore various discourses of exclusion, critique marginalizing and discriminatory practices, and outline the possibilities of constructing different, more inclusive narratives and policies. All the texts address a crisis and examine the individual, systemic, institutional, and relational reactions to it. The anthology comprises three sections, each representing a different perspective and research field and reflecting the authors’ diverse interests and institutional backgrounds. Additionally, in line with the inclusive policy of the issue, each section features articles by young scholars. The first part, titled “The Global and the Local,” includes essays dealing with restrictions on movement across national borders and the rise of violence in urban spaces as well as articles on the formation of non-human identities on Tumblr and the linguistic exclusion in the city of Poznań. The second section, “Exclusion and Othering in Literary Works and Theory,” starts with the study of the development of environmental ethics, followed by articles analyzing literary works dealing with various forms of exclusion and processes of othering. The final part is dedicated to “Healthcare and Marginalization” and contains texts that address the problems of exclusion and stigmatization faced by various disadvantaged groups.

The articles in the first section, “The Global and the Local,” focus on issues experienced worldwide that significantly influence and are influenced by global and local policies. In “Beyond the ‘Hybrid Attack’ Paradigm: EU-Belarus Border Crisis and the Erosion of Asylum-Seeker Rights in Latvia, Lithuania and Poland,” Aleksandra Ancite-Jepifánova employs a comparative socio-legal perspective to discuss the situation of non-EU nationals crossing from Belarus and the EU-level response to the crisis. Based on interviews with protection seekers, NGO representatives, volunteers and legal practitioners involved in the crisis, Ancite-Jepifánova argues that the EU’s border with Belarus has become “an exclusion zone,” where people on the move fall victim “to various types of inhuman and degrading treatment.” The article negatively assesses the instrumentalization of migration and the restrictions on asylum rights and provides a valuable commentary on what Reece Jones calls “the fundamental

conflict of modernity,” that is, “allowing ‘good’ movements while preventing ‘bad movements’” (2017, p. 166).

Anna Maria Karczewska’s “Medellín: Narratives of Trauma and Exclusion in the Works of Colombian Journalists” examines the records of spatial, social, and cultural separation of the inhabitants of poor neighbourhoods in the second-largest city in Colombia. The three reportage books discussed in the article document the exclusion, insecurity and violence that result from the activities of youth gangs, narco business, and the state. By giving account of the suffering experienced by the inhabitants, these books serve as secondary witnesses to their trauma and deliver the call for justice, reparation, and reconstruction. Ultimately, as Karczewska argues, telling the story of the inhabitants of Medellín should be seen as “a political and therapeutic act” as well as “a claim to power” that transforms the archives of public memory and initiates processes of community formation.

Joanna Ziemna’s study of the experiences of exclusion focuses on the alterhuman community on Tumblr. As an alternative to the socially accepted notions of humanity, alterhumanity refers to the sense of not being human while having a human body and embraces a range of identities, including earthly animals, mythological beings, and immaterial ideas. Applying the non-participant observational netnographic approach to analyse self-creation acts by members of the globally scattered community, Ziemna discusses the alterhumans’ experiences of exclusion and relates them to those of other social minorities.

The section finishes with Mateusz Piekarski’s study of the linguistic landscape in the commercial centre of Poznań, Poland, which focuses on the exclusion caused by the lack of knowledge of the language used in signs of private establishments. The analysis of linguistic exclusion demonstrates the everyday effects of globalization and highlights generational differences and changing linguistic competencies.

The second part of the anthology, “Exclusion and Othering in Literary Works and Theory,” comprises articles that describe recent developments in literary practice and theory and explore attempts to represent and speak for the groups excluded from the dominant discourse. Gülşah Göçmen’s article examines the history of environmental ethics, highlighting the shift towards the inclusion of more-than-human beings in New Materialist approaches. Göçmen critiques the persistence of the anthropocentric orientation in environmental ethics and argues that the transgression of the traditional boundaries between human and animal, matter and discourse, or subject and object that characterizes New Materialism provides an excellent tool for radically questioning and destabilizing notions of human exceptionalism. The discussion of the key perspectives in environmental ethics documents the emergence of novel ways of thinking about the human and more-than-human world, exemplified by the work of Karen Barad, Stacy Alaimo, Jane Bennett, and Serpil Oppermann and Serenella Iovino.

In “Discourses of Human Disqualification,” Katarzyna Ojrzyńska discusses the portrayal of the first known victim of the Nazi programme of the extermination of people with disabilities in three contemporary texts: Robert De Feo and Vito Palumbo’s *Child K* (2014), Kristofer Blindheim Grønsgag’s *Kinder K* (2012), and Weronika Murek’s *Feinweinblein* (2015). While the 21<sup>st</sup>-century texts use various representational strategies of monsterization, sublimation, and normalization to depict the body of Gerhard Herbert Kretschmar, they all invisibilize the disabled body-mind and ultimately, as Ojrzyńska argues, fail to evoke “the positive aesthetic potential of alternative forms of embodiment labelled as disability.” The concluding discussion of the 2001 documentary *A World Without Bodies* points to a mode of representation that replaces strategies of exclusion and disqualification with what the Author proposes to call “aesthetics of human appreciation.”

