Iceland and Images of the North

Edited by Sumarliði R. Ísleifsson
with the collaboration of Daniel Chartier

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Collection Droit au Pôle

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Edited by Sumarliði R. Ísleifsson
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2011
Presses de l'Université du Québec
The Reykjavík Akademy

Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec and Library and Archives Canada cataloguing in publication

Main entry under title :

Iceland and images of the North

(Collection Droit au pôle)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-2-7605-3085-0

1. Iceland – Relations. 2. Ethnicity – Iceland. 3. Iceland – Public opinion. 4. Iceland – Public opinion – History. 5. Arctic regions - Relations. I. Sumarliði R. Ísleifsson. II. Chartier, Daniel, 1968- . III. Series: Collection Droit au pôle.

DL305.I23 2011 949.12 C2011-940991-7

This research project has been made possible with the financial support of RANNIS, the Icelandic Centre for Research.

The editors would like to thank Maxime Bock, Nelly Duvicq, Heidi Hansson, Shauna Laurel Jones, and Catherine Vaudry for their help and support.

Cover design by Alexandre Desjardins

Cover photographs by Imaginaire|Nord and Michael Kaud

http://www.ra.is
http://www.inor.is
http://www.imaginairedunord.uqam.ca

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 PUQ 2011 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 **1**

Legal deposit – 2nd semester 2011, Landsbókasafn Íslands
Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec / Bibliothèque et Archives Canada
Printed in Canada

ISBN 978-2-7605-3085-0 (PUQ)
ISBN 978-9979-9922-2-6 (The Reykjavík Academy)

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Iceland and Images of the North

INOR is a collective project on Iceland and images of the North, the purpose of which is to conduct multidisciplinary studies on the identity appropriation of the idea of North. It is thus part of a fertile current of thought that began a few years ago and that seeks to compare the paradigms underlying the imagined world of winter, the North, and the Arctic. This current of thought—involving not only Scandinavia, Russia, Canada, Québec, and the Inuit world but also cultures that, while not geographically belonging to "the North," share some of its characteristics—has revealed commonalities between the cultural representations, traversed by tension between the specific and the universal.

Started by a group of researchers from the Reykjavík Academy, this project was initially intended to counter a tendency to define Iceland's image according to fairly compartmentalized notions of foreign politics, marketing, and tourism. It was also designed to open up the study of Iceland and ask questions about its place in the world, first of all in relation to its northern neighbours, but also in a broader and more circumpolar perspective, through which the country, its culture, history, and achievements offer a singular experience in the definition of cultural identity.

The twenty-one researchers in our collective come from a variety of disciplines, which shows the multifaceted nature of relations between

Iceland and "the North." Stemming from an Icelandic base group to which European and North American researchers were gradually added, the project gave rise to a working process that was resolutely original, collegial and collective, and had the luxury of not being rushed to propose, review, criticize, reformulate, and fine-tune the study. Every year over the past four years, each of the proposals now making up the chapters of this work was discussed in collective work groups overseen by external specialists, up to the final version found here.

Iceland's recent political and economic turmoil has not overly affected our work, since our analyses examine identity construction and resilience based on both historical images and their contemporary extensions. This long collaborative process, fed by the knowledge and insights of its participants, has yielded a new image of Iceland, patiently constructed from a unique combination of borrowings and historical specificities.

Daniel Chartier
Université du Québec à Montréal

INTRODUCTION

Imaginations of National Identity and the North[1]

Sumarliði R. Ísleifsson
The Reykjavík Academy (Iceland)

Jón Ólafsson (1593–1679) is known in Iceland as Indíafari, or the Traveller to India.[2] In his autobiography, he gives a recount of a visit with his Icelandic companions to a restaurant in Copenhagen, where he lived as a young man. He describes the visit thus:

> One chattering fellow, a master mason, sat up there with the others, and declared that he could describe the manners and customs in many countries, among which were the inhabitants of Iceland, who cut a poor figure in his text and its clumsy

1. Translated from Icelandic by Brynhildur Heiðar- og Ómarsdóttir.

2. Jón Ólafsson joined the Danish navy at a young age and sailed all around the world, including eastern Asia. After just over a decade abroad he moved back to Iceland. He wrote his autobiography in his old age.

