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The People of the So-called New World and the Practice of Othering in Czech Written Sources of the 16th Century



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ABSTRACT

The article deals with the issue of representation and the practice of *othering* of the indigenous inhabitants of the Americas – the so-called Indians – in selected Czech written sources from the 16th century. Using the concept this/that/the other by literary historian John Barrell, it examines how the practices of *othering*, i.e., the production of signs of difference, are produced in analysed sources and identifies key discourses for their formation.

Applying the concept to concrete textual passages, the article explores its benefits as a tool in textual analysis. It enables to categorise different types of otherness, among which it identifies the interrelationships, and the way power is distributed. *Othering* is produced through discourses of civilization and barbarism, religious discourse, and the discourse of power. Textual discourses are based on existing European literary production, strongly dominated by Christian discourse and the resulting Eurocentric interpretation of the world. European ideas about society and its organization are also transmitted to the New World.

KEYWORDS: Czech lands, Czech literature, otherness, Native Americans, representations, 16th century

According to Michel Foucault, the 16th century period can be understood as a time when the way of thinking was dominated by the Renaissance episteme (by the word

episteme we mean the way of thinking and knowledge inherent to a particular time – see Foucault 2002b), which was based on the search for similarities (Foucault 2002, 27–29). The meanings of things were constructed through finding analogies between the microcosm and the macrocosm, or inside and outside. This, of course, was reflected in the ways in which the New World¹ was represented in literature.

The literary theorist Walter Mignolo states that the new lands represented not only a possible target for geographical expansion, but also a place where the whole of Christian society could expand (Mignolo 1995, 326). That includes the expansion of cultural ideas and concepts as well. In texts, e.g., early modern European gender roles, religious ideas, and ideas about the ideal society and its organization are transferred to the New World. Textual representations of indigenous societies – the so-called Indians² – in the analysed sources are therefore constructed within the framework of period discourses and draw on existing European textual production. At the same time, according to the literary historian Stephen Greenblatt, a common European identity began to emerge through the contacts of European travellers with the American other (Greenblatt 1992, 8–9; see also Dussel 1992).

The representations of overseas cultures and societies in travelogues were thus constructed, for instance, through late mediaeval fantastical discourses that appeared in notorious works rather than on eyewitness accounts.³ Moreover, many authors did not view the New World only through the lens of contemporary travel literature, but also, as art historians John Moffit and Santiago Sebastián point out, through the eyes of the ancient classics (Moffit and Sebastián 1996, 170), whose works were widely published in the Renaissance and therefore formed the backbone of almost all disciplines. So, it is likely that a certain part of the readership of travel books was also familiar with the works of ancient authors. However, the form of

¹ Terms like “New World” – and, by extension, the “Old World”, “overseas discoveries”, “pagans”, and “barbarians” – can only be understood as European constructs and projections that reflecting a Eurocentric perception of the world and Christian universalism. All these labels are the result of European efforts to categorise the world.

² I am aware that referring to the indigenous people of America by the term “Indian” is highly problematic. It is a European historical construct – like e.g., “New World”, mentioned above. In my paper, I consider the word to be a period designation derived from geographic affiliation and a mode of textual representation based on it.

³ In the lands of the Czech Crown, e.g., the *Travelogue of so-called Mandevilla*, first published in a Czech translation by Vavřinec of Březová, probably between 1369–1398 – see Šimek 1963; on the problem of dating see p. 199.

travelogues was not only influenced by existing literary production, whether contemporary or ancient. Indeed, travelogues often commented directly or indirectly on events in Europe at the time and sought analogies for European events in the newly “discovered” societies.

For the analysis of textual representations, I used the method of Foucauldian discourse analysis (see Foucault 2002a, Foucault 2006). I examined three notorious written sources relating to the New World that originated as translations in the Czech lands in the 16th century and were written in Czech. In the chronological order, these are Mikuláš Bakalář's *On the New Lands and the New World, concerning which we hitherto have had no knowledge nor have heard anything* (1506),⁴ a work created by combining several foreign sources (hereinafter referred to as *Writings on the New Lands*); *Cosmography of Bohemia: This is an account of the lay of the lands, or countries, and customs of the peoples of all the world, and of the history according to the number of years that have elapsed thereon, never before seen so together in any language* (1554)⁵ by Zikmund z Púchova, a title based on Sebastian Münster's *Cosmography* (hereafter referred to as *Cosmography*); and *History of a sailing to America, otherwise called Brasilia* (1590)⁶ by Matěj Slovák and Pavel Cyrus (hereafter referred to as *History*), a translation of a travelogue by the Calvinist pastor Jean de Léry.

All these texts can be collectively called travelogues since they tell of a journey from somewhere to elsewhere. They are also linked by the theme of first contacts with the American Other and could all be characterised as translations. It is important to remember, however, that in the early modern period, translation was not understood in the same way as it is today, and from today's perspective, many works-in-translation would probably be seen more as original works, or at least adaptations. Indeed, as cultural historian Peter Burke points out, the very act of translating into vernacular languages often already shifts the meaning of texts. Moreover, the author-translators themselves usually changed the content of the texts, shortening,

⁴ *Spis o nových zemích a o Novém světě – faksimile a výklad plzeňského tisku Mikuláše Bakaláře z roku 1506* (translated by the author).

⁵ *Kozmografia Czeská: To jest wyspánii o položenii krajín neb zemii y obyčejích národuow wsseho swiata a hystorii podlé počtu leth naněm zběhlých, prwé nikdá tak pospolku w žádném jazyku newidaná* (translated by the author).

⁶ *Historie o plavení se do Ameriky, kteráž i Brasilia slove* (translated by the author).

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rearranging, or adding their own commentaries or excerpts from other works. As a result, the resulting text-translation did not always resemble the original text (Burke and Hsia 2007, 26-30). And this is also how the text is treated in the three sources analysed.

Regarding the problem of translation, all citations from early modern Czech used in the article were translated by the author. This might cause some meaning shifts and inaccuracies.

