

Occupational Othering

Dr Meysam Tayebipour

February 2026

An overview

The concept of 'Othering'.

Occupational othering.

Occupational othering alongside other relevant concepts

Theoretical framework: Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA).

The occupational experiences of refugees and asylum seekers in the UK as a case study.

The concept of 'Othering'

- **Hegel's (2019) Master-Servant Dialectic.**
- **De Beauvoir (2008) discusses otherness through the lens of gender.**
- **Fanon (2008) studies it from the perspective of race and as a tool for critiquing colonialism.**
- **Othering has generally been an essential part of postcolonial studies (Thomas-Olalde and Velho, 2011).**

The concept of 'Othering'

- From perspective of postcolonialism, othering has been defined “as a process in which, through discursive practices, different subjects are formed, hegemonic subjects – that is, subjects in powerful social positions as well as those subjugated to these powerful conditions” (Thomas-Olalde and Velho, 2011, p.27).
- This perspective relies on critical theories that argue that discursive strategies are used to create discrimination by distinguishing between ‘US’ and ‘Them’, where ‘Them’ represents a negative other versus a positive ‘Us’ (Van Dijk, 1998).

Occupational othering

- Occupational othering is defined here as a process in which the occupation of a group is otherised by contrasting it with the occupation of the dominant group.
- ‘Us’ represents the dominant group's occupation, which is prioritised. In contrast, the occupation of the other group(s) loses significance due to marginalisation and underrepresentation within that discourse. In such a situation, the dominant group has the power to define what constitutes a “meaningful occupation” and to otherise the occupations of the marginalised group(s).

Occupational othering alongside other relevant concepts

- Occupational othering is closely linked to other concepts in occupational (in)justice studies, such as occupational deprivation, occupational marginalisation, and occupational apartheid.
- For instance, while both occupational othering and occupational deprivation involve the person at the centre of the experience being prevented from engaging in meaningful activities, in occupational othering this is a result of being otherised.

An example from the literature: In occupational othering, the elderly person cannot engage in meaningful activities because society sees them “as useless and worthless” (Larsson, Haglund, and Hagberg, 2009, p. 103). This also suggests a close relationship with the stereotyping commonly employed in the process of Othering (Fanon, 2008).

Theoretical framework: Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

As an interdisciplinary approach, CDA attempts to clarify how discourse plays a role “in social processes, social structures and social change” (Flowerdew and Richardson, 2018, p.1).

CDA is regarded as a research method that aims to examine how discourses within a sociopolitical context enact, reproduce, and create power abuse, inequality, and dominance (Van Dijk, 2015).

CDA considers discourse as “a form of social action that plays a part in producing the social world” (Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002, p.5).

It means that CDA considers a two-way dialectical relationship between discourse and social action, where both influence each other (Fairclough, Mulderrig and Wodak, 2011).

The occupational experiences of refugees and asylum seekers in the UK as a case study.

- In the current political discourse, asylum seekers are perceived as a threat (Pérez, 2023).
- The term 'illegal immigrants' is constantly used by the media and in political discourse.

Some consequences:

- Experience of occupational othering when accessing health care (Kang, Tomkow and Farrington, 2019; Power and Baxter, 2024).
- Experience of othering among asylum seekers and refugees when accessing housing.

Thank you

References

De Beauvoir, S., 2008. *The Second Sex*. Translated by C. Borde and S. Malovany-Chevallier. London: Vintage Books.

Fanon, F., 2008. *Black Skin, White Masks*. 2nd ed. Translated by R. Philcox. London: Pluto Press.

Fairclough, N., J. Mulderrig., and R. Wodak. 2011. "Critical Discourse Analysis." In *Discourse Studies: A Multidisciplinary Introduction*, edited by T. Van Dijk, 357–378. London: Sage.

Flowerdew, J. and Richardson, J.E. eds., 2018. *The Routledge handbook of critical discourse studies* (pp. 2-62). London: Routledge.

Hegel, G.W.F., 2019. *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Translated by A.V. Miller. Revised ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Kang, C., Tomkow, L. and Farrington, R. (2019) 'Access to primary health care for asylum seekers and refugees: a qualitative study of service user experiences in the UK', *British Journal of General Practice*, 69(685), pp. e537–e545. Available at: <https://bjgp.org/content/69/685/e537>.

References

Larsson, Å., Haglund, L. and Hagberg, J.-E. (2009) 'Doing everyday life—experiences of the oldest old', *Scandinavian Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 16(2), pp. 99–109. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/11038120802409762>.

Pérez, C.S. (2023) 'The Securitization of Asylum: a Review of UK Asylum Laws Post-Brexit', *International Journal of Refugee Law*, 35(3), pp. 304–321. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1093/ijrl/eead030>.

Power, M. and Baxter, M. (2024) "‘I think they are actually a bit racist in not giving us everything that we need in terms of medication’: Racialised Governance and Asylum Seeker Access to Healthcare in England', *Social Science & Medicine*, 365, p. 117558. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2024.117558>.

References

Thomas-Olalde, O. and Velho, A., 2011. Othering and its effects—Exploring the concept. *Writing postcolonial histories of intercultural education*, 2, pp.27-51.

Van Dijk, T.A., 1998. Opinions and ideologies in the press. *Approaches to media discourse*, 21(63), pp.1-33.

Van Dijk, T.A., 2015. Critical discourse analysis. In: D. Tannen, H.E. Hamilton & D. Schiffrin, eds. *The Handbook of Discourse Analysis*. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, pp.466–485.