Sumarliði R. Ísleifsson, "Imaginations of National Identity and the North," in Iceland and Images of the North, ed. Sumarliði R. Ísleifsson with the collaboration of Daniel Chartier, Québec: Presses de l'Université du Québec, "Droit au Pôle" series, and Reykjavík: ReykjavíkurAkademían, 2011.

> interpretation. But his hearers were readily hoodwinked and admired his talk. He was flattered and added to his stories until there was great mirth and no mourning up at the table. I asked Einar [Jón's friend] how long he could suffer the like. He said one must often hear such things about Iceland. I asked him if I could count on him, in case of need […] I stood right in front of the middle of the table and addressed the fellow who had spoken so contemptuously about this country, and had wound up by saying that its inhabitants could not be human beings, but rather the most contemptible beasts. I [said] to him: "Friend, I hear thou art acquainted with many countries and canst wonderfully describe them, and what seems not least strange to me, thou hast such certain knowledge of Iceland; now, hast thou sailed thither?" He asked God to preserve him from such a thing, saying Odin might go thither, but not he. At that moment I [dealt] him a couple of lusty boxes on the ear.[3]

We can well imagine what stories that chattering fellow had heard of Iceland and Icelanders. Icelanders were imagined as being uncivilized barbarians.

The Danish master mason and Jón Ólafsson play opposing roles in Ólafsson's travelogue. The master mason disseminates commonly accepted ideas about a country far up north, a country that is a colony of Denmark. Jón Ólafsson opposes this assessment of Iceland as a country of barbarians, while simultaneously participating in the dissemination of national stereotypes in his own work, writing lurid

3. Ólafsson 1923, vol. I: 79–80; Óðinn here denotes the devil. See the Icelandic text in Ólafsson 1946, vol. I: 76–77. "Einn hvatorður maður, sá eð var múrmeistari, sat þar á meðal annarra og lézt kunna að segja hegðan og háttalag fólks í mörgum löndum, á meðal hverra var Íslands innbyggjarar, sem aumlega sáu út í hans texta og óvandaðri útleggingu. En hans tilheyrendur voru auðtrúa og dáðust að hans ræðu. Hann tók því vel og teygði ræðuna, svo mikill glaumur gjörðist þar, en grátur eigi. Ég spyr Einar að [vin Jóns], hversu lengi hann geti slíkt liðið. Hann kvað slíkt tíðum heyra mega um Ísland talað […] Ég stend svo fyrir framan mitt borðið og tala ég til þessa manns, er svo lastlega hafði þessa lands fólki tiltalað og til ályktunar hafði sagt, að þetta fólk mætti ekki fólk heita, heldur sem svívirðilegustu kvikindi. Ég segi: 'Vinur, ég heyri að þú ert víða um lönd kunnugur og kannt dáfallega frá mörgu að skýra og hvað mig ei sízt undrar, að þú um Íslands háttalag ert vís orðinn, eður hefir þú siglt þangað?' Hann bað Guð sig þar frá varðveita og segir Óðinn mætti það gjöra en hann aldrei. Í því bili ljet eg honum tvær eyrnafíkjur ríða."

tales about countries in the South and the East.[4] This scene described by Ólafsson highlights the importance, the nature, and the role of national stereotypes. Such stereotypes are clichéd and prejudiced and they affect us all in various ways. We most often take these stereotypes for granted. We can agree with them and sometimes we condemn them.

In this introduction I would like to question the concept of these stereotypes of national identity. They are an important part of the world of ideas and transnational communication in which we live, a world which is based on longstanding ideas about nationality and identity. They affect the way we understand the world. It is not often that we observe first and define afterwards. Rather, we are prone to defining ideas and things before observing them since we have specific expectations about new experiences, expectations based on our ideological background.[5] Those who study national identity and the creation of this identity emphasize that national stereotypes are not based on facts, on information that can be verified by objective observation. Rather, national stereotypes are imaginations, "artificial formations" of a culture and of a society.[6] Scholars who interrogate notions of national identities approach their iterations as text and discourse rather than as nature or character.[7] This scholarly approach is antithetical to essentialist ideas that a specific nation has a specific character.[8] Such essentialist beliefs have long been a part of human discourse, reaching back to the time of the ancient Greeks, and were well known in the early modern period. The Danish scholar Peder Hansen Resen proclaimed confidently in the 17th century that different nations had different characters. The vice of the French was "vanity and inconstancy"; Germans were afflicted with drunkenness, and the Spanish with "arrogance and unclean passions."