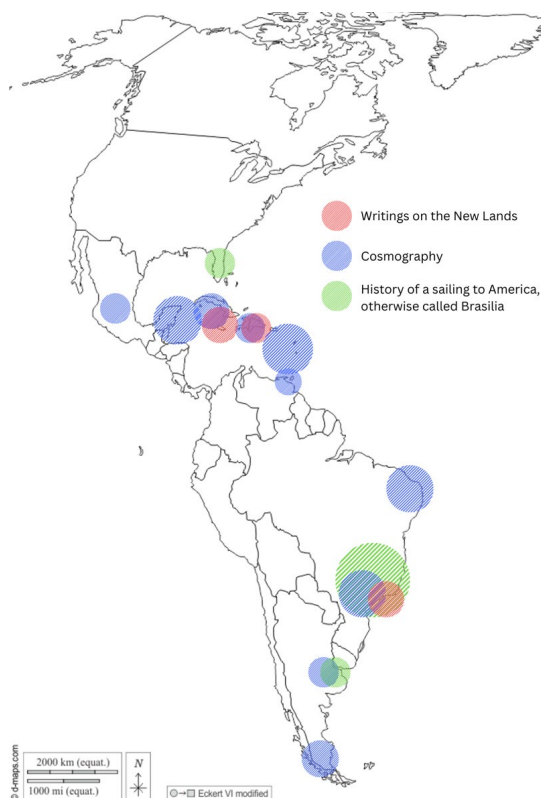


Figure 1: *Locations of peoples mentioned in the text*⁷

⁷ However, the geographical location and the name of the people are not always given in the text and cannot be precisely identified.

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The People of the So-called New World and the Practice of Othering in Czech Written Sources of the 16th Century**Table 1:** *The most common themes within which sources mention the peoples of the Americas⁸*

	Writings on the New Lands	Cosmography	History of a sailing to America, otherwise called Brasilia⁹
Habits, morals, and behaviour	Peoples of Brasilia, Peoples of the Caribbean	Peoples of the Caribbean, Peoples of Hispaniola, Peoples of Dominica, Peoples of Patagonia, Peoples of Trinidad, Peoples of Paria, Peoples of Yucatan, Peoples of Ah Canul, Peoples of Cozumel, Peoples of small islands off the coast of Central America, Peoples of Cempoala, Peoples of Nahua city states, Peoples of Tlaxcala, Peoples of Tenochtitlan	Tupinambas, Margaiates, Ouetaçates
Food and dining	Peoples of Brasilia, Peoples of the Caribbean	Peoples of the Caribbean, Peoples of Hispaniola, Peoples of Dominica, Peoples of small islands off the coast of Central America, Peoples of Tlaxcala, Peoples of Nahua city states, Peoples of Tenochtitlan	Tupinambas, Margaiates, Ouetaçates
Gender relations and differences	Peoples of Brasilia	Peoples of the Caribbean, Peoples of Dominica, Peoples of Yucatan, Peoples of small islands off the coast of Central America, Peoples of Nahua city states, Peoples of Tenochtitlan	Tupinambas, Margaiates

⁸ Sometimes it is difficult to determine which region the text is talking about. Also, in many cases, the text refers to multiple peoples or locations at once, and it is often not possible to determine which ones it is referring to specifically.

⁹ Although the text mentions other groups of people, it is mainly devoted to the Tupinambas, other groups are negligible.

Religion	Peoples of Brasilia, Peoples of the Caribbean	Peoples of Cozumel, Peoples of Cempoala, Peoples of Nahua city states, Peoples of Tenochtitlan	Tupinambas
Canibalism	Peoples of Brasilia	Peoples of Dominica, Peoples of Saint Croix, Peoples of Brasilia, Peoples of small islands off the coast of Central America, Peoples of Tlaxcala, Peoples of Nahua city states	Tupinambas
Appearance	Peoples of Brasilia	Peoples of the Caribbean, Peoples of Hispaniola, Peoples of Patagonia, Peoples of Yucatan, Peoples of Nahua city states, Peoples of Tenochtitlan	Tupinambas, Margaiaates, Ouetacates
Civilizing mission	Peoples of Brasilia, Peoples of the Caribbean	negligible	Tupinambas
Gold,wealth and its extraction	Peoples of Brasilia	Peoples of the Caribbean, Peoples of Hispaniola, Peoples of Dominica, Peoples of Paria, Peoples of today's Nueva Esparta, Peoples of today's Lesser Antilles(?), Peoples of Brasilia, Peoples of Yucatan, Peoples of Colhuacan, Peoples of small islands off the coast of Central America, Peoples of Tlaxcala, Peoples of Nahua city states, Peoples of Tenochtitlan	negligible

The Construction of Otherness: Same or different?

According to historian Lucie Storchová, “*the grasp of the foreign lies in its linguistic representation*” (Storchová 2005, 410). Textual representations understood in the constructivist sense as an encoding of cultural meaning (Hall 2003) thus serve as a

means of a practice called *othering*. *Othering* can be defined as the production of signs of socio-cultural difference. Through *othering*, the dominant group has the power to create knowledge about the “other” – in this case, Native Americans. However, are the people from overseas truly represented as Others, or are their textual constructions similar to those of Europeans?

Within the framework of the Renaissance episteme, we can identify an attempt to constantly liken seemingly alien cultures and phenomena to something already familiar in the analysed texts. When a mutual analogy is found between phenomena, the foreign is stripped of its strangeness, and its inclusion in the image of the Christian cosmology of the world takes place. As the *Cosmography* states, “the speech of Solomon stands true, who says that there is nothing new under the sun.” (Z Púchova 1554, f. 116r).

Searching for similarities: The practices of ritual violation of the integrity of one's own body and cannibalism

In particular, the Czech translation of the *Cosmography* provides us with many parallels between the religious rituals of indigenous peoples and the religious practices of other cultures that were probably familiar to European readers at that time, i.e., cultures already known from earlier European literary tradition¹⁰ - either ancient cultures such as those understood as cultures of the European past, like Rome, Carthage or Greece, or non-Christian cultures such as Turkey. The numerous comparisons emphasise that inhabitants of the so-called New World are similar to something already known. Thus, although they are becoming objects of textual othering practice, they are not constructed as radically different – they do not transgress completely the order of the known world. Native Americans are coded as different from Europeans, but also somehow familiar to them or to the cultures they are familiar with.