Joanna Antoniak’s article continues the critique of dominant discourses and analyzes various kinds of exclusion in the poetry of the Hong Kong-born Chinese Canadian writer Grace Lau. Antoniak’s reading of selected poems from Lau’s debut collection, *The Language We Were Never Taught to Speak* (2021), focuses on the instances of exclusion experienced by the poet as a postcolonial subject, a queer subject, and a queer subject of colour and their influence on her identity. In the article, poetry becomes a mode of representation that allows the marginalized and excluded to tell their stories and those of their communities. By drawing attention to the processes of exclusion within the mainstream discourse of inclusion, Antoniak demonstrates how Lau’s poetry presents the possibility of inclusion through marginalization and the creation of a community through “the shared experiences of exclusion.”

The suppression of differences and the construction of norms through excluding others are the key concerns of Julian Rakowski’s analysis of colonial otherness in Andrzej Sapkowski’s “The Edge of the World” (1993). Situating Sapkowski’s short story in the broad context of colonial violence, race studies, and genre development, Rakowski analyzes the processes of othering, colonial exclusion and monsterization in the relations between humans and elves. Examining the distribution of otherness and monstrosity in Sapkowski’s work and the fantasy genre demonstrates that, as Rakowski claims, monsters “are born, but not out of mutation or magic: only by fear, hatred, and violence.”

Agata Rupińska’s article addresses the problems stemming from exclusionary beauty standards in her analysis of the influence of South Korean facial beauty norms and plastic surgery on women in Frances Cha’s *If I Had Your Face*. Approaching beauty as a specific discourse of exclusion and inclusion, Rupińska discusses the complex relationships between beauty work, aesthetic labour, and social capital and questions the perception of beauty as a source of freedom.

The final part of the anthology, “Health care and exclusion,” includes articles about the problems encountered by members of various disadvantaged and marginalized groups, such as parents of children with autism spectrum disorders, persons with disabilities and their caretakers, and people facing involuntary childlessness. By focusing on works that engage with issues of the body and illness, the texts highlight the role of literature, theatre, performance, and the visual arts in making the public conscious of and sensitive to medical problems (Bleakley, 2015, p. 41). Moreover, they fulfil the goals of medical humanities, which Alan Bleakley describes as the critical examination of “historically and culturally determined assumptions about the body and illness” in healthcare and medicine and the assessment of “how apprentice practitioners are socialized, gain and consolidate identities—or learn” (p. 43). Accordingly, Agnieszka Żabińska’s article examines the social exclusion of mothers of children with autism spectrum disorders and offers an analysis of increasingly popular biographies and autobiographies by the parents. These personal accounts, as Żabińska argues, may help raise public awareness about the problem and improve the situation. The text traces the development of the medical and social discourses that have contributed to the mothers’ stigmatization and their social and individual exclusion and concludes with the call to create an inclusive space for the children with ASD and their families.

Magdalena Grenda’s article explores the portrayal of illness, disability, and ageing in projects by Polish representatives of critical art and independent theatre from the late 20<sup>th</sup> century to the present. Grenda addresses the problem of exclusion of bodies deemed imperfect by consumer culture and demonstrates how art has subverted and opposed normative and discriminatory social practices. Her analysis of the works of Katarzyna Kozyra, Artur Żmijewski, and Alicja Żebrowska, performances directed by Janusz Orlik and Adam Ziajski, and the monodrama *The Whole Life in Tracksuits* (2016) is based on the belief that contemporary art not only provides a critical commentary on the ongoing exclusionary practices and raises public awareness but can also lead to action and inclusive change.

Anna Baruch’s study of the reasons for the social exclusion of infertile couples in Poland discusses the key factors influencing the marginalization of this group, including the discrediting opinions expressed in public discourse and the media, frequently turning into ideological disputes, lack of educational programmes, and the passive attitude of the state. The article argues for the elimination of educational exclusion and ideological bias, the creation of support networks for persons struggling with unintentional childlessness, and the development of state-funded programmes to deal with reproductive health problems.

The exclusion of disadvantaged groups and minorities in the healthcare system is intricately related to other kinds of exclusionary and discriminatory behaviours discussed in the anthology. Kosma Kołodziej’s article assesses the global

state of research about the situation of persons with a substance abuse disorder, seniors, people with HIV or AIDS, immigrants, refugees, and people from the LGBT community to argue that the lack of such studies in Poland makes it hard to promote and implement positive social inclusion in health care. Kołodziej's discussion demonstrates the persistence of inequalities in the healthcare system. Significantly, it highlights the need to guide healthcare professionals and managers on how to provide care to members of socially excluded groups.

The articles comprising the anthology have been written by participants of academic conferences organized from 2021 to 2024 by the Lab on Exclusion and Alienation Research (LEAR) at the Faculty of Philosophy and Social Sciences and the Faculty of Humanities at Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń, in cooperation with the NGO Institute for Prevention of Exclusions. The lab is a research project started in 2021, thanks to a grant from the IDUB Programme to support interdisciplinary research to identify and combat social exclusions. The texts gathered in this anthology edited by the lab members show that adopting such a perspective helps explore various forms and spaces of exclusion and study diverse practices and ways of thinking that produce inequalities but may also redress them. The articles examine theoretical and practical dimensions of exclusion: real-life contexts and experiences and conceptual systems—schemes, norms, and relations that generate and resist exclusionary discourses. Most importantly, they show how practices and discourses of exclusion and inclusion function “to *give face* and to *efface*” (Butler, 2009, p. 77).

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