4. See Ólafsson 1923, vol. II, on his travel to Africa and East Asia, for example pp. 75, 129.

5. This statement is attributed to the American scholar Walter Lippman in the 1920s. Lippman was one of the earliest scholars to write about the role of stereotypes. See Beller 2007b: 4.

6. Petkova 2009: 17, 44; Alphen 1991: 2–3, "not presences behind the self or the other, but changeable products of the ongoing process of constituting a self-image."

7. Leerssen 2007c: 27.

8. Petkova 2009: 16–17.

Icelanders' main flaws were "arrogance and ambition."[9]

Even though I assume here that stereotypes of national identity are "imaginations," I fully recognize the influence these ideas have on the daily life of people and the important role these imaginations play in the arenas of politics and economics. These imaginations are therefore no less "real" to an individual than any other personal experiences that affect his or her values and ideals. An obvious example of the role of national stereotypes in modern society is the negative image people in the West often have of Jews and Muslims. These stereotypes have a verifiable impact on modern society.[10] Another example is the financial collapse of Iceland in 2008: we can argue that the expansion of the financial sector in Iceland leading to the collapse was influenced by national self-imaginations. The imagined superiority of Icelandic financiers in international business and ideas about the cultural significance of the nation proved to be influential in the way Icelandic businessmen conducted their affairs.

The creation of a national identity has two aspects that are unthinkable and meaningless without each other. When we create an image of ourselves, we simultaneously create images of the Other. These two aspects of identity coexist and intersect and neither can exist without the other. They are in a dialectic relationship.[11] We assume more often than not that self-images are positive while images of the Other are negative, since we assume our own culture to be the norm but other cultures to be foreign and (sometimes) inferior since they deviate from that self-defined norm.[12] However, sometimes this process is reversed. Images of the Other can be presented as an ideal for us to emulate; other cultures can be described in a positive and often effusive manner, while our own society can be described as being lacking.

The creation of a national identity is influenced by various factors. These factors are concepts such as centre–periphery, North–South, East–West, island–continent, city–rural, small–big, and powerful–powerless, to name a few. The construction of a national identity is

9. Resen 1991: 272–273.

10. Hoppenbrouwers 2007: 54.

11. Lehtonen 2005: 69–70; see also Leerssen 1991: 129.

12. Said 2003: 54; Pieterse 1991: 201.

thus not a haphazard process, but based on "structural constants in the stereotypical imagination."[13] The imagination of a national identity is deeply rooted in history and is, for example, defined by transnational contact, rumours, conflicts of interest, fiction, misunderstandings, and mistranslations. These imaginations are longstanding and can be hard to combat. An example of the longevity of a national stereotype is the idea that people in the North are drunkards. This stereotype can be found in the writings of the Roman writer Tacitus (ca. 56–117 CE), who promulgated this idea in his work *Germania*. After *Germania* was published in the early modern period, the idea of Northerners as drunkards found easy passage into other texts that dealt with the people of the North.[14] In the past two centuries, this drunken imagination of the North was common, and it was popularly believed in the 19th and 20th centuries that Northerners were incapable of controlling their drinking if they were given access to alcoholic beverages.[15]

Each era bequeaths to us different and often contradictory images of a national character.[16] Sometimes stereotypes of a given national identity are positive, even utopian, but at other times they are negative. The shifting boundaries of national imaginations are often related to a struggle or tension within a society or between different nations. These images also change and evolve, and the boundaries between images of the self and images of the Other are often blurred or even shifted. Sometimes the image of the Other is transposed onto the image of the self. This transposition can appear as the self-exoticization of a society, when exotic ideas about a specific nation are adopted and co-opted by that nation (such as in Iceland, where common German imaginations have been adopted by Icelanders themselves).[17] The national identity of a country is simultaneously changeable and constant, positive and negative, uniform and composite, visible and invisible.