The textual parallels between Europe's pagan past and New World societies consist mostly of describing practices of cannibalism and other bloody religious rituals, both consensual and non-consensual. According to the *Cosmography*, cannibalism is a

¹⁰ Chapters XXVII-XXIX, included in the Czech translation. They were probably written by Zikmund z Púchova by himself.

practice spread across the whole world and “in many places human flesh is eaten.” (Z Púchova 1554, f. 116v). So are rituals violating the integrity of one's own body during various bodily modifications (piercings, artificial body deformations, etc.) and the sacrifice of one's own blood or human sacrifice.

Thus, for the human sacrifice, which was most encountered in urban Mesoamerican civilizations, (Z Púchova 1554, f. 108r; 106r; 107v) the *Cosmography* finds parallels, e.g., in Tertullian, who describes the sacrifice of girls to Saturn in Africa during Tiberius' reign (Z Púchova 1554, f. 116v). The *Cosmography* also mentions ancient cultures practising mutual blood covenants and drinking blood, as well as those that sacrificed their blood to the gods, as the Mesoamerican “Kolwakanya”¹¹ do (Z Púchova 1554, f. 107v). The practice of the ritual violation of one's own body is also attributed to Old Testament pagans who “oftentimes scratched themselves and cut their faces” in blood. According to the *Cosmography*, “self-torment” continues to be “held in high esteem” among the Turks as well (Z Púchova 1554, f. 116v).

The parallels, however, are not found in pagan societies only. In the context of the ritual violation of bodily integrity, the text also mentions the habit of flogging, a custom that “persists to this day” in Italy (Z Púchova 1554, f. 116v). European religious practices of the time, such as flagellantism or even fasting into a faint, considerably resemble the described pagan rituals. After all, let us not forget that Christianity did not shy away from other bloody rituals either – e.g., the religious practice of scarification was present in it. Scars and other stigmata were evidence of a divine miracle, of the wearer's faith, or a memento of the wounds suffered in the Crusades in defence of the faith (Mackendrick 2010). Christ's scars could also be symbolically transferred to his faithful followers. As religious historian Kathryn Dickason notes, the scars thus covered the body with cultural marks that could be read (Dickason 2021).

But the acceptance of these body practices applied exclusively to scars, perceived as evidence of belief in the Christian god. Familiarity with the other above-mentioned phenomena thus does not imply approval – all such ‘pagan’ rituals are roundly condemned in the text. The *Cosmography* explicitly notes that such bloody practices are “forbidden by Christ the Lord [...]” (Z Púchova 1554, f. 116v).

¹¹ Probably Cōlhuacān.

While the parallels in all the texts examined emphasise the non-Christian nature of the populations of the “new lands,” (Bakalář 1981, f. A1r, 5) they also incorporate it into the picture of the known world. And thus, they give their practises meaning in the context of general Christian history. Indeed, the universality of Christian cosmology is emphasized even by the *Cosmography* with the following statement: “God is good to all peoples [...] among all peoples he is gracious, even among those who fear him” (Z Púchova 1554, f. 117v). A similar expression of Christian universalism and the desire to incorporate all human communities into the one Church of Christ can be found in the *Writings on the New Lands*, where new discoveries are seen, among other things, as a reason to rejoice “in so great a multiplication of Christians” (Bakalář 1981, f. B4v, 13).

In search of parallels with New World societies, the *History* looks not only to ancient Europeans and pagans, but also to examples from early modern Europe. Against the backdrop of contemporary European events, the text even relativizes cannibalistic practices, for example by comparing them to the violence committed by European Christians against each other during the European wars of religion. Right at the beginning of the book, the Czech dedication states: “It is a terrible thing to kill people, to roast and eat human flesh [...] but is it a less terrible thing to torment the religious and miserable, to torture and torment them, to afflict the poor and needy orphans and widows, and to extort their hard-won bread almost out of their hands?” (Cyrus and Slovák 1957, 54). We find similar comparisons elsewhere in the text, where, e.g., the practice of usury is directly related to the “sucking of brains and blood” or eating people alive (Cyrus and Slovák 1957, 234). In other words, practises may have been associated with certain marginalised groups in mediaeval Europe, such as Jews as moneylenders or witches as murderers of newborn babies (Hsia 1988; Roper 1994, 138).

Such statements underscore the moralising tone of the *History*, based on the rejection of bloody religious disputes among Christians and criticism of injustice, violence, and crimes in the whole society. The textual metaphor of the cannibal – man-eater is thus used as a tool of pillory of European sinners. The following excerpt from the Czech dedication points particularly at the Czech ones: “Oh how many such man-eaters [...] has this our Europa, but what about Europe, even our own land, the Czech land!” (Cyrus and Slovák 1957, 54). The mutual enmity between European Christians is recalled throughout the text. According to the *History*, Christians commit greater atrocities against themselves and their bodies than the Brazilian cannibals – e.g., during the St. Bartholomew’s Day massacre, remembered in the text by Léry

(Cyrus and Slovák 1957, 239). To some extent, statements criticising the behaviour of the European population can be understood as idealising the otherness of the people of the New World.

The text, however, does not use the figure of the cannibal – man-eater merely as a metaphor. For example, it mentions the consumption of humans during the siege of Sancerre (Cyrus and Slovák 1957, 350) or the cannibalistic “atrocities” recorded during the revolt against the Roman emperor Trajan (Cyrus and Slovák 1957, 221). The literary trope of the cannibal-man-eater is thus a familiar stereotype used to delineate against Others, against their conduct, and to dehumanise them. This is also how this mode of representation is used in connection with non-European non-Christian societies.