Scholars of national identity study the imaginations and stereotypes of different societies and illuminate their origins, nature, context, and purpose. Those scholars who are deeply invested in this study consider

13. Corbey & Leerssen 1991: xvi.

14. Zacharasiewicz 2009: 29.

15. See for example Barrow 1835: 50–51.

16. See Leerssen 2007b: 343–344; see also Beller 2007b: 11.

17. See Leerssen 2007a: 340–341; see also Leerssen 2007b: 343.

it their duty to uncover the negative impact national stereotypes have on cultures, whether those stereotypes are of the East, the South, or the North.[18] However, other scholars have reminded us that there is a long tradition of positive imaginations of the Other, the celebration of the foreign and the exotic, and that we cannot simplify the impact of national stereotypes.[19]

The North

The Palestinian-American scholar Edward Said (1935–2003) introduced us to the concept of Orientalism. Said's Orientalism refers to the standardization and systemization of ideas about the East, ideas based on and promulgated by power colonialization. Said's concepts and methods have been adopted by other areas of study and his ideas transposed upon other geographical parts of the world. Thus we have the concept of "tropicality," which refers to northern European imaginations of foreign cultures "alien in climate, vegetation, people and disease."[20] The Icelandic scholar Gísli Pálsson has proposed we use the term "arcticality" to analyze the discourse about the Arctic regions.[21] And then we have the concept "borealism," which denotes the standardization and dissemination of ideas about the North and mainly the far North.[22]

The concept of "North" appears simplistic on the surface. It clearly

18. Edward Said (2003) writes that it was necessary to fight against the tendencies to create "collective identities for large numbers of individuals who are actually quite diverse […] [they] must be opposed, their murderous effectiveness vastly reduced in influence and mobilizing power"; see pp. xxviii–xxix. See also Petkova 2009: 161; Beller 2007b: 12; Grace 2002: 24. Sherrill Grace writes that representations are "at best a necessary practice that mediates socially constructed images of the self and the world, while at its worst it can block the real by replacing it and directing our attention or desire away from complex lived experience of a heterogeneous reality towards a simulacrum."

19. See for example Lovejoy & Boas 1965 [1935] and their well-known study from the first half of the 20th century, *Primitivism and Related Ideas in Antiquity*.

20. Arnold 1996: 142.

21. Pálsson 2002: 276–277.

22. See the article "Banking on Borealism: Eating, Smelling, and Performing the North" by Kristinn Schram in this volume; see also Krebs 2010.

denotes one of the cardinal directions, the opposite of the South. But the meaning of the North is both complicated and malleable. For example, in the beginning of the 17th century, the Danish scholar and vicar Claus Christoffersen Lyschander (1558–1624) wrote a description of areas in the far North, in which the North is equated with evil. But his North is also a place of great riches that can be exploited by Southerners. And of course, the North is populated by ghosts and spirits, and the inhabitants of the far North are pygmies, an amalgamation of man and animal. According to Lyschander, the North is simultaneously exotic, desirable, and repulsive, even devilish.[23]

Lyschander's ideas were not particularly new. The Roman writer Ovid (Publius Ovidius Naso, ca. 43 BCE–17/18 CE) wrote about Scythia, the ancient equivalent of the North:

> There is a place […] a freezing place,
> At Scythia's farthest bounds, a land of gloom,
> Sad barren soil with never crop or tree;
> This is the numb wan home of Cold and Ague
> And starving Hunger.[24]

In the ancient Mediterranean it was commonly believed that the North was a place of barbarians and of ignorance.[25] Christian writings promulgate this imagination of the North. For example, in Jeremiah's prophecies in the Old Testament is the following text:

> The word of LORD came to me a second time, saying, "What do you see?" And I said, "I see a seething pot; and the face thereof *is* toward the north." Then the LORD said unto me: "Out of the North an evil shall break forth upon all the inhabitants of the land."[26]