The text for instance, speaks of the cruelty of “bloodthirsty” Turks and Muslims in general. Their cruelty is considered “crueller” than the “American” one (Cyrus and Slovák 1957, 229–234). Yet the *History* stresses that the “cruelty of Machomet” – that is, the “tyrannical” Turkish emperor (Cyrus and Slovák 1957, 229) – is nothing compared to the events of the European Wars of Religion, and especially the events of the St. Bartholomew’s Day massacre in France (Cyrus and Slovák 1957, 236). According to the written source, cannibalistic practises often occurred during religiously motivated violence; for example, “some Italians cut a little boy in two and ate the liver out of him” for religious reasons (Cyrus and Slovák 1957, 237), or that Frenchmen sold human lard in the market “like other tallow.” The text states that the behaviour of the French during the incriminated religious conflicts was significantly worse than other “cruel” acts of the Turks and “Americans” (Cyrus and Slovák 1957, 241–2).

So, I can say that the practice of othering in the analysed texts does not only involve so-called Indians but also some Christians and members of other non-European societies. It’s especially the Turks who are frequently constructed as the non-European Others, which is evident from their depictions in the *Cosmography* and the *History*. The Turks as “rabid dogs” (Cyrus and Slovák 1957, 231) and “beasts” (Cyrus and Slovák 1957, 230) are animalized and dehumanised here. They are described as “cruellers [...] than the Brasil man-eaters” (Cyrus and Slovák 1957, 234) because of the violence they commit. Representations of the Turks as cruel, barbaric, and bloodthirsty people are also associated with the conquest of Constantinople, “at the capture of which everything was filled with blood, horror, and death [...]” (Cyrus and Slovák 1957, 229). The textual representations of the Turks are coded as the

menace of Christianity - though no more than European religious conflicts (Cyrus and Slovák 1957, 236).

This corresponds to the fact that the Turks are also constructed as European Others in many early modern texts and travelogues. As literary scholar Elizabeth Spiller points out, their textual representations as barbarians and violent infidels are related to the conquest of Constantinople (Spiller 2011, 41–79). The described characteristics thus highlight primarily their warlike nature, as seen in the analysed sources. However, the Turks were not always constructed in a mode which we could call military masculinity. According to historian Anna Suranyi, the Turks in early modern sources were often depicted as ephemeral and having very loose sexual morality (Suranyi 2009). As a result, they did not generally represent the ideal of masculinity as defined by the European construct of masculinity at the time.

This/that/the other

The practice of making American Indians look more familiar to Renaissance Europeans, a practice that appears throughout all the analysed sources, is complemented by the practice of othering. The practice is dependent on multiple textual discourses. I have used the lesser-known concept of this/that/the other by literary historian John Barrell to identify significant discourses and to better understand the ways in which otherness is constructed and represented in the analysed texts, and how it can be categorized (Barrell 1991).¹²

The othering as a process of creating the imagination of otherness is often explained through the binary model of self and the other. Such an interpretative model allows us to classify textual representations and concepts depending on whether a concept belongs to a certain category or not. However, as Barrell points out, this model can be unsuitable and oversimplifying for many textual resources. Indeed, the effort to interpret texts by using strictly dichotomous models often fails to capture the complexity of relations between statements and discourses therein, for it necessitates that the terms self and the other always remain in opposition (Barrell 1991, 8–10).

¹² Barrell uses the concept in the context of the 19th century British imperial policy. Nevertheless, I believe that it is worth a try to explore whether or how it's applicable to other territories and time.

Inspired by literary and postcolonial theorist Gayatri Spivak's conceptions of the self-consolidating other and the absolute other (Spivak 1985),¹³ Barrell proposes to extend the terms of self and the other by a third term stage situated somewhere between them, which he calls that, resulting in the triad of this/that/the other (hereafter also t/t/t). Barrell's model of t/t/t explains how the textual othering functions and, thus, how the otherness is constructed. Categories of this and that, although somehow different are at the same time in many ways alike (Barrell 1991, 10). On the contrary, the category of the other is entirely dissimilar from the remaining ones. Let us see how the concept works in textual representations of overseas societies.

This has the power to produce knowledge about others and to othering them. It represents the position from which the text is written. In the analysed sources, the category is thus embodied by Europeans. That is in a subordinate position in relation to this. Hence, indigenous societies that have already been conquered or in other ways subjugated, Europeanized, or societies that do not pose a threat to Europeans, are often represented as that in the sources. The texts frequently represent the act of subduing as being accompanied or followed by the act of imposing European culture. The category of that also consists of societies that were similar to Europeans even before their first contact. The mutual resemblance between their textual representations can be seen in the relation to societies coded as the other. The other is situated in a subordinate position to both this and that and it is constructed as their complete opposition. The other represents a significant disruption and transgression of the ideal social order – the order as constructed by the then-European discourses – and a direct threat to Europeans in the analysed texts. According to Barrell, members of the category of the other often act as enemies of both this and that as well (Barrell 1991, 163).

Thus, in relation to European society, indigenous societies can be represented in different power roles within different discourses. That is decisive for the construction of a specific type of colonial relations. In the analysed texts, I have identified three

¹³ Spivak uses these terms in the context of othering and the British colonial administration in India in the 19th century. She is referring to the process by which the other and the alien – *the absolute other* – become a pacified and subjugated other – a *self-consolidating other* that accepts the hegemonic discourse and power position of the colonizers and their power to produce knowledge about others. The member of the category of the *self-consolidating other* thus accedes to the subordinate position in which he or she is placed in the epistemic framework of the colonisers. See Spivak 1985.

basic discourses that structure otherness - discourse of civilisation, religion, and power. These three discourses can also be called categories of textual difference. Differences between societies and cultures are produced right through the trio of these discourses, which therefore serve as a tool of othering practices.

For each of the discourses, the main rules of their formation can be identified. Using the discourse of civilization, the different societies in the texts are compared mainly based on material conditions, i.e., the way of life, knowledge of technology, the level of urbanization, and the type of economy. Religious discourse constructs differences through different religious concepts about the world and its cosmologies, but also through distinct forms of religious organization. The production of difference within power discourse occurs through the distribution of power relations between societies – better said, through how Europeans relate to other peoples in texts.