It was prophesized that during the end times, Gog and Magog, archenemies of God and Christianity, would break out of the North and storm south, razing the earth. Medieval and early modern Christian

23. Lyschander 1989: 143–144.

24. Ovid 1986: 195.

25. Hartog 1988: 17.

26. Jeremiah 1:13–14 (*King James Bible*); see also Pochat 1997: 44; also Zacharasiewicz 2009: 33–34.

scholars claimed that some northern nations, such as the Mongols and the Vikings, were direct descendants of Gog and Magog.[27] Northern people were described as having more in common with wild animals than with humans.

The imaginations of the North closely correlate with ancient theories of climate, ideas that were revived in the early modern period. The temperate areas were considered to be ideal. In temperate countries society and culture were believed to flourish and the people to be highly intelligent. Conditions worsened the farther they were from the temperate medium.[28] These theories of the effect of climate on national and individual character were inherently ethnocentric and were used, for example, to justify colonialism and the enslavement of the inhabitants of regions outside the temperate zone.[29]

The stereotype of the North in ancient times was commonly a negative one, but more positive descriptions can be found. The ancient Greeks told stories of a northern paradise, the nation of Hyperborea, which supposedly was located in the far North. The people of Hyperborea lived in luxury beyond the reach of the northern winds. Hyperboreans were believed to be sacred people, often living several centuries, and they were known for the various wonders found in their land.[30] They lived in balance with nature, unmarred by the corruption and evils of the world.[31] The climate of Hyperborea was temperate and Hyperborean life was one of enjoyment. The Greeks believed that the god Apollo preferred to live amongst the Hyperboreans.[32] What is fascinating about the idea of Hyperborea is that the Hyperboreans are supposed to live at the edge of the world, yet they enjoy all the benefits of the "centre" and were even considered to be superior to the Greeks.[33]

27. Davidson 2005: 28; *Brockhaus Encyclopädie* 1969, see Gog und Magog.

28. This is widely discussed in classical writings; see for example Ovid 2009: 30. See also *Konungs Skuggsjá* [The King's Mirror] 1955: 61.

29. See Beller 2007a: 298–300.

30. See Davidson 2005: 23–25, 50–51, 106; Romm 1994: 60, 65–67.

31. See for example Davidson 2005: 23–25, 50–51, 106; Romm 1994: 60, 65–67.

32. Romm 1994: 60.

33. Romm 1994: 66–67.

Different Kinds of North

The geographical location of the North is as ephemeral as its ideological definition. In the ancient Mediterranean everything north of the Alps was considered to be the North and Africa was considered to be the South.[34] With the changing balance of power in Europe during the Middle Ages, the idea of the North changed and the boundaries of the North shifted northwards. The importance of the Mediterranean slowly diminished and countries north of the Alps—France, England, and Germany—became the real centre of the continent. Simultaneously, the idea of an ideal climate changed so that the temperate zone now encompassed the countries north of the Alps rather than the Mediterranean Basin. The centre of power was also the centre of the climate![35] We can argue that from the end of the Middle Ages until around 1800, Scandinavia, Russia, and most of what is now defined as Eastern Europe were considered to be in the European North. But in the 19th century the definition of the North narrowed and the idea of Eastern Europe was born. The Scandinavian countries were now considered to be the true North, and to the north of Scandinavia was the far North.[36]

We can trace a few prevalent imaginations about the North from the 16th to the 18th centuries. First, there is the barbaric North. Descriptions about the barbarism of the Scandinavian countries and the far North were commonplace until the late 18th century and their influence was felt even longer. The idea of the barbaric North was based on classical ideas about the North and the experience of Mediterranean nations of Northern invasions. The crude living conditions in the North were believed to be the result of the extreme conditions of the area. The idea of the North as barbaric is not only a European imagination, and can also be found, for example, in China and Japan.[37]

The idea of the barbaric North was exceptionally longstanding in relation to areas geographically located in the far North. It was believed

34. See Tacitus 2001: 52.

35. Zacharasiewicz 2009: 34–35.

36. See for example Kliemann-Geisinger 2007: 70.

37. See Davidson 2005: 175.

that the far North was hardly inhabitable due to the inhospitable nature, and culture and society in those areas were commonly described as barely human. Common descriptions of culture in the far North emphasized immorality in sexual practices, witchcraft, barbaric appearance and clothing, sexual confusion (the sexes were believed to have a similar appearance), small stature, stench, and speech—or lack thereof, since it was believed that many Northerners communicated by emulating the sounds of animals.[38] These stereotypes of the far North were alive and well in the 18th and 19th centuries. In 1772 the Englishman Thomas Salmon asserted of the northernmost part of Scandinavia that

> human species of these cold and sterile climates seem very different from those to the Southward of them: the people […] are ill-shaped, with large heads, and short, scarcely exceeding in stature five feet; and their intellect is very inconsiderable.[39]

And Northerners themselves, such as Olaus Magnus, proclaimed in the 16th century that the minions of the devil resided in the far North and aggravated their inhabitants.[40]

Alongside these lurid descriptions we can also find different ideas about the North and the far North. Some of them are derived from the ancient ideas about Hyperborea. Olaus Magnus and other writers of the early modern period sometimes praised the primitive existence of northern Scandinavia. Magnus admitted that many of the inhabitants of the far North were wild and had strange habits, but he admired their sincerity and their simple way of life.[41] Other writers later claimed that the inhabitants of the far North were honest and hospitable and that their faith was admirable and worth emulating.[42] Thus, the North and the far North were not only described in dystopian terms. Their image was also a positive, "hyperborean" ideal, the idea of the noble savage where primitiveness and simplicity denote an honest nobility.[43]

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38. See for example Barrow 1835: 46; Ísleifsson 1996: 47–77.

39. Salmon 1772: 256–257.

40. Olaus Magnus 1976, vol. I: 169.

41. Olaus Magnus 1976, vol. I: 171; Rauwen 1597: 616.

42. See for example Guthrie 1782: 59.

43. Zacharasiewicz 2009: 39–41.

Closely related to the idea of the North as a primitive paradise is the common imagination of the North as a place of great wealth and riches. It was also believed that Northern inhabitants were incapable of harnessing and utilizing this wealth themselves.[44] For example, Adam of Bremen (ca. 1040–1081) wrote about an island in the northern seas where gold and gems were in abundance and where the inhabitants possessed only a rudimentary understanding of this wealth.[45] In later eras, writers extolled different kinds of wealth in the North. Around the year 1700 stories abounded of the great wealth European fishermen found in the northern seas.[46] In the middle of the 18th century, the German missionary David Crantz described these ideas thus:

> The desire of discovering new lands was every where [sic] roused, because adventurers flattered themselves with the hopes of gold and silver mines in every new discovered country. There was the same sanguirre expectation from the unknown northern countries.[47]

The search for gold was an important impetus for the voyages of exploration to Greenland in the 16th and 17th centuries.[48]

Since the late Middle Ages the centre of power in Europe was shifting towards the north. Discourse about the North changed accordingly. Scholars were an integral part of this redefinition of the North, scholars such as the Swedish bishop Olaus Magnus (1490–1557) and in the 18th century the French philosopher Montesquieu (1689–1755).[49] In his history of the Nordic nations Olaus Magnus attempted to respond to Northern stereotypes prevalent in the South. He combated the idea that only immoral savages populated the North and described the Northern nations as cultural ones. He admitted, though, that Northern traditions were in some ways wild and harsh, but proclaimed that some were even superior to those of the South.[50]

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44. See Tacitus 2001: 123.