Civilizational discourse

The textual representations of New World societies are constructed as either civilised or barbaric.¹⁴ These constructs reflect ideas about the European ideal of a developed society at that time. The ideal also serves as the measure by which Indian societies are classified in the analysed texts. As the linguist Sara Mills points out, discourses of civilization and barbarism are one of the frequent means of othering through European history (Mills 2005, 98–100).¹⁵

Although the analysed texts do not use words such as barbarian or civilisation¹⁶ very often, we frequently encounter discourses that draw directly on the dichotomous concept of civilisation and barbarism and use its mode of cultural coding. Such a binary understanding of cultures comes to the fore, especially when comparing, from

¹⁴ For an early modern understanding of these concepts, see, for example, Rubiés 2011, 329; Jones 2009, 356 and 358–364.

¹⁵ Regarding the current state of research in the Czech Republic, the construction of representations of Indians through binary oppositions of civilization and barbarism is also the subject of a study by historian Monika Brenišínová, who analysed murals in Ixmiquilpan, Mexico. See Brenišínová 2019.

¹⁶ In fact, unlike the concept of barbarism, the term "civilization" as currently understood was unknown in early modern Europe. If we look, for example, at 16th-century Spanish sources on non-European cultures, the Spaniards used the term *policía* instead to describe the way of life and the way of government in a particular society. The term *policía* was associated with urban life – polis – see, e.g. Hinz 2008.

the European point of view, less developed (barbaric) societies, which across all texts are usually found on islands, and urban (civilised) societies.¹⁷

European society, with which all the authors of the analysed texts identify themselves in certain passages, is primarily understood as civilised in the texts. European society is constructed as highly functionally differentiated, technologically advanced, urbanized, and isolated from nature. Separating oneself from nature is represented as allowing for the efficient exploitation of natural resources, which barbarian societies, by contrast, are incapable of, and plays an important role in the early modern conceptualisation of humanity. Unlike barbarians, civilised people are thus able to control and effectively exploit their surroundings – their space. That is, to cultivate the land, and to permanently settle it and build cities on it; to extract available resources from it by using advanced technologies; and to protect it from their enemies. But equally important for the evaluation of a society is the level of culture and respect for the natural laws of God.

Focusing on the textual representations of barbarian societies, they are often located on islands or non-urban places. Barbaric peoples, such as the Tupinambas in the *History* or various islanders in the *Writings on the New Lands* and the *Cosmography*, are characterised mainly by their unsettled way of life (Z Púchova 1554, f. 102r) and living in very flimsy dwellings, which, for example, “have no doors” (Cyrus and Slovák 1957, 211). Sometimes they have no dwellings at all, and “cover themselves from the heat with large and broad leaves,” as on the nameless island mentioned in the *Cosmography*, “where the people were abominable” (Z Púchova 1554, f. 103r). Inadequate dwelling can thus become a means of textual dehumanization. For the most part, the islanders embody the exact opposition to civilization - they do not build larger settlements, they do not know trade (Z Púchova 1554, f. 102r; Bakalář 1981, f. A4v, 9), letters (Cyrus and Slovák 1957, 248), art (Cyrus and Slovák 1957, 249), advanced technology, or clothing as one of the basic elements of culture, and some of them go naked even to battles and “do not cover their bodies with anything” (Bakalář 1981, f. B1r, 9).

In this context, I think it is important to recall that the concept of civilisation can also be applied to the understanding of human corporeality. As pointed out by Storchová,

¹⁷ For more about the differences between barbaric and civilised societies, see Pagden 1986, 74 and 92.

the measures of social maturity in early modern Europe were the way the body was covered. The wild nudity stands in stark contrast to the civilised, clothed European body. According to Storchová, the naked, uncivilised body becomes a means of sexualization (Storchová 2005, 440).

As portrayed in the texts, the non-urban peoples of America lack complex social administration and laws (Bakalář 1981, f. A4v, 9), they do not have rulers (Bakalář 1981, f. A4r, 8) nor “costly and splendid palace built up” (Cyrus and Slovák 1957, 283). Their ability to exploit natural resources and reshape the space around them is limited, as is their knowledge of the technologies and tools that texts consider advanced. To some extent, they are represented as societies not yet separated from nature, which they themselves are unable to control. Sources, however, describe how their backward technological level is often increased with the arrival of Europeans, who bring, e.g., weapons such as rifles (Cyrus and Slovák 1957, 209) or working tools like axes (Cyrus and Slovák 1957, 285) to the local people.

By the logic of early modern civilizational discourse, knowledge of more advanced practices and technologies allowed for a division of labour, which was also associated with greater social stratification. In the representations of barbaric societies, however, the descriptions of more complex social hierarchies are almost absent. The stratification of society and the division of labour allowed, for example, the development of specialised crafts, organised religion, and culture. According to period understanding, the concept of culture consisted, e.g., of recording events, the existence of art, and, above all, knowledge of writing and books. As Storchová points out, written culture also played an important role in the construction of otherness, with the letter-using us on one hand and the oral them on the other (Storchová 2005, 413). Indeed, the importance of writing is also made clear in one of the texts analysed, which considers it not only as a sign of civilised society but also as a means of dominating oral cultures. According to the *History*, “writing is a boon from the lord of God [...] to us in Europe, in Africa, and in Asia, dwelling above the foolish people who dwell in the fourth part of the world” (Cyrus and Slovák 1957, 249). Writing also figures here as a sign of intelligence, a means of knowing and describing the world around us, and of recording one’s own history. Above all, however, it is the mark by which the inhabitants of the Old World distinguish themselves from the inhabitants of the New one. The image of an advanced and civilised society is also

completed by the knowledge of the liberal arts,¹⁸ “which we learn from books” and “which are totally unknown to those savage people (meaning Tupinambas)” (Cyrus and Slovák 1957, 249).

Civilised societies are encountered exclusively in the *Cosmography*, within the representations of Mesoamerican urban societies. The way urban societies live differ fundamentally from barbarian societies, including where they live, how they dress, and how they organise their societies. They are mostly encountered on the mainland, but this is not necessarily the rule. Their main characteristic is life in the cities, which are described as centres of cultural life (Z Púchova 1554, f. 109r), trade (Z Púchova 1554, f. 110v) and organised religion, the centre of which is the temple, a building “beautifully decorated with fine work and masterly painting,” like in Tenochtitlan (Z Púchova 1554, f. 111r). In the towns we find several specialised places and buildings, such as various shops, workshops, religious buildings, inns and lodging houses, and taverns, “where the local people gather to drink” (Z Púchova 1554, f. 110v).

Thanks to a well-developed network of services and a market in which the population can easily acquire everyday necessities, “no one in the city crafts for himself,” i.e., does not have to make them him or herself. People can therefore engage in various specialised professions - for example, goldsmithing, painting, (Z Púchova 1554, f. 111v) or medicine – in Tenochtitlan, even “proper apothecaries” can be found where one can buy “herbs and species for human health” (Z Púchova 1554, f. 110v). The profession’s heterogeneity leads to a greater hierarchisation of society and a division of labour. There is a ruling class, a working class, and one that is solely concerned with the administration of the cult. There are more marked differences in property and power.

Some urban societies, according to the text, have letters (Z Púchova 1554, f. 107v) and laws by which “the mayors administer the cities, punish criminals, and pardon none,” (Z Púchova 1554, f. 109r) and thus have an advanced land administration. More efficient land administration and the use of natural resources are made possible by their level of technological advancement and knowledge of science. Their form of economy is also much more advanced than that of societies constructed as barbaric. Urban people can transform the landscape around them

¹⁸ The *septem artes liberales* is the sum of general education at that time.

and make good use of it, as for example in Tlaxcala, “where there are no barren hills or valleys [...] but everything is planted and sown as it should be” (Z Púchova 1554, f. 109r). What distinguishes them from European civilisation is their ignorance of Christianity and the practice of cannibalism and human sacrifice, as is often pointed out in the descriptions of barbarian societies as well.

The populations of urban societies, thus, may have been perceived by Europeans as pagan and faithless, but this did not necessarily make them barbarians in the eyes of their European contemporaries. They are even compared to some European cities and regions (such as Venice, Genoa, or Switzerland) in their type of urban establishment (Z Púchova 1554, f. 109r).

Compared to Europeans, they are constructed as having somewhat less developed technology, and the manifestations of their culture are often considered imperfect, odd, or simply different – for example, they have “strange writing” and write “books [...] on strange paper” (Z Púchova 1554, f. 107v). They are therefore not the same, but their textual representations are in many ways like those of Europeans, who are always portrayed as the most advanced. The practices of Mesoamerican religions involving bloody rituals, sacrifices, and cannibalism may have seemed shocking and, in some ways, barbaric to Europeans. In the texts, however, they were able to identify with Mesoamerican urban dwellers somewhat more than with the so-called barbaric islanders, who knew no trade, no letters, and often no agriculture. In civilizational discourse, these urban societies thus represent that.

We can therefore observe a distinct difference between the textual representations of indigenous peoples constructed as advanced empires such as the Aztecs, Incas, or the populations of smaller Maya city-states, and, conversely, the representations of people living outside of cities and so-called societies without laws and governing. That is, people living outside of civilization. In the *Cosmography*, barbarian societies are in this way othered not only in relation to Europeans or even some “Old World” societies mentioned in the text, but also to Mesoamerican urban civilizations. The barbaric societies of the New World represent the other, something that is truly different. This is also apparent in textual representations in the *History* and the *Writings on the New Lands*. In the texts, however, civilised urban societies are completely lacking, and all indigenous peoples concerned are constructed as barbaric.

This can also be examined through representations of social hierarchies within these populations. The example of the *Cosmography* shows that the structure of urban

societies depicted is in many ways like the European model of the three estates,¹⁹ or, better said, the textual representation of social structure is coded as such. The text distinguishes between the estate of the clergy-priests (*oratores*), the ruler-warriors (*bellatores*), and the rest of society (*laborantes*), which includes merchants, craftsmen (such as painters, goldsmiths, or stonemasons), and farmers (Z Púchova 1554, f. 111v). Thus, it is mainly manual labourers on whom the first two estates are dependent for their livelihood. At the top of the imaginary social pyramid is the prince or king, who has, e.g., his court, personal guard, and many servants, such as Tlatoani of the Aztec empire, Moctezuma, residing in Tenochtitlan and having 300 people “who bring food” (Z Púchova 1554, f. 112r). Other members of the nobility who are subordinate to the prince-ruler also have their own guards and servants.

But the social distinctions constructed in the text are not only based on the share of power, but also on the amount of wealth. In fact, unlike in barbarian societies where property differences are minimal – if any – there are both rich and poor people living in cities, who, for example, in the city of Chorultekal, together with the sick, beg “before their temples,” just as European beggars and beggars “before our churches” (Z Púchova 1554, f. 109r).

The organisation of barbarian societies is usually described as non-hierarchical and without property distinctions, and their textual representations do not usually resemble the European doctrine of the three estates. These populations have no kings, no lords, no laws – “every man is his own master” (Bakalář 1981, f. A4r, 8). Texts often make no mention of priests or other people in charge of the administration of the cult, nor of any form of organised religion – often there is no person present at all who is solely in charge of religious ceremonies. Similarly, there are no buildings dedicated exclusively to religious practice, thus, they have “no churches” or any religious law, such as in the *Writings on the New Lands* (Bakalář 1981, f. A4r, 9).

If the first two estates are not present in barbarian societies, there cannot be *laborantes*. Their existence as a category is conditional on the existence of the other two estates to which they are subjected. Among the barbarians, the provision of livelihood is usually the responsibility of all people, both men and women. Since members of barbarian societies across the texts analysed are often portrayed as

¹⁹ For the concept of three estates in general, see e.g., Iwańczak 2011:44–5, Dane 198:283–309.

unfamiliar with merchantry and the division of labour, they are constructed as relatively autarkic in terms of obtaining food, making tools and everyday items. Everything they need, they usually produce themselves.