45. Adam of Bremen 2000: 234.

46. Melissantes 1715: 966.

47. Crantz 1767, vol. I: 273.

48. Crantz 1767, vol. I: 274–275, 278; see also Egede 1818: xl.

49. Zacharasiewicz 2009: 36–40.

50. Olaus Magnus 1976, vol. I: 171.

The economic and political power of the North grew in the 18th century alongside the ideas of the Enlightenment. In that era it became ever more common to consider the North as hardy, progressive, and democratic, in opposition to the South, which was considered attractive and seductive but at the same time weak, old-fashioned, autocratic, corrupt, and inconstant. This era is exemplified in the way some nations began to celebrate their Northern, rather than Greco-Roman, cultural heritage.[51] This transposition can be clearly seen in the writings of Montesquieu and other scholars of the period. They based their ideas on writings of the classical ancients (Aristotle) and medieval scholars.[52] Montesquieu claimed that freedom itself sprung from the North:

> Jordanes the Goth called the north of Europe the forge of the human race. I should rather call it the forge where those weapons were framed which broke the chains of southern nations. In the north were formed those valiant people who sallied forth and deserted their countries to destroy tyrants and slaves, and to teach men that, nature having made them equal, reason could not render them dependent, [except] where it is necessary to their happiness.[53]

The idea that the North was the birthplace of freedom but the South the cradle of slavery was an idea that was echoed in later writings. According to this philosophy, the North was a place of innovation and creation, and even of science and scholarship.[54]

In geographical descriptions written in central and western Europe in the 17th and 18th centuries, it became common to proclaim that people of the North were intelligent and attractive.[55] The habits of these people were perhaps crude and unsophisticated, but writers of the period emphasized that, for the most part, Northerners were "very alike" the people of England and other civilized nations.[56] The

51. See Arndt 2007: 388.

52. Stadius 2005: 41–43.

53. Montesquieu 1952: 124. Jordanes lived in the 6th century.

54. See for example Holberg 1729: 30.

55. Mallet 1684, vol. IV: 18.

56. Salmon 1772: 255. Similar ideas can be found in Guthrie 1782: 59.

Nordic countries were slowly being drawn into the geographic centre of "civilization" and were considered (at least the southern part of these countries) to be civilized. They became a part of the "centre," if at the edges of it.[57]

Romantic ideas of the 18th and 19th centuries further strengthened the position of the Nordic countries in Europe. The Romantics defined the North as a place of the sublime, as a pure and awe-inspiring place of freedom. The aestheticism of the era celebrated the magnificent and even terrifying nature of the North. Instead of fearing the harsh landscape of the North, writers revelled in its beauty, admiring the waterfalls, the glaciers, the expansive plains and dark forests and rough mountains, and even the darkness and the gloom.[58] These new ideas about the North correlated with the Romantic search for that which is pure and true, for that which is "real." Integral to this quest were emotions, free expression, and creativity. Simultaneously, the Romantics denigrated that which was constructed or regularized and proclaimed those things as being "not real."[59] The concept of the North played an important part of the Romantic imagination, and in the 19th century the idea became prevalent that Nordic countries were "more original" than the more sophisticated countries such as England, the Netherlands, or Germany.[60]

Romantic ideas of the North, including Iceland, were pervasive in the 19th century, surviving alongside other influential stereotypes of the North.[61] According to Romantic ideals, writers recreated the North as the birthplace of creativity, the desire for freedom, individuality, and human kindness. And the North, not least the far North, was defined as the home of heroism, masculinity, and poetry:

I cannot love thee, South, for all thy sun,
For all thy scarlet flowers or thy palms;

57. A good overview about the theories of climate can be found in Beller 2007a: 298–304.

58. See Stadius 2005: 53–54, 56. These ideas have been connected to the ideas and theories of the Englishman Edmund Burke about the Sublime.

59. See Stadius 2005: 55.

60. Stadius 2005: 49–51.

61. See Stadius 2005: 59–60.

But in the North forever dwells my heart.
The North with all its human sympathies,
The glorious North, where all amidst the sleet,
Warm hearts do dwell, warm hearts sing out with joy;
The North that ever loves the poet well.

This poem was written by the English poet William Morris in the middle of the 19th century, and it is probable that he had Iceland in mind when he penned these words.[62]

Ideas about the superiority of the North compared to the South became ever more prevalent in the 18th and 19th centuries. These ideas would fuel the racism of the 19th and 20th centuries and greatly impact society all around the globe. According to some racialist thinkers in the late 19th century, the race that populated the southernmost part of Scandinavia was the essence, the kernel of the race they named Homo Europæus. These ideas permeated cultural life and discourse in central and northern Europe in the latter half of the 19th century and the first decades of the 20th.[63]

The redefinition of North as being the enlightened, educated, and technologically advanced countries of Scandinavia was achieved during this time period. Writers began to praise the high level of education of the populace of these countries, to extol its open and free politics and government, and to admire the great technological advances in these countries and their citizens' high quality of life.[64] Icelandic and Nordic cultural heritage played an important part in this process of redefinition.

During this time period the concept of the far North was divided between the northernmost part of Scandinavia and Greenland on the one hand and Iceland and the Faroe Islands on the other. Iceland and the Faroe Islands became a part of the Germanic North and played a significant role in the system of ideas created by nationalism in the 19th and 20th centuries. Greenland and the territories populated by the Sami people became the representatives of the primitive North.

62. Quoted in Wawn 2000: 249.

63. Stadius 2005: 92–97; see also Grace 2002: 96–97.

64. See Stadius 2005: 171–187.

However, political and social upheavals, especially following the end of the Cold War, have changed popular conceptions of the different regions of the high North. It is likely that in the near future the idea of the people of the far North will be more harmonious than in the recent past.

I have discussed here the various imaginations and definitions of the North and the far North, and traced the history of the ideas from the Middle Ages up until the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th. We can generally claim that many of the historical stereotypes and imaginations of national identity that have been discussed here, both the positive and the negative, survive and thrive in the modern era. Among the stereotypes about the North and the far North that appear to be common now in the 21st century are:

- The Utopian North: According to these imaginations, people live a primitive and self-sufficient life in the far North, in balance with nature. These ideas are common today about Iceland, the Faroe Islands, Greenland, and the northern part of Scandinavia.

- The Historical or Original North: Ideas about the original North are also thriving. According to them, we can still find traces in the far North of the early culture of Europe. Culture and traditions are believed to have survived in the far North but lost elsewhere.

- The Creative North: Closely related to this belief is the idea that the North is a place of creativity and freedom. Some believe that people and nature have a closer relationship in the far North than elsewhere and that this relationship engenders the desire for freedom and initiative.

- The Progressive North: The image of the progressive North is also applied to regions in the far North, at least to Iceland, but it is more common to think of the Nordic region as a whole as being progressive.

- The Unfeeling or Unemotional North: It is common to contrast the cold, unfeeling, quiet, and material North to the warm, emotional, and cheerful South.

- The Wealthy North: In the last decades it has become increasingly more common to consider the far North as a place of cultural and material wealth. The far North is considered rich in cultural heritage and also in raw materials and energy. Examples of these ideas can be found in the daily discussions about the rich energy sources of Iceland and Greenland, as well as in discussions about the fish stock in the oceans and the raw materials in the earth. These ideas have an impact on modern international politics, where geographical and economic superpowers attempt to gain control of natural resources in the North.

- The Evil or Immoral North: According to these ideas, life in the North is still defined by cruelty. This image is exemplified by Faroese whaling and Greenlandic drinking, as well as Icelandic overindulgence, both alcoholic and sexual.[65] News about Icelandic behaviour in international business in the recent years has strengthened this stereotype.

Depictions of the North, the Nordic countries, and the far North have been many and varied throughout the centuries. These regions oscillated from being considered traditional to being progressive, from embodying the primitive to embodying the technological advancement of the modern era, from being a horde of barbarians to being a civilized people; they have moved from poverty to wealth, from enlightenment to romanticism, from being cold and callous to being warm and kind. All these ideas were well known in earlier eras and they have survived to this day. The North is simultaneously a utopia and a dystopia.

The Canadian Scholar Sherill Grace writes in her book about northern Canada, "North is multiple, shifting and elastic; it is a *process*, not an eternal fixed goal or condition."[66] This overview of the different permutations of the North is meant to illustrate constant change in the imaginations and stereotypes of the North. We can argue that it is perhaps more correct to speak of many and various Norths rather than one individual North.

65. "Ísland í sviðsljósi Conans" [Iceland in Conan's Spotlight] 2009: 40.

66. Grace 2002: 16.

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