Living without laws, nevertheless, can also serve as a tool of admiration, as can be seen in the *History*. Although the texts often explicitly speak of the difference between barbarian societies and the ideal European model, a system of three estates is sometimes projected into the textual representations of barbarian societies. Like other barbarian societies in the analysed texts, the Tupinambas have no princes, kings, or other rulers or laws, and are described as being all equal. According to the text, they are guided in their social organisation by “natural light” (Cyrus and Slovák 1957, 281). Rather than praising the Tupinambas, this statement can be understood to shame those Europeans who have “all good orders erected and rights divine and human established,” (Cyrus and Slovák 1957, 281) but do not follow them.

Religious discourse

In all the analysed texts, religion receives considerable attention and acts as a social structure that creates differences between societies. A basic distinction can, of course, be made between Christian and non-Christian societies, which are then called pagan. The representatives of Christian society are solely Europeans. However, the non-Christian – pagan societies of the New World do not form a homogeneous mass, some of them are already partly evangelized, others have quite complex structure of their own religious ideas and practise organised religion, while others are represented as living completely without faith.

So, first we have a category of societies where evangelization is underway or has already partially taken place. The societies to which the Europeans in the texts betray “from their nonsensical faith to our Christian faith” (Z Púchova 1554, f. 107r). Cultures that choose to embrace Scripture - or have Scripture forcibly imposed upon them – are Europeanized through religion. As a result of evangelization, they cease to be godless the other, and become that. With the adoption of religion – whether willingly or unwillingly – societies often adopt other features of European civilization, both cultural (Z Púchova 1554, f. 105r), and material, such as clothing (Bakalář 1981, f. B2v, 11). In texts, they are understood as a kind of semi-Christians or second-class

Christians whose religious practice still lacks something. This is true regardless of how sincere their efforts to adopt the faith are.

Some cultures are portrayed as explicitly evangelization-requiring. These are, for example, the men and women of “Potanecyanuom”²⁰ of the *Cosmography*, who “gladly accepted the faith gratefully from us,” (Z Púchova 1554, f. 107v) or the islanders in the *Writing on the New Lands* writings who “asked to receive Holy Baptism” (Bakalář 1981, f. B3r, 12). On these examples, it can be well seen that textual coding of otherness through religious discourse is not permanent. And so, in the realms of religious discourse, barbaric societies first constructed as the other can become that by embracing Christianity.

Otherness can also be produced through the way of religious organisation and its similarity or difference to the European Christian model. In this case, urban societies, albeit non-Christian, represent that since their religious organisation is kind of like the European church structure. In textual constructions of Mesoamerican cities, there are cultural places dedicated exclusively to the exercise of worship - in the *Cosmography* referred to as temples, with temple schools operating alongside them (Z Púchova 1554, f. 107v). There is also a special group of inhabitants in charge of the administration of the cult - the priests. Moreover, in the textual discourses, the complex religious structure is a sign of the cultural maturity and intelligence of urban dwellers (Z Púchova 1554, f. 109r). Thus, though a great number of urban societies are represented as pagan, the structure of religion and the complexity of religious ideas make them a bit like Europeans.

Although the *Cosmography* does not endorse their beliefs, it does recognise them as a form of religion, albeit a little bit “weird” one (Z Púchova 1554, f. 111r). After all, it can be compared to something already known. As mentioned above, the text describes many analogies between the religious practices of the Old World's pagan societies and the pagan societies of the New one, including the consumption of human flesh or human sacrifice.

We do not encounter a more organised and complex religion in textual representations of barbarian societies. Moreover, the barbarian societies that have

²⁰ I was unable to identify the city of *Potanecyanuom*.

not yet been even partially Christianized, the texts do not identify the presence of any ideas that would be identified as manifestations of religion at all.

The representatives of one such society are the Tupinambas in the *History*. The “wicked Americans” are said to have the most “hearts turned away from God” (Cyrus and Slovák 1957, 251) of all the “nations” of the world, unable to even grasp the concept of God and thinking instead that “he must be a villain” (Cyrus and Slovák 1957, 251). Generally, all the analysed texts interpret religion as one of the most important expressions of human culture that humanises it. For example, in the *History*, life without religion is compared to the life of “unreasonable beasts” (Cyrus and Slovák 1957, 251). This statement is complemented by Cicero's paraphrase, “there are neither so untamed nor so savage people, who, though they know not what god they trust in, do not believe that at least they are bound to worship one” (Cyrus and Slovák 1957, 248). According to the *History*, this is not true of the Tupinambas, however, since they do not worship any gods. They are thus textually coded as a kind of anomaly, which is even not supposed to exist, as faithless the other.

The absence of religion and the inability to understand certain religious ideas is associated with low intelligence and becomes a means of animalization and dehumanization. Non-Christian societies are usually judged worse if they are already familiar with the Christian religion but refuse to embrace it, or, for worse, even ridicule it – like the Tupinambas (Cyrus and Slovák 1957, 220). This reluctance is explained precisely by their stupidity, i.e., their lack of reason.

Power discourse

The practice of othering is also carried out through the distribution of power relations. Otherness is shaped by mutual hostilities, alliances, and other relations between different ethnicities and cultures. In the texts, power discourse is largely determined by how Europeans relate to local American societies. Sometimes, however, it is also formed by representations of relationships between Europeans themselves – both in Europe and America. In relation to Europeans, American societies may be represented as already colonized, conquered, and pacified, allied, hostile, etc. The typology of otherness in power discourse is determined by the degree of power that Europeans can exert over particular societies. In the text, the foreign – the other – embodies a fundamental threat because Europeans cannot control it. The other, hence, represents a possible threat to the hegemonic position of the Europeans.

Through subjugating, ethnicities cease to be represented as potentially dangerous. After being conquered by the Europeans, they do not become part of European society, but they cease to be alien. Because they become power-dependent on Europeans, they are forced to accept their authority, and a European image of the world is imposed on them. Also, the allied ethnic groups, whether the Tupinambas in the *History* or the Tlaxcaltecs in the *Cosmography*, who “saw the Europeans gladly, hoping to stand by them against the tyrant Zima,” (Z Púchova 1554, f. 109r) (meaning the Aztec ruler Moctezuma) - as well as some other Mesoamerican peoples, do not represent a source of threat to the Europeans in the texts. By forming alliances, they can at the same time stand together with Europeans against another group, a common enemy that is thus being othered. The societies collaborating with the Europeans thus represent that – whether voluntarily, such as the inhabitants of “Cempoala” who, like Tlaxcaltecs, join Cortés “to retaliate against the tyrant of Zima,” (Z Púchova 1554, f. 108r) or involuntarily. Taking as an example, the “Churultekals”²¹ whose city the Europeans and their Indian allies “after five hours took control of” and whose nobility, because of their defeat, were then compelled to collaborate with the Europeans (Z Púchova 1554, f. 109r).

Thus, the danger for this – Europeans and that, whether European allies or dominated ethnic groups, is posed by societies that Europeans do not yet control or are in a state of war with. In the *History*, this primarily refers to the Margaiates – the Europeans' enemies and the Tupinambas' “archenemies” (Cyrus and Slovák 1957, 204). Regarding the *Cosmography*, those are the inhabitants of Tenochtitlan, against whom the Europeans are fighting together with some Mesoamerican city states. E.g., the already mentioned Tlaxcaltecs and the inhabitants of Cempoala,²² who “waged constantly war with the king of Mount Zima (a name confusion derived from Latin mons = mountain and Czech zima = winter)” (Z Púchova 1554, f. 108r).

The members of the urban civilizations represented as the other – that is, especially the inhabitants of Tenochtitlan, with the ruler Moctezuma at their head, are generally described as the more cunning and deceitful ones compared to the inhabitants of other Mesoamerican cities (Z Púchova 1554, f. 108v). Also, members of hostile barbarian societies are characterised as more treacherous (Cyrus and Slovák 1957,

²¹ Today's Cholula.

²² Also known as Zempoala.

94), devilish, and savage compared to other barbarians (Cyrus and Slovák 1957, 93). Thus, societies represented as the other are generally associated with adjectives that directly imply their evil nature and potential dangerousness. The Margaiates are called “robber peoples,” (Cyrus and Slovák 1957, 206) the Ouetacates, also a Brazilian ethnic group, are referred to as barbarians even by the Tupinamba themselves (Cyrus and Slovák 1957, 312). The reverse is also true. Ethnic groups who are friendly or already subjugated are usually portrayed in a rather positive and moderate way. The Tlaxcaltecs, for example, are “very reasonable people” (Z Púchova 1554, f. 109r); the inhabitants of *Kolwakanya*, who are friendly and welcoming to Europeans, are described as people of good and peaceful manners, for whom “murder is a strange and terrible thing in their eyes” (Z Púchova 1554, f. 106v).

Conclusion

In this article, I have presented how textual representations of Indian societies are constituted in the context of early modern discourses, and how the indigenous peoples of America are otherized. As shown in the textual analysis, the authors of the given sources look not only for signs of mutual difference, but also for mutual similarities. Finding them mainly through parallels in history, they compare American Indian societies and their customs to past or present societies of the Old World. Such analogies include, e.g., cannibalistic practices and the violation of the integrity of one's own body.

Christian universalism also helps to find similarities between human societies as well. Nothing is new in a world where everything stems from a single god and is foreshadowed in the Bible. Everything belongs to the one single cosmology of the world. Given that all human societies can be traced back to Noah's sons, all societies were part of a single world history based on the Scripture. Textual otherness is thus constructed primarily through the attempt to apply one's own cultural concepts and cultural codes in a universalistic way.

Hence, although the so-called new lands are constructed as being different, the numerous comparisons to the things previously known make them something familiar – different but nevertheless similar in many ways. After all, we must not forget that the world of Renaissance knowledge was a world full of mutual similarities and analogies. Nothing could, therefore, be so diametrically different that it did not at the same time resemble something else. The other, too, was therefore inherently familiar

since its essential characteristics were manifested in already familiar entities and phenomena. All discourses were thus applicable quite universally, or better said, globally. The resulting unity and universality of discourse made it possible, once similarities were found, to write equally informedly about the next village and the distant islands.

I have used John Barell's concept of this/that/the other to explain how the othering practice of indigenous societies functioned in the analysed textual sources. I applied the t/t/t formula to the three basic discourses that help to construct and structure otherness – discourses of civilization, religion, and power – within which I identified different types of alterities and the kinds of power relations between them.

The classification of societies through the t/t/t concept is both locally and temporally variable and is strongly influenced by textual context. Thus, the way in which t/t/t categories are constructed is always dependent on the one major discourse of which the categorised representations are part. This, as the hegemonic discourse with which the textual speaker identifies, is always represented by Europeans. American societies can act in different roles in relation to the European ones within discourses. This is, *inter alia*, conditioned by the various ways of forming power relations during the conquest of America and the early phase of its colonization.

The population of the New World may be likened to the population of Christian Europe within certain discourses, while its otherness is emphasised within others. It is evident, then, within each discourse – that is, discourses of civilization, religion, and power – the same societies are invoked in different ways, and the categories of that and the other may not overlap across textual discourses. At the same time, I have shown that these categories are not static. Regarding the categories of alterity, it is possible to speak of the translation of otherness further into a hitherto unconquered space. In the analysed texts, societies represented as the other can become that by voluntarily accepting elements of European civilization or also by their defeat in a struggle that forces them to submit to the Europeans and accept their civilization involuntarily. But of course, none of the New World societies in the texts can become this – the dominant knowledge-producing entity, and therefore equal to Europeans and fully integrated into Christian society.

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The People of the So-called New World and the Practice of Othering in Czech Written Sources of the 16th Century

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